# Egypt: Cinema and Revolution

ELLA SCHOCHAT

Like other major Third World film industries such as those of India, Mexico and Brazil, Egyptian cinema has a long tradition (70 years) with a production often amounting to 50 films a year. It has gained a dominant position within the Arab World, managing to break through language barriers by familiarizing other Arab countries with its particular dialect. Once Egyptian cinema became independent it was perceived as troublesome by the colonizers in the neighbouring Arab countries. The French in the Maghreb, for example, formed a "special department" on African problems that was "responsible for setting up a production centre in Morocco whose official mission was to oppose the influence of Egyptian cinema."[1]

The political-economic realities in the colonies that led to the emergence of "Third Worldism" after World War II is the substance that forms the psycho-cultural structure of the "underdeveloped" societies. Hence, writing on the evolution of a national cinema in Egypt implies the necessity of revealing its correspondences with periods of political significance, i.e. the 1952 revolution.

Despite the fact that thirty years have passed since Nasser led the Free Officers movement and seized power on July 23, 1952, only in recent years has it become possible to outline the revolution's repercussions for Egyptian cinema. Although some traditional genres such as the sentimental melodrama remain dominant today, another cinema has emerged, built on the foundations laid in 1952. This new cinema is characterized by an attempt to tackle the political dilemmas and social problems of contemporary Egypt. Directors such as Salah Abu-Seif, Youssuf Shahine, Tawfiq Salah and later Ali Abdul-Haleq, Shadi Abd el Salam as well as critics such as Samir Farid, Sami al-Salamony, Hashem al-Nahhas (members of "The New Cinema Collective") contributed to the development of a politically conscious cinema.

My purpose here will be to examine the consequences of the 1952 revolution for the orientation and structure of the film industry as well as in the films themselves. I will focus on the first decade under Nasser's regime which undoubtedly led to the gradual decolonization and de-westernization of Egyptian cinema. Although film makers criticized Nasser's regime, especially after his death in 1970[2], it is clear that the development of a self-conscious national film industry can be traced to the Free Officers Movement revolution of 1952.

In order to comprehend the changes that took place in Egyptian cinema it is necessary to outline the state of the pre-revolutionary

industry. As in almost every Third World country, the Egyptian film industry was initially controlled by foreigners, primarily Italians, who directed the local film makers toward a commercial cinema devoted to profits and entertainment based on the Hollywood model. It was not by chance that Egypt's film industry was called the "Hollywood of the Orient". The European control of the film industry was merely one dimension of the political-economic regime, whereby the British, Greeks, Italians and French dominated Egyptian trade and industry. Egyptians rarely owned commercial or industrial companies. Despite the granting of formal independence in 1922, the British retained real political and economic control of Egypt until the early 1950's. The constitution of 19 April 1923 declared Egypt a sovereign, free and independent state whose religion was Islam and whose official language was Arabic. Personal liberty was guaranteed but the liberty of the press (including the cinema) was limited "for the protection of social order". All public and military employment was restricted to nationals of the country, except where otherwise provided for by law - a reservation required to allow for the continuing role of British officials.

From the beginning the cinema played out the conflicts generated by the colonial situation, and the pro-Western orientation of the cinema persisted even when Egyptians had become part of the the industry. Fearing that the audience would tire of seeing imported films, some producers, such as the Italian, Signore de Lagrane, and later the Italo-Egyptian Cinematographic Company (with the Banco di Roma as a partner), tried to produce films with local scenes to stimulate the interest of Egyptian audiences, e.g. Signor Osato's *Shanf el Badawi* (*The Bedouin's Honour*)and *El Zouhour el Kateta* (*Fatal Flowers*), both of 1918. These first films produced in Egypt reflected a very shallow comprehension of the religious traditions and customs of the Egyptian population. For example, *El Zouhar el Kateta* offended the Islamic community by garbling several phrases from the Koran. A more severe case occurred in 1925 when a German film company tried to produce a film entitled *The Prophet*, with Muhammad as the main character. This plan shocked the Islamic university, El Azhar, since the Moslem religion prohibits representation of the Prophet. As a result, the film was never made.

The period between official independence and the 1952 revolution was marked by social turmoil and political struggle. The European producers and film makers, unconcerned with Egyptian problems, avoided subjects that critically addressed the political situation. Gradually, however, Egyptians were gaining positions within the industry as investors and technicians. Some film companies and studios were established by Egyptians. One of the first major companies, Misr Company for Acting and Cinema, was established in 1927 by Misr Bank; Lama Studio was established in 1936, Wahbi Studio in 1939 and so forth. However, these companies maintained the European colonial tradition, creating a "neo-colonial" cinema that paralleled the neo-colonial political situation. They produced familiar genre films, safe in terms of censorship and commercial prospects, especially the sentimental melodramas. The critic, Gallal El Sharkawi, summarized the plots and ethos of such films as follows:

> Love always takes pride of place, spiced with base seduction, rape, adultery, prison, murder, suicide and madness with a background of brooding tragedy for the sympathetic victim. If we consider the 1945-46 season as an example,

we find in the 23 melodramas, out of a total of 52 films: 9 girls seduced, 2 rapes, 3 suicides, 2 attempted suicides, 2 cases of madness.[3]

Superfluous oriental songs and dances were often introduced into such melodramas. In the comedy revues, another popular form, stereotypical characters fell into farcical misunderstandings which led the plot into cabarets and music halls as a pretext for the inclusion of colourful songs and dances, tailored to the talents of singing stars such as Abdel Wahab, Um Kulthum, Farid al-Atrosh, Lila Murad, Nadra, Munira el Mahdiya and others.

One exception was Kamal Selim's *El Azima* (*Determination*, 1939-40), which was the first realist Egyptian film to influence the later post-revolutionary film makers. The hero, Mohamad, is a young Egyptian who rebels against the goals of a traditional education, which encouraged careers in government service. He decides to build his own business during a period when business was dominated by foreigners. Life in the streets is presented realistically and contemporary Egyptian social problems form the source of the action. The film implicitly expresses the urban bourgeoisie's discontent with foreign intervention as well as their will to establish their independence by assuming control of trade and industry.

Censorship, officially instituted by the Palace and the English Embassy in 1914 and administered by the Ministry of the Interior, heavily favoured the production of traditional genre films. It forced directors to abstain from criticizing foreigners, government officials and religious institutions. It went so far as to forbid cinematic presentation of conflicts between peasants and land-owners, references to nationalist politics or a favourable portrayal of nationalist or socialist ideas either in the past or in the present. *Lasheen*, made in 1938-39, offers a dramatic example of the severe code. Produced by Studio Misr, with a relatively high budget of 20 000 pounds sterling, as a patriotic historical picture, the film was suppressed because it portrayed an oppressive medieval tyrant. Censorship would not tolerate criticism of state authority or of monarchical government even at a distance of many centuries because of implicit analogies between past tyranny and the contemporary regime. Another case of censorship involved Bahiga Hafez's *Lila Bint al-Sahara* (*Lila, Daughter of the Desert*, 1937). The film, which dealt with the successful Arab struggle against the Persians and their brutal anti-Arab ruler, Kisra, was banned despite its big-budget production values. Thus government censors, well aware of the dangers of controversial political issues, hampered the development of an independent nationalist cinema. The tendency of profit-orientated producers was to avoid contemporary subjects close to everyday Egyptian experience precisely because they ran a greater risk of censorship.

Along with Egypt's political struggle towards complete independence came clashes over culture and manners. While the intellectuals of Cairo's Al Azhar university, a prestigious centre of Islamic thought, reacted with hostility toward the new Western ideas introduced by Egyptian writers and thinkers, ordinary Egyptians were fascinated by clothing fashions and European customs. Even more serious questions arose over the status of women, polygamy and divorce. The urban bourgeoisie was selectively adopting Western

habits and values, using the movies as an avenue by which to move toward these goals. The cinema, besides being a means of class expression, shaped the general consciousness of the urban population.[5] With the outbreak of World War II the already strong profit orientation of Egyptian cinema was exacerbated by the *nouveaux riches* who became powerful as a result of their service to the Allies. The paradoxical situation of the Egyptian bourgeoisie made their aspirations somewhat schizophrenic. They resented Western domination yet envied Western lifestyles, technology and power. The two historically possible solutions for the colonial dilemma - assimilation or revolution - were thrust before Egyptian society. But before reaching the stage of revolution, i.e. of stripping the colonizer of his power, the urban bourgeoisie first tried to transcend their colonial situation by assimilation, i.e. by moulding themselves in the colonizer's image:

> The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to the splendid model of the colonizer who suffers from none on his deficiencies, has all rights, enjoys every possession and benefits from every prestige and to resemble him to the point of disappearing into him.[6]

Nasser himself speaks of these widespread feelings of inferiority in *The Philosophy of Revolution*.

The cinema also gave indirect expression to these feelings. The traditional genres, though basically maintaining and respecting the Moslem faith, catered to the public demand for more up-to-date clothes, furniture and music. The presentation of sophisticated characters and upper class glamour indirectly exalted European manners while implicitly denigrating Arab ways. A sprinkling of casual French phrases, for example, was thought to give an elegant air to conversation. These attitudes are not surprising when we remember that French was spoken at court and among the elite generally while Arabic tended to be reserved for insults.

The predilection for Western music, songs and dances also reflects the pro-Western orientation and the native inferiority complex implicit in Egyptian cinema. It is important to examine this form since singing and dance have often held a special place in Arab cinema generally and in Egyptian cinema in particular. Not a single film season passed without several musical productions and, indeed, statistics point to a predominance of musical films in certain periods. The first Egyptian talkie was a musical *Enshodet el Fuad* (*The Song of the Heart*, 1932), directed by the Italian Mario Volpe, for which the producers, the Benna Brothers, gathered a group of Egyptian stars led by Nadra, the celebrated singer.

A close examination of the structure of the music in the musical reveals that the Westernization had occurred even in well-established Egyptian-Arab art forms such as music. In addition to the obvious difference in vocal style between Arab and Western music, Arab music also has more tonal scales than Western music. Efforts were made by musicians such as El-Shoujahi, Hajaje El-Zahir and Khayrat to turn popular melodies into modern forms influenced by European music. A striking example of this influence on Egyptian cinema is the case of the composer-singer Muhamad Abdel Wahab. In his first film, *El Warda el Baida* (*The White Rose*,

1933-34), directed by Muhamed Karim, he introduced the new style in the art of composition. As the critic Salah Ezzedine explained, in these films the duration of each song was cut as much as three-quarters without thereby losing any of its appeal. Abdel Wahab superimposed the quick beat of European dance music on the oriental base of Arab music. He also used a diversity of musical instruments, with each film emphasizing a "new" instrument. Farrid el Atrash also used Western instruments, particularly the piano. The "takht," the traditional oriental ensemble (a small group of musicians, each one with a different musical instrument), was seldom used in the films. Rather one finds Western scoring and instrumentation with a rapid beat and light, short songs. Initially introduced as intermittent attractions in films, songs and dances came to form an integral part of the action. Along with belly dancing, the films introduced more or less Western-style theatrical dancing. Sania Gamal, who accompanied Farid el Atrash's songs, for example, tended to move toward a more figurative Western form.

The pre-revolutionary inferiority complex was reflected in other ways as well. Instead of inviting Egyptian authors to produce original scenarios, or adapting Egyptian literature to the screen, producers found an easier and cheaper way: "El-Iktibas", adaptations, sometimes amounting to plagiarism. Western films or novels were adapted to local conditions without acknowledgement. Seifechine Shawkat, a Hungarian-Turkish director who settled in Egypt, was notorious for using this method. Films, plays or novels such as *Waterloo Bridge*, *Camille*, *Pygmalion*, *Les Miserables* and others appeared on Egyptian screens, usually under new titles: *Waterloo Bridge* became *Daima fi Qalbi* (*Always in My Heart*,1945), *Pygmalion* became *Baia al Tufah* (*The Apple Vendor*). Sometimes the same source was an inspiration for different productions, as in the case of *Camille*, which was produced four times with different casts: *Lila* with Lila Morad, *Ahd al Hua* (*The Period of Love*) with Miriam Fakhr al-Din, *Salam alal Hubab* (*Greetings to the Lovers*) with Sabah and *Ashk al Ruh* (*The Love of Soul*) with Nagla Fathi. The adaptations and plagiarizations of this period indicate not only the commercial orientation of Egyptian cinema, but its general reluctance to use rich native sources whether from myth, theatre or literature.

One of the few exceptions was Mohamed Karim's adaptation of Mohamed Hussein Heikel's novel, *Zeinab*, in 1930. The novel, written in 1910, deals with the psychological conflicts within a land-owner torn between his love for the poor village girl, Zeinab, and his ambition to marry the daughter of a rich bourgeois family. It is only after the revolution that cinema turned more frequently to native sources and engaged well-known Egyptian authors as screen-writers. The political dependency of Egypt, in other words, paralleled its mental dependency on Western culture, undermining any strong national identity on the screen. A disorientated cinema could not easily adapt the more engaged pre-revolutionary literature. In addition, the censors considered literature less dangerous, no surprise in a country where illiteracy reached 75%. One celebrated example is Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Aoudat al-Ruh* (*The Soul Regained*), published in 1933. The novel, adapted for the screen by Abu-Seif only in 1969, portrayed Egyptian national identity as humiliated by British domination and suggested that it could be redeemed through the struggle of all classes against the colonialists. The pre-revolutionary cinema, unfortunately, smothered by melodramas and musicals, could offer no similar call to arms. The beginning of a revival had to await the political action of the Free Officers movement.

The revolution of 1952 which established a new era in Egypt forms part of the post World War II decolonization of the Third World: in Indochina, France was defeated at Dien Bien Phu in 1954; the same year witnessed the beginning of the Algerian war for independence. In Iraq, the revolution of 1958 overthrew the Hashemite dynasty set up by the British. As Fanon points out:

> International events, the collapse of whole sections of colonial empires and the contradictions inherent in the colonial system strengthen and uphold the native's combativity while promoting and giving support to national consciousness.[7]

The ideology of the Egyptian revolution, like that of other nationalist revolutions in the Third World, crystallized around the concept of anti-colonialism. The movement's leaders, a relatively small class of petit-bourgeois nationalists, were united in their determination to win genuine political independence, modernize the economy[8] and achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth. Agrarian reforms were undertaken, limiting agricultural landholding to 200 acres and over one million acres were appropriated from the rich and distributed among peasant land-owners. The Suez Canal and foreign property were nationalized and the educational system was made more democratic.

Nasser's regime marks a turning away from Western domination and a resurgence of national Arab culture. It was the reaction against the West that shaped the cultural, social and political structure of Nasser's regime. He rejected Western culture, including Marxism, arguing that Arab nationalism could not accomodate international or atheist ideology. The exaltation of traditional cultural values, Islam and nationalism, was the means of restoring dignity and power to Egypt. The Egyptian personality, for example, was defined by the writers Taha Husayn and Tawfiq al-Hakim as the synthesis of the pharaonic past, Arabic language and Islamic religion, while the writer Muhamad Hasanen Haykal emphasized the pan-Islamic notion of "divine unity". This process of cultural rediscovery is common in the countries victimized by colonial de-culturization and trying to rebuild a national identity. In the words of Fanon:

> The passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped. Because they realize they are in danger of losing their lives and thus becoming lost to their people, these men, hotheaded and with anger in their hearts, relentlessly determine to renew contact once more with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people.[9]

Although the revolution did not produce a complete transformation, it energized cultural life in Egypt. Cinema became part of the initial stages of nation-building, whose ideology criticized colonial attitudes. The nationalist ideology, as conveyed by the cinema, aimed to provide the people with an interpretation of reality that claimed to transform them from traditional subjects to active citizens. Therefore, the cinema, as a vehicle of the new ideology, had the role of producing solidarity and identity among the masses.

Considering the cinema as an influential means of propagating

culture and national ideas among the people, the state took important measures to reorganize the industry. The cinema was nationalized and the state had nearly complete control over the different branches of the film industry, which previously had been in private hands. Although censorship continued under Nasser's regime its *raison d'être* was quite different. On the one hand, it encouraged directly political as well as historical films, but on the other it exercized a double standard since the present regime was presumed exempt from criticism. Local production had to have scripts approved by the Censorship Department. The censorship affected foreign productions and especially those with political implications. The Ministry of the Interior censored imported pictures with subversive ideas (i.e. communism), films ridiculing Moslem religion and Arab prestige, films showing Afro-Asian people as inferior and films about Israel or Jews. Even films using pro-Zionist stars and technicians such as Elizabeth Taylor, Danny Kaye, Otto Preminger, and Paul Newman, were banned.

The state established the Supreme Council for the Protection of Arts and Letters, and later in 1957 the Organization of Consolidation of Cinema was set up by the Ministry of National and Cultural Guidance, with an annual budget of 1 500 000 Egyptian pounds. Its purpose was to raise artistic and technical standards and strengthen the national film industry by encouraging the presentation of Egyptian films inside Egypt and opening new markets for distribution outside Egypt (apart from the other Arab countries). It offered investment capital and secured bank guarantees for producers, built more movie theatres throughout the country and participated in co-productions to help distribution. Some examples of the co-productions are *Hazaz fil Kahira* (*It Happened in Cairo*), a Hungarian-Egyptian co-production and *Ala Shati el Nil* (*On the Nile Bank*), a Japanese-Egyptian co-production. Annual awards or prizes were given for the best direction, production and so forth. In addition, taxes were imposed on imported films in order to raise funds for native production, strengthen the distribution network and procure the latest technology. A protectionist system of quotas was established, requiring that one week out of four be reserved for the projection of Egyptian films. These measures, together with the increase in the national production, led to a drop in imports from 431 films in 1955 to 294 in 1958. In 1959 the government established the Higher Institute of Cinema, whose purpose was to educate a new generation of film makers and technicians. In 1963 the Egyptian General Organization, which was a fusion of the cinema organization with that of Radio and TV, established its control over the major studios of the past, which were now state owned: Misr, Jalal, Arabic and Nahhas. The public sector in cinema, which was in fact an extension of the state control over the nationalized industry, trained in its institutions script writers and offered a chance to film makers and actors to study abroad.

The faults of the Nasser regime were also reflected in the film industry. The revolution of 1952 was not a revolution by the people, but that of an elite acting in the name of the people. The revolution did not effect a radical change in the political and social structure through genuine redistribution of wealth or the transfer of power from one order or class to another. Therefore, as pointed out by the Egyptian critic Qussai Samak, the public sector in cinema was not created in response to a shared desire of the people and the leadership to radically transform the dominant culture and change the state of the art and industry. It was

merely a continuation of the process of bureaucratically reshaping the state sectors along the lines of what was described as'Arab Socialism'in the'character of National Action'. Like the Egyptian state as a whole, concepts from the private sector still controlled the cinema in the public sector, but under a new organization. In other words, within the framework of the Egyptian General Organization of Cinema the old struggle continued between the veteran producers and directors who gained their power from connections and experience in the industry, and the young generation who were struggling to produce a different cinema.

Despite the faults of the public sector, its importance was above all in its support of the new generation which had not had the chance to demonstrate its abilities in the pre-revolutionary period. The new film makers trained in the public sector were given the opportunity to work in the General Organization of Cinema, and indeed some of the best Egyptian films appeared in the late 60's under the auspices of the public sector, such as Shahin's *Al Ard* (*The Land*), Abu Seif's *Al Kahira Thalatin* (*Cairo 30*), Henri Barakat's *Al Haram* (*The Sin*), Hussein Kamal's *Al Boustagi* (*The Postman*) and Shadi Abdel Salam's *Al Moumia* (*The Mummy*).

The revolution immediately and directly influenced the chosen themes of Egyptian films. Veterans like Badrakhan, for example, incorporated the new nationalist gospel into their films. The films of the younger film makers, besides criticizing the former regime, drew inspiration from contemporary events such as the Palestine War of 1948, the revolution of 1952, the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the Suez War in 1956 and the Algerian struggle for independence. (The Egyptian movement, in fact, anticipated a similar process in Algeria with the rise of Cinema Moudjahid after the liberation, which was concerned mainly with films about the recent past.) Screen criticism of the former regime emphasized its social injustice, portraying the exploitation of peasants by land-owners and their struggle against the monopoly of land and markets, e.g. Shahine's neo-realist social subject *Sera fil Wadi* (*A Struggle in the Valley*, 1953), or Ahmed Dia-Eddine's *Ardona el Khadra* (*Our Green Land*, 1956), which develops a love story between a peasant and his wife, recounting their struggle to save enough money to buy their land only to find that no-one will sell.

This criticism of the former regime was naturally accompanied by films praising the revolution, e.g. Ahmad Badrakhan's *Allah Maana* (*God With Us*, 1954-55), written by the journalist and writer Ihsan Abdil Kuddus, which celebrates the Egyptian revolution and chronicles the Egyptian role in the Palestine War of 1948. The film closes on a critical note, pointing to the plight of the soldiers betrayed at the front by poor equipment and bad leadership. Izzeddine Zulficar's *Rudda Qalbi* (*Give Me My Heart Back*, 1957) described the hard life of the Egyptian peasant before the revolution and the importance of that revolution in bringing reform, distributing land, granting opportunity and justice to the masses.

There were also an increased number of patriotic anti-colonial films celebrating the transformation of the people from objects of history into subjects, participating actively in history. Some examples are Hussein Didky's *Yascut el Istamar* (*Down with Imperialism*, 1953), Henri Barakat's *Fi Baitouna Ragoul* (*A Man in Our House*, 1961), and Ibrahim Hilmy's *Kilo Tissa wa Tissaine* (*Kilometre 99*, 1955). Other films celebrated the Palestine War: Niazi Mustafa's *Samara Sinai*

(*The Dark Girl of the Sinai*, 1958), Kamal el-Cheikh's *Ard el Salam* (*Land of Peace*, 1955). Later films depicted the Suez War of 1956, such as Niazi Moustafa's *Sajine Abou Zaabal* (*Abou Zaabal, Prisoner*, 1956), Izzeddine Zulficar's *Port Said* (1957) and Hassan el Imam's *Hub min Nazr* (*Fiery Love*, 1957).

Some films presented general Arab issues reflecting the ideology of Arab unity. Such films, promoting Arab solidarity, and portraying struggles outside Egypt, derived from Nasser's position as the symbol of radical pan-Arab nationalism and its aspiration to Arab unity. In the Third World, Nasser had established himself as a major leader deeply committed to the anti-colonial struggle, especially throughout the Arab countries and in Africa. This committment is reflected in the portrayal of the Algerian struggle for independence in Shahine's *Gamila Bohraid* of 1958, a film which thematically anticipates Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1966). The film concerns an Algerian girl commando, Gamila, who was tortured by the French. Shahine's long sequences of torture, suffering and resistance became a symbol for Arab solidarity with the courageous Algerian freedom fighters.

As in other Third World countries, the desire for liberation was not simply a question of political independence but also of re-asserting cultural traditions. Without such attitudes towards one's past, together with active and concrete involvement in the present and planning for the future, one is condemned to what Memmi calls the colonized's loss of memory:

> As long as he [the colonized] tolerates colonization, the only possible alternatives for the colonized are assimilation or petrification. Assimilation being refused him ... nothing is left for him but to live isolated from his age. He is driven back by colonization and, to a certain extent, lives with that situation. Planning and building his future are forbidden. He must therefore limit himself to the present, and even that present is cut off and abstract.
>
> We should add that he draws less and less from his past. The colonizer never even recognized that he had one ... the colonized seems condemned to lose his memory.[20]

Consequently, historical and religious films celebrated the end of the 'negative myth' of the colonized through reinforcement of Egyptian tradition and culture. Among the first religious films was *Bilal, Muezzin el Rasul* (*Bilal, the Prophet's Muezzin*, 1952-53) by Ahmad al Touki, and Shahine's *El Naser Salah-el-Din* (1963), dealing with Saladin, the determined leader of Moslem armies who fought against the invading crusaders. He restored Jerusalem to Islam, weakening the European position in the Near East and improved Egypt's political and economic situation. The film, by praising past Arab exploits, implicitly suggests the inversion of power through history (the Arab relationship with the European colonizers was unique, after all, in the respect that it had dominated certain regions of Europe, such as Iberia, and had enjoyed military victories over the West).

At the same time, the revolution also influenced artists to go beyond traditional forms. One of the noticeable tendencies was the rise of realism, reflecting a desire to explore the concrete

problems of the Egyptian people. There were precedents in Egyptian literature for this kind of realism in the 1930's, when writers Taha Hussain and Tawfiq el Hakim established realism through a more colloquial Arabic; later, in the forties and beyond, Neguib Mahfuz contributed to a realistic literature springing from the daily experience of the Egyptian people and helped create a diction based on everyday life. In the cinema, a similar process occurred after 1952, and although most of the films produced in the first decade of the revolution are marked by political naivete, illusionism, and revolutionary romanticism, some also explore the new alternatives created by the revolution. This realist trend in the cinema is demonstrated especially in the films of Salah Abu-Seif who had assisted Kamal Selim in *Al Azima* (*Determination*) as well as Youseef Shahine.

Like similar movements in Third World Cinema, such as Brazil's Cinema Novo and India's New Cinema, Egyptian post-revolutionary cinema was partially inflected by Italian neo-realism. The filmic portrayals of social themes drawn from Egyptian life were usually shot on location, unlike the studio-shot offerings of pre-revolutionary cinema. Songs and dances were relegated to the musicals and the traditional tendency toward melodrama was minimized. Abu-Seif's films focused on urban problems such as sexual oppression and capitalist exploitation. In his film *El Ostahassan* (*Foremen Hassan*, 1952), the hero, Hassan, initially rejects the alley where he grew up; his experiences in the outside world, however, convince him that he cannot abandon his own. Shot in an alley in a poverty-stricken district of Cairo, the film portrays the routine habits of the people who lived there, their speech, their manners and their gestures.

Also Shahine showed deep concern for the ambient reality of the everyday Egyptian. His *Bab el Haded* (*Iron Gate*, 1958) filmed in Cairo's railway station known as the Iron Gate, deals with the sexual frustration and oppression of a crippled newspaper vendor, Kinawi, within the framework of the harsh realities of life in the station where the workers must struggle for their livelihood and their rights.

After the revolution, more Egyptian novels were adapted to the screen and more Egyptian writers worked as screenwriters, e.g. Naguib Mahfuz. Most of these adaptations, unfortunately, relied too heavily on the literary text and created what is known as the 'literary mentality of the Egyptian cinema', e.g. Hassan el-Imam's adaptation of Mahfuz's *Ath-Thulathiyya* (*Trilogy*). In any case such adaptations indicate a new will to search for Egypt's authentic sources in national talent rather than adopting Western formulae.

Changes also occurred within traditional genres such as the musical. After 1952, music became more patriotic and combative. Traditional folklore became a major source of inspiration in the process of defining the 'authentic' nation. Most compositional techniques sought their inspiration in regional songs and dances. A celebrated singer-actor of this new era was Abdel Halim Hafez who, with Muhammad El Mougi and Kamal el Tawil as composers and Morsi Gamil Aziz and Salah Shahine as lyric writers, formed the new mode of expression in the musical. Abdel Halim Hafez's films expressed the local traditions and his love songs were authentically Egyptian, hardly incorporating the modernized form.

In conclusion: the reorganization of the industry and the changes in the films themselves contributed to the development of a distinctively national film culture. As a result of the 1952 revolution, the transition towards a decolonized cinema paralleled the political transition, suggesting that the nation is the substance for cultural renewal since political independence lies at the foundation of a dynamic and vibrant culture, thus illustrating the connection between culture and politics stressed by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> The condition for its existence is therefore national liberation and the renaissance of the state ... A non-existent culture can hardly be expected to have bearing on reality, or to influence reality. The first necessity is the re-establishment of the nation in order to give life to national culture in the strictly biological sense of the phrase.[11]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Hala Salmane, Simon Hartog and David Wilson (eds)1976: *Algerian Cinema*, British Film Institute.

2 One of the most famous films critical of Nasser's regime was *The Bullet is Still in My Pocket*(1973), scripted by Ihsan Abdel-Quddous and directed by Hussan el-Din Mustafa. A hero of the October War, after carrying out his duty successfully on the Canal Front, saves one bullet for the enemy at home, i.e. the man who raped his girlfriend and whom the film associates with the Arab Socialist Union.

3 Sadoul, Georges 1966: *The Cinema in the Arab Countries*, Unesco, Paris ; and specifically "History of the U.A.R. Cinema" by Galal Al-Sharkawi, p 89

4 Paradoxically, this Egyptian historical film was directed by a man who knew no Arabic, the German, Fritz Kramp.

5 The cinema was mainly an urban medium and the *fellahs* (peasants) who formed about 65% of the population had little access to it.

6 Memmi, Albert 1967: *The Colonizer and the Colonized* , Beacon Press, Boston, p 120

7 Fannon, Frantz 1968: *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, p 238

8 As G. Chaliand notes in *Revolution in the Third World*, the Free Officers saw modernization essentially as a matter of technology, for unlike their Chinese, North Vietnamese and Cuban counterparts, they were socially and culturally conservative, and despite occasional lip-service to 'socialism', the 1952 revolution rejected class struggle or any profound social upheaval.

9 Fannon *op.cit.* pp 209 - 210

10 Memmi *op.cit.* pp 102 - 103

11 Fannon *op.cit.* pp 244 - 245