

Cultivating cultural change through cinema; Youssef Chahine and the creation of national identity in Nasser's Egypt

Barrie Wharton²

Egypt has long been considered by most commentators as the birthplace of Arab cinema and many of the seminal milestones in Arab cinematic history such as the shooting of the first full-length feature film, *Layla* (1928)³ took place along the banks of the Nile. The golden era of Egyptian cinema began in the late

² Dr Barrie Wharton, from the University of Limerick, Ireland, is currently a Visiting Fellow at the National Centre for Research on Europe at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. He has lectured widely throughout Europe (Portugal, Greece, etc) and the Islamic world (Egypt, Iran, etc) and he has published widely in refereed journals throughout Europe, the Middle East and North America. He is a regular contributor to the international press and media on questions relating to Europe and Islam.

³ During the article, all films will be referred to in the first instance in italics by their Arabic title in an English alphabet form followed by an English translation and the year of film release. Subsequent referrals to the same film will be in italics but in English translation form only. In the filmography at the end of the article, all films are referenced in their Arabic language version in English alphabet form followed by an English translation and year of release. All translations are in standard Egyptian Arabic. Any Arabic terms used in article are highlighted in italics and bold script.

1940's and continued through the 1950's and early 1960's, an era which coincided with the coming to power of Col. Nasser after the Free Officers Revolution of 1952 and the subsequent establishment of Egypt as the cultural fulcrum of the new emerging pan-Arab doctrine. During this period which ended with the death of Nasser in 1970, Egyptian cinema moved from being a simple entertainment tool for the masses to a role as an instrument of socio-cultural change. As such, Egyptian cinema became almost a blueprint for the new Nasserist societal vision and the cinema screen brought this vision to a population where high rates of illiteracy hampered written efforts.

Although much more famous internationally for his post-Nasser work, one of the foremost directors of this period was the recently deceased Egyptian director, Youssef Chahine and this neglected period of his career may in fact prove to be his most important legacy. This neglect is perhaps understandable as Nasser's sudden and premature death in 1970 led to a rapid demise in what had become perceived as Nasserist cultural policy and in a rapidly changing Egypt, both cultural commentators and Chahine himself shied away from the discussion of his role in what had been perhaps the most important project of national identity creation in modern Egyptian history.

Indeed, when one analyzes the considerable literature available on culture, and more specifically on cinema, in Nasserist Egypt, there seems to exist an almost avowed and deliberate playing down of Chahine's role in Nasserism. On the contrary, there has been a vast range of academic studies

on the role in Nasserist Egypt of his contemporary and sometime collaborator, Naguib Mahfouz⁴ while the influence on Nasserism of the legendary singer and actress, Um Kolsoum has also been widely documented.⁵

There are various reasons for this academic obfuscation of the relationship between Chahine and Nasser but foremost amongst them is undoubtedly the contemporary academic obsession with Chahine as an anti-establishment maverick director whose themes of cosmopolitanism, liberalism and homosexuality mark him out as an anti-regime figure in Arab society. This obsession was exacerbated by his attack on Islamic fundamentalism in *Heya Fawda..?/Chaos* (2007) and increasingly, one sees Chahine posthumously lauded in an erroneous manner as a “Western” director . Admittedly, the aforementioned themes do exist in his most famous work in the West, his Alexandrian quartet, *Iskandariyah... lih? /Alexandria...Why ?*(1978), *Hadduta Misriyah /An Egyptian Tale* (1982), *Iskandariyah Kaman wa Kaman/Alexandria Again and Again* (1989) and *Iskandariyah-New York/Alexandria-New York* (2004) but they do not predominate in these films and play no part in much of his work. In fact, closer examination of

⁴ Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988 and this spawned a huge wave of research on his work with the bulk of it concentrating on his work during the Nasserist period when he wrote his classic *Cairo Trilogy* and perhaps his best-known work, *Midaq Alley*.

⁵ Indeed, the Institut de Monde Arabe in Paris dedicated a full exhibition in 2008 to Um Kolsoum with much of the exhibition concentrating on her relationship with Nasser and Nasserism.

Chahine's complete oeuvre reveals a cinematic master who was far more a poet of marginalization and social inequity than a chronicler of dilettante life in modern Egypt and it is noteworthy that by the time Chahine released the first of this mainly autobiographical quartet of films which is often cited as spanning his career, he had already directed twenty-eight films and as this article will argue, his most significant cinematic work, albeit not his most celebrated, was already behind him.

In particular, this article will concentrate on three of Chahine's films which were produced during the Nasserist era and which had in different ways, a profound effect on a national culture and identity which was still in the throes of formation. The first is the seminal *Bab al-Hadid/Cairo Main Station* (1958), a film which recreates and distills the upheaval of Col. Nasser's new Egypt through a series of interwoven and fraught personal relationships in the symbolic location of the country's largest train station. Second is *Al Nasser Salah Ad-Din /Saladin* (1963), the quintessential Arab epic of the Crusades and a thinly-veiled allegory of the expected triumph of pan-Arab nationalism, a paean to the moral certainty of the new regime and almost a hymn to Nasser himself. Finally, this article will examine the daring and ground-breaking *Al-Ard/The Land* (1969), Chahine's sadly neglected neo-realist *tour de force* which captured the soul of rural Egypt and still stands today as one of the most powerful testaments to social injustice in the annals of world cinema.

To understand the problematic position with the work of Chahine and its role and influence in Nasserist Egypt, one

must look primarily at the reception which has been afforded to pan-Arabist and Nasserist-era cinema and intellectuals in the post-1970 period. First and foremost, one must mention that the legacy of this period has been primarily associated with Col. Qaddafi in Libya, Saddam Hussein in Iraq and to a lesser extent, Hafez al-Assad in Syria, the late father of the current Syrian president. The association between Nasserism and these authoritarian and dictatorial figures has done much to discredit Nasserism as an innovative cultural project and by extension, those that were heavily involved in its creation.

Some such as Naguib Mahfouz, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, managed successfully to reinvent themselves in a new post-Nasserist Egyptian cultural environment without having to overtly disassociate themselves from or deny their past. Others such as Abderrahman Cherkaoui, who had worked with Chahine and Mahfouz on the script of *Saladin*, were not as successful and found themselves intellectually marooned in President Sadat's new *infitah* capitalist society⁶ where they were tainted, albeit often wrongly with the stigma of servants of the Soviet Union and intellectually demeaned and debased as mere reactionary mouthpieces of the culturally redundant Nasserist ideology of pan-Arabism.

⁶ *Infitah* or open door policy was a policy initiated by Sadat which was originally economic but quickly had wide-ranging socio-cultural and political ramifications. It involved the opening up of Egyptian society to capitalism and the rejection of Nasser's socialism. It brought Egypt closer to the United States and away from the Soviet sphere of influence.

Youssef Chahine circumvented this danger when after a three year hiatus from feature films after Nasser's death, he released *El Ousfour/The Sparrow* (1972), a film which clearly points the finger of blame for the calamitous defeat of Egypt at the hands of Israel in the Six Days War of 1967 at the Nasserist political establishment. Indeed, the film was so provocative in its attack on state corruption that Nasser's successor, Sadat had it banned for two years after its release. However, the film was successful for Chahine as an individual in that he managed to clearly draw a line in the cultural quicksand between his Nasserist past and his future career and as such, *The Sparrow* becomes a watershed not only in Chahine's career but also in the trajectory of Egyptian film as its release marks the end of Nasser's pan-Arabist cinematic dream as a new generation of Arab directors and producers followed Chahine's lead and moved towards more introspective, microcosmic visions of their societies in stark contrast with the avowed pan-national didactic nature and universality of theme and structure which had characterized Arab cinema in the Nasserist era. Highly ironically, *The Sparrow* was itself an Arab co-production between Egypt and Algeria but such co-productions would be few and far between in the following decades.

However, it is Chahine's pre-*The Sparrow* work which is of principal concern to this article and despite its powerful condemnation of Nasserism, the reality is that Chahine's career was forged in and helped to forge Nasserist culture and by logical extension, contemporary Egyptian identity. It may have been possible to detach and remove the stigma and yoke

of Nasserism from Chahine after 1970 but it will never be possible to remove Chahine from Nasserism.

Born in 1926 in Alexandria into a Christian family, Chahine attended the prestigious and elitist Victoria College from where he progressed to Pasadena Film School in California. As such, Chahine was not a member of the different opposition political groups such as Young Egypt or the Muslim Brotherhood⁷ but to suggest that he was ambivalent to or ignorant of the great political change that was on the horizon in early 1950's Egypt would be foolish.

His first three feature films were shot when Egypt was still under British colonial rule but his career really took off after the Free Officers Revolution of 1952 which brought Col. Nasser to power with his accompanying vision of a new Egyptian culture and society. This vision called for a total *bouleversement* of the hitherto existent class and societal structure through a socialist programme of nationalization and education for the masses in order to create a new, more just society.

Nasser's utopian vision involved the formation of a new national identity and culture and emissaries were enlisted throughout the respective spheres of Egyptian cultural production and entrusted with the dissemination of the new Nasserist creed. Cinema was one of the principal spheres and from the early days of the revolution onwards, Egyptian

⁷ Young Egypt was a neo-fascist group with sympathies towards Nazi Germany while the Muslim Brotherhood which still exists today sought to islamicize Egyptian society and was the breeding ground for many offshoot Islamic radical groupings.

cinema enjoyed huge government subsidies and production support as long of course as it served the aims of the revolution. Chahine was one of the first directors to benefit from this support and early films such as *Sira` Fi al-Wadi /Struggle in the Valley/The Blazing Sun* (1954), in which Chahine discovered, Omar Sharif enjoyed his first main role and *Sira` fi el-Minaa /Dark Waters, Struggle in the Port* (1956) stand the test of time as almost propaganda documents of early Nasserist doctrine.

However, it was *Cairo Main Station* (1958) which would cement Chahine's reputation as Nasserism's greatest director and bring his work and by extension, Nasserism to a wider Arab and international audience. *Cairo Main Station* is a complex and above all, visually rich film, a veritable feast for the eyes. Its frequent long shots echo the influence of Italian neo-realism as the principal characters are juxtaposed against the tumult and chaos of the real railway station of the title. Such contrasts mirror the cultural upheaval and radical change which characterized early Nasserist Egypt and perhaps the most moving scenes are occasional ones of complete silence which contrast starkly with the usual incessant noise of the station. One of the most striking and famous images from the film is the shot of the giant statue of Ramses II which stands outside the station with the masses swarming around it and the impact of this shot, which represents the creation of a society of the masses, a dominant theme in pan-Arabist ideology, remains as powerful and effective today as when the film was first released.

Cairo Main Station is the story of a simple-minded man, Qenawi, a disabled newspaper seller in the railway station, a rural peasant cast adrift in the new metropolis. Chahine himself plays the role of Qenawi and despite his privileged upbringing, he imbues his character with an *ibn-al-balad*⁸ quality which endears him to the audience who identify with his character from the very beginning. Qenawi cuts pictures of women from magazines for the station hut he lives in but the real object of his sexual desire or more correctly, frustration is Hanouma, the beautiful lemonade seller, played by the popular Egyptian actress, Hind Rostom. However, Hanouma is engaged to the handsome Abou Serib, a station porter and trade union organizer, played by Farid Chawqi.

Hanouma playfully but innocently flirts with Qenawi and the confusion this provokes unleashes a wave of tragic violence. This violence results in the death of an innocent girl whom Qenawi kills during a rage in a case of mistaken identity as he attempts to kill Hanouma who has resisted his advances and when he attempts to kill her again, this act inevitably leads to Qenawi being taken away to a lunatic asylum. This allegory for the consequences of the inability to accept and embrace change in Nasser's Egypt was shocking for Egyptian audiences and after its release, it was shelved for almost twenty years in Egypt but it had succeeded in breaking

⁸ *ibn-al-balad*, literally a son of the neighbourhood, is one of the greatest compliments one can pay to an Egyptian. In dialect, it varies from area to area but in Irish English, the term "salt of the earth" would be used. The term is used to describe somebody who embodies inherent decency, a type of everyman.

new ground in Egyptian cinema and its positive portrayal of a “fallen” woman as a heroine was the first time the issue of gender inequality had really been portrayed on the Egyptian cinema screen.

The power of *Cairo Main Station* is its ability to portray complex political, social and cultural issues in a simple yet always didactic manner. For this purpose, Chahine employs all the classic stereotypes of Egyptian society in the familiar setting of the Cairo railway station, a location familiar with almost all of Egyptian society. Sounds of people greeting and parting, eating and drinking, buying and selling permeate the film and almost lull the audience into a sense of ease and familiarity which makes the end all the more shocking.

Parallel stories permeate the film as we see a selection of vignettes of a changing Egypt which reinforce the film’s message. Porters try to set up a trade union while a feminist gives a speech. A family of rural peasants wander through the station completely lost and adrift akin to aliens in a brave new world while two young lovers arrange a secret rendezvous. Above all, we see the repeating vignette of the uprooted and isolated Qenawi, an existential loner and silent voyeur, emasculated and doomed by his social condition.

A tale of failed socio-economic determinism and socio-cultural fatalism, *Cairo Main Station* is a cry for change in Egypt for only radical change can alter the destinies of the protagonists. The final scene in the film, when Qenawi is taken away in a straitjacket through the teeming crowds after he has been persuaded to dress up for a wedding which will never take place, is almost overly melodramatic but indeed, highly

emotive and it quickly became seen as a leitmotif for the programme of social justice and reforms which Nasser sought.

If *Cairo Main Station* linked Chahine to the new Nasserist creed, he became interminably intertwined with its fortunes through *Saladin* (1963). Ostensibly, a historical epic charting the twelfth-century defence of Jerusalem by the Arab hero, Saladin against the Christian crusaders, the film is a thinly-veiled allegory for the yearned-for triumph of the pan-Arab nationalist ideology of Nasser.

Scripted by Naguib Mahfouz and Abderrahman Cherkaoui, the film was originally titled *El Nasser; Saladin* but to avoid accusations of overt propaganda, the title is usually shortened. However, the inferred parallel between Saladin and Nasser is glaringly obvious. Saladin is a paragon of peace and religious tolerance, an educated ruler who gives clandestine medical assistance to Richard the Lionheart and guarantees religious freedom for all. A three-hour epic, *Saladin* remains one of the few authentic post-colonial cultural productions which attest to the glory of ancient Egypt. Indeed, the film is often cited as the great historical epic of Egyptian cinema with Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt and Syria uniting Arabs across Western Asia and North Africa in order to ward off the Christian crusaders and its appearance in the wake of the Suez crisis was widely interpreted as echoing Nasser's contemporary harnessing of Arab society against the Zionist enemy.

Chahine never discussed at length *Saladin* in later years but its interpretation and appropriation of Egyptian history for propaganda purposes cannot be denied. *Saladin* had already

been the protagonist of an Egyptian film by the Lama brothers in 1941 but in colonial times, he had been reduced to a mere action hero in an adventure. Yet, Chahine's production, in which he appears himself, brings Saladin to a new plane as a symbol of justice and chivalry with the omnipresent slogan of unity resonating throughout the film, striking a direct chord with contemporary Nasserist ideology of the time.

Arab identity is constantly placed above religious affiliation and the character of the Christian, 'Issa al-'Awam is pivotal with his depiction as Saladin's closest confidante. The film is of course, historically inaccurate and the Kurdish origins of Saladin are never mentioned nor is his predisposition to violence. On the contrary, he is presented in a purely positive manner as befitted the Nasserist discourse on the portrayal of Nasser and as such, one encounters a cinematic work which over thirty five years later, still holds its own alongside the oeuvre of other eminent propaganda directors such as Riefenstahl or Sáenz de Heredia⁹. Interestingly, Nasser is said to have resented his portrayal on the screen in such a magnified and deified manner yet, such assertions only give rise to further myths such as that of Nasser as a reluctant and benevolent dictator.¹⁰

⁹ See Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), the film of the 1934 Nazi party rally at Nuremberg and José Luis Sáenz de Heredia's *Raza* (1941), a propaganda homage to General Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War.

¹⁰ This myth of Nasser as a reluctant and benevolent dictator was widely propagated and official pictures of Nasser with children and in civilian dress still predominate.

Chahine's final great work of the Nasserist period was *The Land* (1969), another ground-breaking work of social realism in the style of *Cairo Main Station*. Adapted from the 1952 novel of the same title by Abderrahman al-Cherkaoui, one of his collaborators on *Saladin*, *The Land* is a harsh epic about the power of feudalism in rural Egypt as it chronicles the struggle of a group of peasants against the oppression of the local landowner.

In a marked departure from other social realist epics of the post-war period, *The Land* shows how political oppression does not necessarily lead to a sense of solidarity amongst the disinherited and as such, the film presents a pessimistic and almost nihilistic view of Egypt on the eve of Nasser's death, a view which stands in stark contrast to that of Cherkaoui, the author of the original book who was an uncompromising old-school Marxist. A politically committed film against the backdrop of a love story and inter-generational conflicts, it contains numerous memorable vignettes of the social realist genre but its ambivalent ending is disturbing and echoes the vacuum which defeat in the 1967 war and the consequential failure of Nasserist ideology wrought.¹¹

In *The Land*, one sees the real daily life of the Egyptian peasant. Their accents and clothes are real. One sees their work through the seasons, the sweltering days and cool

¹¹ The film has strong echoes of early Italian neo-realism and in particular films such as Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Umberto D* (1952).

nights. For the first time on cinema screens, one sees their cows and chickens co-habiting with them, their dignity in poverty, their superstitious nature but most of all, their quasi-religious attachment to their plot of land. The Nasserist motif of solidarity in community is present throughout but throughout the film, a current of pessimism exists about the prospects for real social change, mirroring the pervading social attitudes of the time as the power of Nasserism was on the wane.

What is really memorable in *The Land* is the feast of Bertolucci-like archetypal images which stand as almost a collage to the principal tenets of Nasserist ideology. The most striking is perhaps the long tracking shot of the film's last scene where the aging villager who has stood up to the tyrannical landlord is brutally punished. His feet are bound with his body tied to the legs of a horse which is ridden by the village sheriff. With his clothes ripped apart and his body bleeding, he is dragged along but continues to clutch at the soil. On analysis of this highly emotive scene, one may question whether he is clutching the soil, refusing to let go, to abandon his land, his home or whether it is the earth that is clutching him.

Whichever way one interprets this deliberately ambivalent ending, one cannot deny that *The Land* is an immensely powerful and moving film, almost a prelude to the huge funeral of the charismatic Nasser which would take place little over a year later. Moreover, it was the first time the Egyptian peasant, the cornerstone of the nation, had been portrayed on the screen in a realistic fashion and as such, the

film fulfilled its Nasserist role of empowering the hitherto silent peasantry with an authentic voice and presence in Egyptian culture.

Yet, despite the obvious social and political content of these three films alongside most of his work, many of the obituaries and tributes on Chahine's recent death concentrated on his status as a "liberal", westernized director who opposed the conservative and traditional values of his Egyptian homeland. Such a concentration, albeit erroneous, is principally due to the aforementioned semi-autobiographical Alexandria quartet, *Alexandria...Why?* (1978), *An Egyptian Tale* (1982), *Alexandria Again and Again* (1990) and *Alexandria-New York* (2004), a series of films which have been popular in arthouse cinemas and film clubs worldwide over the last twenty years and which have come to embody Chahine for many critics and commentators.

In *Alexandria...Why ?*, a patriotic Egyptian soldier kidnaps a British soldier but begins a homosexual relationship with him and then falls in love with his victim whereas in *An Egyptian Story*, the young protagonist from *Alexandria... Why ?* is seen at an older age undergoing a crisis of conscience as he awaits heart surgery. *Alexandria Again and Again* sees Yehia, the original protagonist and Chahine's alter ego as a successful director who joins an actors' strike and daydreams about Amir, a handsome young actor whose career he has launched. However, he then meets the beautiful Nadia and falls in love with her. The quartet ends with the melancholic *Alexandria-New York* which brings Yehia back to America where he

discovers a lost son but mourns the loss of American innocence and values.

Although successful internationally with the creation of a cinematic portrayal of Alexandria reminiscent of Woody Allen's homages to New York, one could argue that the quartet is far from being Chahine's best work and undoubtedly, it is not the most representative of his real talent. Admittedly, the Alexandria quartet is more accessible than some of his complex earlier work and his participation as a co-director in the portmanteau post September 11th production *11'09"01 Eleven Minutes, Nine Seconds, One Image* (2002) has only helped to cement this false image of Youssef Chahine in cinematic circles as an ultra-liberal and westernized Arab director.

However, the truth is that the films of the Alexandria quartet may be amongst the blandest and least meaningful of Chahine's work. They may appear more polished than *The Land* or *Cairo Main Station* but this polish diminishes much of the potency of a director whose real talent lay in his ability to shock and disturb audiences. Chahine's body of work until the mid 1970's implicitly embraced the fusion of history and politics with the omnipresence of a strong social conscience and in the tradition of Italian neo-realism or the French new wave, such films sought to overtly influence and direct socio-cultural change. The pre-quartet Chahine was in the true sense of the word, a revolutionary director and for much of his cinematic life, he worked towards the goals of Nasser's revolution. As such, one sees the innovative treatment of characters from humble and destitute areas combined with

non-linear plots, a mixture of sociology, psychology and remarkable cinematic individuality in the treatment of subject matter and in technique. With a range in styles and cinematic language from neo-realism to the surreal to blatant melodrama, Chahine spanned cinematic movements but his engagement was ever-present and although he would often flirt within the same film with myriad styles and genres, he remained faithful to his preoccupation with the destruction of class distinctions, the question of gender equality and the definition of a new Egypt.

This crucial social commitment of Chahine is key to his relationship with the Nasserist regime and it is not until *The Sparrow* (1972) that he really criticizes it but one must remember that by then, Nasser was dead and the pan-Arab dream was over. Perhaps tellingly, Chahine squarely lays the blame at corruption in the Nasserist administration for the calamitous defeat by Israel in the Six-Day war rather than directly at Nasser. In the last scene before the film ends with Cheikh Imam's haunting theme tune, Nasser announces defeat in the war and his offer of resignation but Chahine's protagonist, Bahiyya, celebrated in Imam's song, runs into the street, followed by a growing crowd, shouting, "No, we must fight, we will not accept defeat".

A pioneer of social realism in the Arab world, Chahine's work was not only confined to Egyptian themes in this realm of social awareness. In *Djamila Bouhired/Djamila, the Algerian* (1958), he portrays the Algerian anti-colonial struggle in a biopic which documents the heroism of the resistance fighter, Djamila Bouhired and his subsequent trial. As such,

Chahine's work alongside contemporaries such as the Algerian Mohammed Bouamari or the Syrian, Nabil Maleh, can be seen as sowing the seeds for the birth of New Arab Cinema in the 1980's and 1990's which would become chiefly characterized by its strong commitment to and espousal of the Palestinian cause.

What is important to note here is that Chahine was never vehemently anti-Israeli and indeed, his positive portrayal of the Jewish community and legacy in Alexandria in *Alexandria...Why ?* aroused the wrath of many anti-Israeli hardliners in the Arab world. Yet, he was always a brave and open critic of social inequality and here, he would hypothetically stand ideologically with a Palestinian population. Not simply a mere anti-colonial or Arab nationalist director, Chahine was brave enough to turn the mirror of criticism upon his own society as in *Cairo Main Station* or *The Land* while continuing to point to unjust global systems which were to blame for the fundamental problems in the Arab world.

An avowed secularist, Chahine was appalled by the rise of religious fundamentalism, both Christian and Muslim alike, in his beloved Egypt. This was something he shared closely with Nasser and his rejection of what he saw as forces of ignorance was still openly apparent in his latter films such as *El-Massir/Destiny* (1997) and his final film, *Chaos* (2007). This almost rabid opposition to religious extremism and social conservatism is often wrongly interpreted as the characteristic of a pro-Western director when in fact, it may on reflection be a natural reaction of angry nostalgia by an artist who was

culturally and ideologically formed and moulded in the fires of Nasserist revolutionary rhetoric.

Youssef Chahine's death in July, 2008 left Egyptian cinema without its colossus but Egypt also lost its eyes, its ears and most importantly, its conscience. Chahine will be remembered for taking on fundamentalism in the contemporary era but he had taken on the yoke of imperialism almost fifty years before with his vision for a new Egypt which he would tragically never see. This eventual failure of Nasserism to realize the project of a new just Egyptian society, based on principles of secularism, tolerance and equality is a historical reality with myriad cause factors but this doesn't denigrate or diminish in any way the fundamental role of Youssef Chahine in this social, cultural and political project for almost twenty years.

The failure of Nasserism may account for the introspective nature of much of Chahine's later and ironically, more commercially successful work but his most enduring legacy may be his status as a cinematic conscience for a nation and this was never clearer than in works such as *Cairo Main Station*, *Saladin* and *The Land*.

Chahine, like Nasser, knew that Egypt had to face her memory and by extension, her fears before she could embrace her hopes and her future. Their dreams for the cultural production of a new Egyptian would never come to fruition and would remain a utopian dream, tarnished by political

oppression.¹² Yet, as Nasserist ideology fades into history in a contemporary climate of increasing religious radicalism, the “Nasserist” films of Youssef Chahine such as *Cairo Main Station* and *The Land* remain as powerful celluloid advertisements for and testaments to one of the potentially most powerful socio-cultural ideologies of the last century. Successive Egyptian heads of state have gone to great lengths to cast off and exorcize the legacy of Nasserism as a socio-cultural beacon from contemporary Egyptian society but their efforts will have been in vain as long as the cinema of Chahine survives.

Filmography

Baba Amin (Papa Amin) - 1950

Ibn al-Nil (Nile Boy) – 1951

El Mohareg el Kebyr (The Great Clown) - 1952

Saydat al Ketaar (Lady on the Train) - 1953

Nisaa bila Regal (Women without Men) - 1953

Sira` Fi al-Wadi (Struggle in the Valley/The Blazing Sun) - 1954

Shaitan al Sahraa (The Desert Devil) - 1954

¹² Nasser was particularly harsh in his political oppression of Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

Sira` fi el-Minaa (Dark Waters, Struggle in the Port) - 1956

Wadda'tu Hobbaka (Farewell to Your Love) - 1957

Enta Habiby (You're My Love) - 1957

Bab al-Hadid (Cairo Main Station) - 1958

Djamila Bouhired (Jamila, the Algerian) - 1958

Hobb lel Abad (Forever Yours) - 1959

Bein Edeik (In Your Hands) - 1960

Nidaa al Oushaak (A Lover's Call) - 1960

Rajul fe Haiaty (A Man in My Life) - 1961

Al Nasser Salah Ad-Din (Saladin) - 1963

Fagr Youm Gedeed (Dawn of a New Day) - 1964

'Biyaa El Khawatem' (The Ring Salesman) - 1965

Rimal min Thahab (Golden Sands) - 1966

Eid al Mairun (The Feast of Mairun) - 1967

Al Nas wal Nil (Those People of the Nile) - 1968

Al-Ard (The Land) - 1969

Al-Ekhtyiar (The Choice) - 1970

Salwa al Fatah al Saghira allaty Tokalem el Abkar (Salwa the Little Girl who Talks to Cows) - 1972

El Ousfour (The Sparrow) - 1972

Intilak (Forward We Go) - 1973

Awdet el Ebn el Dal (Return of The Prodigal Son) - 1976

Iskandariyah... lih? (Alexandria... Why?) - 1978

Hadduta Misriyah (An Egyptian Tale) - 1982

Wadaan Bonabart (Adieu Bonaparte) - 1985

Al-Yawm al-Sadis (The Sixth Day) - 1986

Iskandariyah Kaman wa Kaman (Alexandria Again and Again) - 1989

El Kahera Menawara be Ahlaha (Cairo as told by Chahine) - 1991

Al-Mohagir (The Emigrant) - 1994

Al-Massir (The Destiny) - 1997

Kolaha Khatwa (It's Only a Step) - 1998

Al-Akhar (The Other) - 1999

Sokoot Hansawwar (Silence, We're Rolling) - 2001

11'09"01 Eleven Minutes, Nine Seconds, One Image - 2002

Iskandariyah-New York (Alexandria-New York) - 2004

Heya Fawda..? (Is This Chaos..?) – 2007

Select Bibliography

Abou Shadi, Aly. *A Chronology of the Egyptian cinema, 1896-1994*. Cairo, al-Majlis al-A'la lil-Thaqafah, 1998.

Al-Obaidi, Jabbar A. "Egyptian Film: Gender And Class Violence Three Cycles." *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 27.3 (2000) 261-275.

Armbrust, Walter. "Islamists in Egyptian Cinema." *American Anthropologist*, 104.3 (2002) 922-932.

Armbrust, Walter. "New Cinema, Commercial Cinema, and the Modernist Tradition in Egypt." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. 15.1 (1995) 81-129.

Baker, Raymond. "Combative Cultural Politics: Film Art and Political Spaces in Egypt." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. 15.6 (1995) 179-98.

Beattie, Kirk J.. *Egypt during the Nasser Years: Ideology, Politics and Civil Society*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994.

Vol. 3, No. 1
2009

Daney, Serge and Toubiana, Serge. "Alexandrie, parce que." *Cahiers du Cinéma*. 431.1 (1990) 44-52.

Darwish, Mustafa. *Dream makers on the Nile: a portrait of Egyptian cinema*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998.

Gaffney, Jane. "The Egyptian Cinema: Industry And Art In A Changing Society." *Arab Studies Quarterly*. 9.1 (1987) 53-73.

Gordon, Joel. "Days of Anxiety/Days of Sadat: Impersonating Egypt's Flawed Hero on the Egyptian Screen." *Journal of Film & Video*. 54.2 (2002) 27-42.

Gonul Donmez, Colin. *The cinema of North Africa and the Middle East*. New York: Wallflower Press, 2007.

Jankowski, James. *Egypt; a short history*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2000.

Jousse, T. "Entretien avec Youssef Chahine." *Cahiers du Cinema*. 517.1 (1997) 35-39.

Kehr, Dave "The waters of Alexandria: the films of Youssef Chahine." *Film Comment* 32.6 (1998) 23-28.

Khan, Mohamed. *An introduction to the Egyptian cinema*. London, Informatics, 1969.

Khatib, Lina. "Nationalism and Otherness: The representation of Islamic fundamentalism in Egyptian cinema." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*.9.1 (2006) 63-80.

Kiernan, Maureen. "Cultural Hegemony and National Film Language: Youssef Chahine." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. 15.1 (1995)130-52.

Klawans, Stuart. "Nine views in a looking glass: Film trilogies by Chahine, Gitai, and Kiarostami." *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*. 25.1 (2000) 231-234.

Le Péron, Serge and Daney, Serge. "Le syndrome Alexandrie./ Entretien avec Youssef Chahine." *Cahiers du Cinéma*. 310.1 (1980)18-25

Malkmus, Lizbeth. "The 'New' Egyptian Cinema: Adapting Genre Conventions to a Changing Society." *Cineaste*. 16.3 (1988)30-33.

Massad, Joseph. "Art and politics in the cinema of Youssef Chahine." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28.2 (1999) 77-78.

Reynaud, Bérénice. "Everywhere desire-a profile of the works of Egyptian film director Youssef Chahine." *Sight and Sound*. 7.8 (1997) 20-23.

Samak, Qussai. "The Politics of Egyptian Cinema." *MERIP Reports*. 56.1 (1977) 12-15.

Vatkiotis, P.J. *Nasser and his Generation*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978.

Woodward, Peter. *Nasser*. London: Longman, 1992.