

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Though a mere hundred years separate us from the birth of cinema, these years have seen a total transformation of the world political situation. In 1895 the European empires were at the apparent height of their power and influence, dominating between them over three-quarters of the earth's surface. The bulk of Africa and Asia was formally colonized, while most of the Latin American republics, which had achieved their national independence in the early part of nineteenth century, were still subjected to British economic power. Largely as a result of the two world wars, this pattern was totally destroyed within fifty years or so: the old empires were dissolved and the United State rose to dominance of so called "free world".

Cinema reached the Arab World during the period of colonialism. As the Tunisian Critic Ferid Boyughedir point out, it can for therefore be seen to have a very definite social role, namely.

To supply a cultural and ideological justification for the political domination and economic exploitation... the cinema like education, archaeology, books and newspapers, conspired in the falsification of reality whereby the colonizer was a technician, a man of progress, from a superior culture and civilisation, while the native was a primitive, incapable of technical progress or of mastering his passions, the next best

thing to a wild beast even if he could on occasion be a “proud and generous”.¹

The second chapter deals with the birth of Arabic cinema, and Egypt is a key state in Arab World, the rare instances in which important film industries have emerged in Africa and Arab World follow patterns already familiar in other parts of the Third World, both in their relationship to the progress of local industrialisation and in their cultural ambiguities. What is particularly revealing of the importance of cinema in contemporary culture in the region is the emergence of talented individual filmmakers almost everywhere from Egypt to Morocco and from Mali to South Africa. Africa and Arab World may be poor in term of the industrial production of film, but they offer a wealth of thoughtful and carefully realized works that reflect and speculate upon the various national issues and problems of the region.

Also this chapter deals with commercial cinema after coming of sound in the Third World and I have taken a narrower approach capable of dealing with filmmakers whose work goes far beyond the constriction commercial cinema.

This chapter takes into account how the Arab cinema constructed since the cinema reached the Arab World during the period of colonialism. The first projection of the Lumiere cinematography took place in Alexandria in 1896 and in Cairo the following winter, and elsewhere in the Arab World, cinema developed only slowly. In

¹ Khalil, Al-Hadi. (1996). *The Arab and the Modernity of Cinema*, Tunisia. Southern House Press, p. 53.

The Machreq (the Arab East), an important role had traditionally been played by Lebanese financiers and distributors. But in the Maghreb (the Arab West), French colonial policy here had created a minority of educated Arabs whose views were shaped by French cultural dominance, film making has followed a quite separate pattern of development in the Maghreb as distinctive national cinemas have emerged in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.

A desire to unveil the conflicting realities of their own countries has led young directors in Arab World since the early 1950s to explore the political potential of the medium. Responding to the climates of social and political crisis that prevailed across the Arab World, the filmmakers sought committed way to use film as an instrument of social awareness. By the end of the decade and through a concerted effort, these filmmakers sought to join diverse radical projects developed within specific national contexts into a broader ideological and cultural agenda capable of encompassing the territorial expanse of the Arab World. This ideological agenda was initiated by and developed through a cinematographic movement known as the New Arab Cinema.

Constituted in 1967 during the historic festival of Arab World cinema in Cairo, the New Arab cinema has over the last three decades produced an impressive body of work that bridges the gap between theory and practice and consists of films critical essays, and social political manifestos. The circulation of this body of work has disseminated the objectives and goals of the predominantly social, political cinemas of Arab world.

The Third Chapter deals with issues of the Euphoria of revolution, the Euphoric mood of the late 1960s is very apparent in the work of many of the film makers who, born mostly in the 1930s and 1940, combined with growing national awareness in the Third World during the 1960s, led almost imperceptibly to a belief, which came to be widely held, that an era of socialist revolution was dawning throughout the Third World.

As the Arab World a part of the Third World, young generation film makers created New Arab Cinema movement - they do indicate how these film makers unlike their elders of the 1950s generation could be seen as participating in a collective movement of revolutionary change that had both national and international dimensions, belief in the political function of cinema was fundamental to all these film makers.

The Third Chapter deals also with issues of gender and representation and seeks to identify new expressive territories, that not only subvert accepted aesthetic standards but claim a public space for issues censored from the private sphere. These feminist oriented practices reflect the importance of reshaping notions of social and gendered experience within the New Arab World.

In the Fourth chapter, attention is paid to the achievement of just a handful of notable filmmakers of the New Arab Cinema. This choice is limited but not random, for all filmmakers selected meet two criteria. Firstly, they have all produced a series of films over a period of ten or fifteen years and achieved a degree of notoriety and influence

outside their own countries. Secondly, their work offers the opportunity to consider in greater detail the artistic implications of some the issues raised in earlier chapters. These filmmakers working in just about every part of the Arab world, working individually to express their national social reality, most of whom have been unable to make more than a feature film or two, but a brief study will give some idea of the current diversity of the Arab world film production.

In the Fifth chapter, attention is paid to the deterioration of Egyptian Cinema as early as 1925 when an important impetus come from Bank Misr, Its director, Talaat Harb, had set up the Misr Theater and cinema company, by 1935 saw the opening of Misr studios, equipped with imported European facilities and manned by staff who had been sent for training to France and Germany. It is from the immediate pre-war period that one date the customary gulf that comes to exist in a film industry between commerce and art. When the cinema become, in Egypt the easiest, quickest and surest way of the making fortunes characterized as “the cinema of the war profiteers”.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this work is to illustrate that today’s cinema, especially the commercial one, has negative implications on the society. Thus, the study intends to recourse the Arabic Islamic memory to our abrogated culture. That is for the assertion of our identity emanated from the Islamic teachings.

This is similar to establishing a noble society by bringing to surface the defects and flaws even if they will be embarrassing in nature. As such, banning the commercial cinema whose aim is materialistic springing from capitalism, is an important objective here - because it has corrupted the morals and public values.

The Arab countries followed and injected to bring up their own cinema and from that day, cinema, nicely and proudly, bewitched in Arab countries with hope that these technologies can do something to bring back the Arab civilization.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis was accomplished through three methods of study. The initial step taken before starting the project were trips to the library and reviewing literature on the subject. This early research informed me on previous works that has been written on my intended project and supplied me with the basic theories involved in the study of films and filmmaking. The second step was to get hold of all resources that concern my line of study. This turned out to be the most difficult stage in my project because the resources available were limited. Related articles were almost all found only in Arabic magazines from a number of Arab nations. After initial reading, selected parts of these articles had to be painstakingly translated into the English language, to be quoted and incorporated into the thesis. The last step before starting the thesis was viewing all resources in the form of video cassettes and films. These resources were likewise rare,

possibly because of poor marketing and distribution strategy, or the hassles of censorship boards. After viewing and reviewing, comparison made and parallels noted, I was finally ready to commence writing my thesis.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

One of the main obstacles any researcher in the subject of Arab cinema would have to face is the rather severe lack of resources. The study of Arabic cinema is relatively new therefore it is difficult to find academic papers related to the field. One would have to depend on articles in the newspapers and magazines. The fact that articles on the cinema are more often found in entertainment magazines or the leisure sections of the newspapers further worsens the situation. The reputation of entertainment magazines, especially those that cater to the taste of young audience, is rather dubious. An article written in these magazines, more often than not, are mere gossips, and concern only the low-level cinema. It is very seldom that serious interviews are carried out with substantial result. It is even rarer to find articles on the new kind of cinema I am discussing in this paper.

Besides difficult in reviewing related literature, I also found it very hard to review the Arabic films themselves, as there are hardly any available for sale or rental. Perhaps, this has to do with the strict censorship guidelines that producers and marketers have to adhere to. In the Arab countries, the cinema is not looked upon kindly.

It has always been believed to be the purveyor of western immorality and the instigator of anti-establishment sentiments. Consequently, the cinema suffers a very slow progress and an even more laggard attention from the government.