

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN EGYPTIAN
CINEMA: A STATE VENTURE

by
TAMARA CHAHINE MAATOUK

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of History and Archaeology
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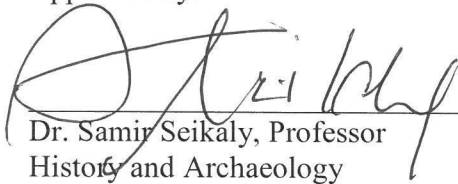
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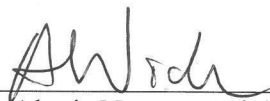
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Tamara Chahine Maatouk for Master of Arts
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Title: Understanding the Public Sector in Egyptian Cinema: A State Venture

In 1957 the public sector in Egyptian cinema was established, followed shortly by the emergence of public-sector film production in 1960, only to end eleven years later in 1971. Assailed with negativity since its demise, if not earlier, this state adventure in film production was dismissed as a complete failure, financially, administratively and, most important, artistically. Although a few film critics have sporadically commented on the role played by this sector, it has not been the object of serious academic research or study designed to provide a balanced, more nuanced general assessment of this state institution. This thesis hopes to address this gap in the literature dealing with Egyptian cinema.

An introduction evaluating the current scholarship will precede a chapter dedicated to a thorough examination of the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the public sector in Egyptian cinema. Subsequently, and after contesting common misconceptions about the expansion of this sector, chapter three will endeavor to unravel the main reasons for this expansion. After an extensive review of the public sector's attempts to counter inherited and rising predicaments that threatened the film industry, chapter four will investigate whether there was a real change in the general perception of the cinema, and the government's attitude towards it, following the defeat of June 1967. With the launching of the Corrective Movement in 1971 the story of this brief state adventure in film production was eventually brought to an end.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSI	Cinema Support Institution
GEICRT	General Egyptian Institution for Cinema, Radio and Television
GEIC	General Egyptian Institution for the Cinema
MCPAC	Miṣr Company for Performance Arts and the Cinema

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I follow the transliteration style employed by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. However, I have used conventional spellings for the personal names of such public figures as Gamal ‘Abdul Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat, Youssef Chahine and Omar al-Sharif.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Between an inevitable birth and a predestined death, historical inaccuracies and deterministic analyses prevail in the study of the public sector in Egyptian cinema, the outcome of which is none other than general confusion. Over four decades have passed since the dissolution of the General Egyptian Institution for the Cinema (*al-Mu'assasa al-miṣrīyya al-‘amma lil-sīnima*) led to the unceremonious, perhaps premature, demise of public-sector film production in Egypt. Since that time, the Egyptian state's short-lived adventure in film production has sparked heated debate, both as a subject of mordant criticism or uncritical praise. Although a considerable volume of academic literature dealing with the Egyptian cinema has been published, little research has studied in depth the story of the public film sector in Egypt.¹ The first intention of this thesis is to fill this lacuna by shedding some light on the multilayered circumstances under which the said sector emerged, expanded, and was eventually brought to an end.

What has been written about it takes the form of a few arguments following teleological interpretations, all yielding the same incomplete, and somewhat distorted

¹ A few exceptions include studies relating to the relationship between politics and cinema in Egypt in general which more often than not devote a chapter or a section to the public sector in Egyptian cinema. Among these exceptions are Durrīyya Sharaffudīn, *al-Siyyāsa wal-sīnima fī miṣr, 1961-1981* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-miṣrīyya al-‘amma lil-kitāb, 2002); Hishām al-Naḥās, *al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya, al-thawra wal-qitā' al-‘amm 1952-1971, majmū'at abḥāth* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-a'la lil-thaqāfa, 2010); ‘Alī Abū Shādī, *al-Sīnima wal-siyyāsa* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-miṣrīyya al-‘amma lil-kitāb, 2000); and May al-Tilimsānī, “Sīnima al-dawla sīnima badīla, qirā'a fī tajrubat al-qitā' al-‘amm al-sīnimā'ī fī miṣr,” *Alif – Journal of Comparative Poetics* 15, Arab Cinematics: Toward the New and the Alternative (1995).

narrative that starts and ends with the assumption of inevitability. To many film historians, the establishment of this sector was inexorable in a society experiencing an overall drift to socialism, attributing its emergence solely to a premeditated set of ideological elements.² The collapse of this sector, however, is strongly assumed by some critics to have been predetermined by birth defects, namely, the absence of a clear ideological agenda.³ From this frequently repeated narrative of the rise and fall of the public sector in Egyptian cinema, the socio-political and economic implications of unforeseen events, such as the Tripartite Aggression in 1956, the political tension between Egypt and some Arab countries from the late 1950s onwards, the defeat of 1967, Nasser's death in 1970, and al-Sadat's Corrective Revolution, are typically excluded.⁴ To propose a comprehensive and more accurate account of the public sector

² To mention a few, Hishām al-Naḥās suggests that the state's decision to nationalize the Egyptian film industry came as a logical continuation of a decade-long wave of reforms, "Qirā'a fī taqrīr al-niyyāba al-'āmma 'an qitā' al-'āmm al-sīnimā'ī fī miṣr," *al-Sīnima wal-tārīkh* 10 (1994): 22-3; Joel Gordon argues that nationalizing the film industry was part of a broader agenda manifested in the National Charter, *Revolutionary Melodrama, Popular Film and Civic Identity in Nasser's Egypt* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2002), 53; Ella Shohat explains how the creation of the public sector in cinema "was merely a continuation of the process of bureaucratically reshaping the state sectors along the lines of what was described as 'Arab Socialism'," "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution," *Critical Arts* 2/4 (1983): 29.

³ Walter Armbrust and Fuād Mursī shed light on the issue of undercapitalization in "Cinema and Television in the Arab World," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Muslims and Modernity Culture and Society since 1800*, ed. Robert W. Hefner, 625-647 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 635-6, and in "al-Qitā' al-'āmm wal-'istithmār al-khāṣ," *al-Ṭalī'a* 2 (February 1974): 17. As for bureaucracy and absence of a clear program see Jane Gaffney, "The Egyptian Cinema: Industry and Art in a Changing Society," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9/1 (1987): 59; Muḥammad Kāmil al-Qalyūbī, "al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya, dā'irat al-ḥiṣār wa riḥlat al-khūrūj," *al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda* 15, 1 January 1980, 61; Sharaffudīn, *al-Siyyāsa wal-sīnima*, 39 and 71.

⁴ Andrew Flibbert underlined this point in a personal correspondence with this author. Flibbert is an associate professor of Political Science at Trinity College, Connecticut, and also the author of "State and Cinema in Pre-Revolutionary Egypt, 1927-1952," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt et al. (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005) and *Commerce in Culture: States and Markets in the World Film Trade* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

is, therefore, the second intention of this thesis, with a view to incorporating previously underplayed, seemingly unrelated influences into the analysis of the said sector's attitude towards the cinema.

This inaccurate narrative is fueled by the political stances and background of film critics concerned.⁵ Writing “in conformity with the prevailing spirit of their times,”⁶ which, more probably than not, was affected by the anti-Nasserist movement that ultimately aimed at “delegitimiz[ing] and demoniz[ing]” the Nasserist experiment,⁷ these critics were more inclined to assail the experience of the public sector than to evaluate it or underline its novelty. For most of them, the state's venture in film production is considered “the beginning of the ‘setback’ of Egyptian cinema,”⁸ pejoratively branding this period “cinema of fear.”⁹ Even more so, they held the public sector accountable for the decline of Egyptian cinema, grounding their criticism in the manifold reorganizations that the public film companies underwent.¹⁰ What these critics failed to see is what this thesis intends, in part at least, to highlight. Hence, the third and last main intention of this thesis is to suggest an alternative perspective, which, in lieu

⁵ al-Tilimsānī, “Sīnima al-dawla sīnima badīla,” 70; and Sa‘īd Murād, “Ḥiwār ma‘ Tawfīq Ṣāliḥ,” in *Maqālāt fīl-sīnima al-‘arabīyya* (n.p.: Dār al-fikr, 1991), 210.

⁶ Jack Crabbs, Jr., “Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser’s Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6/4 (1975): 397.

⁷ For a comprehensive definition of the anti-Nasserist movement, see Meir Hatina, “History, Politics, and Collective Memory: The Nasserist Legacy in Mubarak’s Egypt,” in *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*, eds. Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004), 102-104.

⁸ As cited in Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*, 47.

⁹ Sharaffudīn as cited in *ibid.*, 209.

¹⁰ Sharaffudīn, *al-Siyyāsa wal-sīnima*, 71; and I‘tidāl Mumtāz, *Mudhakhirāt raqībat sīnima: thalāthīn ‘amman* (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-miṣrīyya al-‘amma lil-kitāb, 1985), 181.

of dismissing these continuous structural organizations as weaknesses and failings, showcases them as an apparent indication of the state's resolve to reform and, in the process, rescue an industry in jeopardy.

This thesis also aims at rectifying the shortcomings in the existing literature. The constant lamenting of the public sector in Egyptian cinema automatically results in the dismissal of its films. Overwhelmed by preconceived notions, critics tend to overlook the great artistic value of some publicly produced films. A fact such as the Film Foundation's designation of *The Mummy* (*al-Mūmmyā*, 1969) as "a gem of Egyptian cinema," and its subsequent selection to be restored, preserved, and screened at the Lumière 2015 – Grand Lyon Film Festival goes unnoticed.¹¹ So does the fact that among the top 100 Arab films listed in *Cinema for Passion*, a book published by the Dubai International Film Festival in 2013, 9 films were produced by the public sector, with *The Mummy* ranking first and *The Land* (*al-Ard*, 1970) ranking fourth.¹² Even more, it seems as if the results of the referendum of 1995, instigated by the Cairo International Film Festival, which registered 30 public films among the top 101 Egyptian films produced between 1923 and 1995 are completely ignored by this scholarship, with the exception of 'Alī Abū Shādī's and Amal al-Jamal's work.¹³ In light of this, the importance of this thesis lies in the fact that it lays the foundation for an

¹¹ This project, World Cinema Project, is part of the Film Foundation which was "created under the leadership of Martin Scorsese in 1990 to work for the preservation and restoration of heritage films." <http://2015.festival-lumiere.org/en/program/the-film-foundation%27s-world-cinema-project.html> (accessed on 17 April 2017).

¹² Marwa Hamad, "Dubai International Film Festival Picks Top 100 Arab Films," *Gulf News*, 6 November 2013, <http://gulfnews.com/leisure/movies/news/dubai-international-film-festival-picks-top-100-arab-films-1.1251874> (accessed on 10 March 2017).

¹³ *Miṣr mi'at sana sīnima* (Cairo: Matbū'at mahrajān al-qāhira al-sīnimā'ī al-dawlī al-'ishrūn, 1996), 9-12.

unprejudiced, more nuanced assessment of the public sector. In so doing, the latter's role in introducing the possibility of "an alternative national cinema"¹⁴ and as an incubator to "a new generation of talented filmmakers"¹⁵ becomes evident.

The main body of this thesis is divided into four chapters including the conclusion; all aiming to fulfill the aforementioned intentions. Chapter one provides an introductory summary of the state involvement in Egyptian film industry since its inception in the early twentieth century until the Tripartite Aggression in 1956. The rest of the chapter then examines the various factors that led to the emergence of the public sector in Egyptian cinema in 1957 and public-sector film production in 1960. The story continues in chapter two to tell how the ideological and economic repercussions of the socio-political transformations that Egypt witnessed between 1961 and 1962 drove the state to expand the public sector to encompass a considerable volume of film assets, without resorting to comprehensive nationalization. As a result, the state's film policy evolved from supervision and sponsorship to direct film production. Though this intervention succeeded in reviving a threatened film industry, rising difficulties necessitated a different film policy. The downsizing policy is, therefore, expansively discussed in chapter three, which also sheds light on the cinematic situation following the *Naksa* in 1967. It is this author's contention that this policy, coupled with a new cinematic perception on the part of both the post-67 government and the cineastes,¹⁶ paved the way before the possibility of an alternative, critical national cinema, one that is politically charged and highly acclaimed. The story of the public sector ends shortly

¹⁴ al-Tilimsānī, "Sīnima al-dawla sīnima badīla," 70.

¹⁵ Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*, 207.

¹⁶ The term cineaste or cinéaste may refer to an aficionado of filmmaking or any person associated professionally with filmmaking.

after the launching of the Corrective Movement in 1971 that caused the sudden end of this brief state adventure in film production.

In addition to a long list of secondary sources, this thesis heavily relies on several main sources. The official gazettes, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya* and *al-Waqā'i' al-miṣrīyya*, proved essential in tracking the evolution and expansion of the public sector in Egyptian Cinema, as they include all the presidential and ministerial decrees concerning cinema affairs. Another important source is the report of the Public Prosecution Office (*al-Nīyyāba al-āmma*) regarding the decade-long legal proceedings of the public film sector, which is absent in much of the existing literature. The National Charter of 1962, Nasser's speeches, and the 1968 Manifesto are also beneficial in constructing the historical context of the time period in which the public sector existed. The memoirs of Tharwat 'Ukāsha, which also includes his correspondences and reports as the Minister of Culture, is consulted with the intention of viewing the story of this sector from the eyes of the state. Last but not least, the popular *Ruz al-yūsuf* and the ideologically bound *al-Ṭalī'a* are two contemporary periodicals that stand out as being of great value, for including on their pages a wealth of information dealing with this sector as well as critical discussions regarding the role of the cinema.

A point should be made here: this thesis focuses on the history of the public sector in Egyptian cinema as a state institution, and, therefore, intentionally avoids being caught up in the endless labyrinth of socio-political and cultural representations in Egyptian cinema. Viola Shafik's *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation*, Joel Gordon's *Revolutionary Melodrama: Popular Film and Civic Identity in Nasser's Egypt*, and Marisa Farrugia's *The Plight of Women in Egyptian Cinema (1940s-1960s)* are only a few examples of the huge scholarship that deals with representations in

Egyptian cinema. Film censorship is another topic that this thesis does not lengthily engage with, for censorship, as a state authority, did not come under the purview of the public film sector.¹⁷ The third trope that this thesis carefully evades is the confusion between cinema matters and other communication media, particularly television and radio. Except for a short period when all three media operated under the control of the same government authority, the cinema sector was always regarded as a separate entity that had its own administration, budget, and policy.

¹⁷ Except for the Artistic Censorship that became a part of the Ministry of Culture in the late 1960s, but which was involved in examining the artistic level of a story or film rather than the political content of films.

CHAPTER II

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN EGYPTIAN CINEMA, 1957-62

Egyptian film critics differ on the birthdate of Egyptian cinema. While some consider the screening of the Lumière brothers' cinematic show on 6 January 1896 in Alexandria as the birth of cinema in Egypt, others argue that this cinema, linking it to Egyptian film production, did not see the light until 1927, when 'Azīza Amīr's *Layla*, the first feature film to be funded by local capital, was produced.¹ Most of these commentators, however, agree that between 1896 and 1927 the expansion of the film industry heavily relied on foreign capital. Until the mid 1920s, only foreign film companies and studios operated in Egypt. The situation started to change when Ṭal'at Pasha Ḥarb, the founder of Bank Miṣr, established Miṣr Company for Performance Arts and the Cinema, with the intention of supporting national film production. With the advent of the 'talkies' in the early 1930s, the need for an all-inclusive studio grew, to which Ḥarb responded by creating Studio Miṣr in 1936, only to become the first self-contained studio in the Arab world. Throughout the 1940s, Egyptian cinema prospered in terms of quantity and revenue, spreading the Egyptian dialect to the entire Arab world while reaching all the way to Iran, Turkey, India and Latin America. Though the state occasionally interfered, particularly to address difficulties obstructing the

¹ To read more about the beginning of Egyptian cinema and the abovementioned disagreement, see Marisa Farugia, "The Plight of Women in Egyptian Cinema, 1940s-1960s," (PhD diss., the University of Leeds, 2002), 11-59.

development of this industry, the expansion of Egyptian cinema depended solely upon foreign and local private capital.

This private character of film production began to falter when the Egyptian government established the Cinema Support Institution (*Mu'assasat da'm al-sīnima*) on 2 June 1957, officially marking the birth of the public sector in Egyptian cinema. Three years later, in 1960, the same institution acquired the appropriate means to propel its venture into film production, signaling the emergence of public-sector film production in Egypt. By presenting a comprehensive, chronological and more nuanced assessment of the public sector in Egyptian cinema, this chapter attempts to propose a more accurate account of the circumstances under which public-sector film production came into being.

The chapter begins by briefly tracking the evolution of early Egyptian state involvement in the film industry, delineating how, since its origins, Egyptian cinema was regulated as part of a broader entertainment business, so lucrative that films were regarded primarily as economic commodities, whose 'sale' abroad contributed to enhancing the country's stock of foreign currency. This perception of the cinema continued to prevail well after the 1952 revolution. Even though Egypt witnessed a kind of cinematic awakening on the heels of the Tripartite Aggression in 1956, it was mostly economic imperatives that drove the government to establish a public sector in Egyptian cinema. In time, and for considerations discussed below, the role of the state evolved from bureaucratic supervision of cinema affairs to actual film co-production. The nature of such an involvement soon changed when the state, affected by a series of concomitant events, eventually adopted a more interventionist, expansionist role in the film industry.

A. Historical Background: State Management of Cinema Affairs

Before delving into the historical roots of the public sector in Egyptian cinema, it is perhaps important to clarify that Egyptian film industry was never entirely free of state meddling, the nature and extent of which have varied enormously over the years. To begin with, as early as 1911 the Cairo governorate dispatched officers to expurgate films presumably menacing public order and morals, thus enforcing an ordinance that was not officially adopted by the central government until the introduction of censorship in 1914.² Almost a decade later, the Ministry of Finance passed a law regulating the import of foreign films, soon followed by a decree requiring close inspection by the Interior Ministry of Egyptian films destined for exportation.³ By 1930, the Ministry of Education had started producing short corporate films to promote Egyptian tourist attractions.⁴ With a view to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in film stock on the black market, a problem that surfaced after World War II, the Ministry of Social Affairs oversaw the distribution of such stock solely for authorized film companies.⁵ In 1947, moreover, the government felt compelled to establish the Chamber of the Film Industry (*Ghurfat ṣināʿat al-sīnima*) in reaction to another

² “Censorship,” Alex Cinema, accessed November 30, 2016. <http://www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/industry/Censorship.html>; see also Yves Thoraval, *Regard sur le cinéma égyptien* (Paris: Edition L’Harmattan, 2000); for a fuller appreciation of film censorship in Egypt see Maḥmūd ‘Alī, *Māʿat ʿāmm min al-raqāba ʿala al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-ʿala lil-thaqāfa, 2008) and Samīr Farīd, *Tārīkh al-raqāba ʿala al-sīnima fi miṣr* (Cairo: al-Maktab al-miṣrī li-tawzīʿ al-maṭbūʿāt, 2001).

³ ‘Alī Abū Shādī, *Waqāʿi ʿal-sīnima al-miṣrīyya, 1895-2002* (Cairo: al-Hayʿa al-miṣrīyya al-ʿamma lil-sīnima, 2004), 45 and 73; Magda Wassef, *Egypte 100 ans de cinema* (Paris: Plume, 1995), 20.

⁴ These films were exported to and screened in the United States, *ibid.*, 78.

⁵ Jalāl al-Sharqāwī, *Risāla fi tārikh al-sīnima al-arabīyya* (Cairo: al-Hayʿa al-miṣrīyya al-ʿamma lil-kitāb, 1970), 104-5.

underlying problem that was seriously impairing Egypt's film production, namely, the lack of coordination between the three subsectors of filmmaking—production, distribution, and exhibition.⁶ Though the coordination problems proved to be insoluble, the Chamber, nevertheless, succeeded in exerting quasi-control over cineastes by making Chamber membership mandatory for producers, distributors and theatre owners.

By the late 1940s, more than four ministries appeared to be involved in meddling in the film sector, which was frequently referred to at the time as “Egypt's second industry after cotton,”⁷ more probably in terms of exportation. Perhaps it is this which explains why the Chamber of the Film Industry as a department came under the purview of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, rather than a ministry of culture or guidance. This is not to suggest that the pre-revolutionary state was unaware of the socio-political implications that cinema had,⁸ rather it appears as if it simply opted to overlook such considerations in favor of commercial stance. Even the censorship law of 1947,⁹ naturally promulgated for broader media purposes, was mostly concerned with

⁶ Andrew Flibbert explains this lack of coordination in “State and Cinema in Pre-Revolutionary Egypt, 1927-1952,” 451-2. To read more about the Chamber of the Film Industry, see Madkūr Thābit, “Ḥawla nash'at wa taṭawur ṣinā'at al-sīnima fī miṣr wa waqī'iha,” in *Awraq fī mushkilat i'adat al-ta'rīkh lil-sīnima al-miṣrīyya* (Cairo: Akādimiyyat al-funūn, 1994), 1-37.

⁷ In his work on the economics of Egyptian cinema, Flibbert refers extensively to *Cine Film*, an Egyptian trade journal published continuously on a monthly basis between May 1948 and August 1960, in which there was a regular mention of cinema being the second industry after cotton. Andrew J. Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture: States and Markets in the World Film Trade* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). In their memorandum of 1952, the cineastes described the film industry as the third industry after cotton. For a fuller appreciation of the memorandum, see Samīr Farīd, *Tārīkh naābat al-fannānīn fī miṣr, 1987-1997* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-miṣrīyya al-'amma lil-kitāb, 1999), 38-42.

⁸ The notion of cinema as a socio-political practice was not strange to the Egyptian art scene in late 1940s. As early as 1947, Ṭaha Ḥusayn was introducing his readers to Jean Paul Sartre's writings on the commitment of the artist which he deemed useful for Arab artists, cineastes included. See for example Ḥusayn's “Jean Paul Sartre wal-sīnima,” *al-Kātib al-miṣrī*, 3, 7/26 (1947): 179.

monitoring films, lest they contain material which could disturb the stability of Britain's colonial rule and Egyptian royalty, or could have led to a boycott of Egyptian films abroad, but principally in sister Arab countries. Hitherto, state regulations, though limited and sporadic, had focused principally on handling economic issues affecting, and somewhat impeding, the development of what was largely perceived as a booming entertainment business. The end result of such an attitude was not surprisingly the unintended rise of a commercial cinema brimming with romantic melodramas and farcical comedies.¹⁰ The shift in perception of cinema from merely a hard currency generator to a more powerful instrument of cultural enlightenment did not take place until years after the 1952 revolution.¹¹

⁹ Censorship law of 1947 was promulgated with the intention of prohibiting scenes projecting any negative image of Egypt and the Egyptian royalty. Chaos such as revolutions, strikes, and protests were not allowed to be represented in films. Neither was the depiction of dirty alleys, donkey carts, and poor farm houses. Filmmakers could not: depict the power of God materialistically; represent religion in a disrespectful manner; use Qur'an or Bible verses in a comic fashion; attack any nation; undermine Egyptians or foreigners residing in Egypt; produce subjects or scenes of a communist trait, or any propaganda against the monarchy or the government; and illustrate subjects or scenes that could lead to social disorders. Farugia, "The Plight of Women," 48; Jalāl al-Sharqāwī, "History of the U.A.R. Cinema 1896-1962," in *The Cinema in the Arab Countries*, ed., George Sadoul (Beirut: Interarab Centre of Cinema and Television, 1966), 94; 'Alī Abū Shādī, "al-Qiṭā' al-'āmm al-sīnimā'ī fi miṣr (1963-1972), muḥāwala li-qirā'a mawḍū'īyya," in *al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya, al-thawra wal-qiṭā' al-'āmm*, 312; and Samīr Farīd, "La censure mode d'emploi," in Wassef, *Egypte*, 107.

¹⁰ Of course, there were exceptions, yet insufficient in numbers, to be considered a collective cinematic movement. Kamāl Salīm's *The Will* (*al-'Azīma*, 1939) and Kāmil al-Tilimsānī's *The Black Market* (*al-Sūq al-sawdā'*, 1945) are two examples of early, prominent features of Egyptian Realism. To read more about these films, see Sa'd al-Dīn Tawfīq, *Qiṣat al-sīnima fi miṣr* (Egypt: Dār al-hilāl, n.p.), 76 and al-Sharqāwī, *Risāla fi tārikh al-sīnima*, 78. In his memoirs, Tharwat 'Ukāsha imputed the problem of having naïve cinema to "money owners, foreigners, and Egyptianized citizens who had no purpose but profit-making." Tharwat 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī fi al-siyyāsa wal-thaqāfa* (Cairo: Dār al-shūrūq, 1990), 452.

¹¹ Hamid Mowlana sheds light on a similar claim in his "Trends in Middle Eastern Societies," in *Mass Media Policies in Changing Cultures*, ed., George Gerbner (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1977), 76. There he reasons that among the factors responsible for the development of the cinema in Egypt are the state's interest in exploiting it as a source of hard-currency income as well as a tool of propaganda. Whereas I agree with him on the first, I disagree with him on the second. From the birth of Egyptian cinema and until years after the 1952 revolution, the

B. Cinematic Awakening by Circumstance

Hailing the cinema as an imperative tool for education and influence, the Free Officers' figurehead leader, Muḥammad Naguīb, warned of the dreadful impact the cinema could have if misused.¹² Shortly after the revolution, he called for a thorough transformation in filmmaking towards a more committed art, repudiating the decadent cinema of the past while encouraging the artists to “embed their mission in the [revolution].”¹³ As a first step, the government permitted the public screening of previously prohibited films such as Fritz Kramp's *Lāshīn* (1938 – starring Ḥasan ‘Izzat and Nādyā Nājī), Ḥusayn Ṣudqī's *Down with Colonialism!* (*Yasquṭ al-isti‘mār*, 1952 – starring Shādyā, Ḥusayn Ṣudqī and Mahmīd al-Milīguī), and *Muṣṭafa Kāmil* (1953 – starring Anwar Aḥmad, Amīna Rizq and Māgda). Seizing the opportunity Egyptian cineastes handed a memorandum to the general command of the armed forces, in which they pushed for direct state support by means of bank loans, prizes, objective censorship, and institutional reorganizations.¹⁴ The Chamber of the Film Industry also submitted a report to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry calling for an end to foreign film competition in local theatres.¹⁵ This attempt to rescue the national film

Egyptian government did not show concrete interest in producing films for political or ideological purposes.

¹² Muḥammad Naguīb's speech on 18 August 1952 as quoted in Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*, 53.

¹³ al-Fārūq ‘Abdul ‘Azīz, “al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya wa thawrat yūlyū, muḥāwala lil-ru‘ya fi sanawāt al-amal wal-inkisār, al-sanawāt al-ūla wal-wuṣṭa, 1952-1961,” *al-Talī‘a* 11 (1975): 142.

¹⁴ Farīd, *Tārīkh naqābat al-fannānīn fi miṣr*, 38-42.

¹⁵ By 1955, the Chamber was “claiming that producers and distributors had inadequate access to theaters for the first run of their pictures,” Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture*, 76; “It was said that Egyptian film production was crippled by the inability of Egyptian producers to wrest screen time from foreign films,” Walter Armbrust, “Cinema and Television,” 637.

industry mostly from the control of foreign distributors and war profiteers-turned-producers was reciprocated with a few, yet very pragmatic, governmental interventions. By imposing several different sets of taxes on imported films, replacing the severe censorship law of 1947 with a somewhat less restrictive, more general one,¹⁶ reorganizing the Syndicate of Film Professions (*Naqābat al-mihan al-sīnimā'īyya*),¹⁷ in addition to establishing the Fine Arts Department (*Maṣlahat al-funūn*) in 1955, the state was still simply aiming to address inherent weaknesses in the management of the film industry.¹⁸

However, in the absence of a radical cultural transformation hand in hand with a weak, if not lacking, collective commitment on the part of cineastes, Egyptian cinema remained subject to the mercy of the old profit-conscious mentalities, while the quality of films continued to deteriorate under the same market factors of the previous regime. Thus far, cinema was first and foremost an economic commodity, with an almost exclusive emphasis on entertainment. To be sure, films inspired by the revolution started to emerge from 1954 onwards, particularly ones condemning the previous monarchy and colonial rule, such as Aḥmad Badrakhān's *God is on Our Side* (*Allah Ma'āna*, 1955 – starring Shukrī Sarḥān and Fātin Ḥamāma). Muḥammad Karīm's great

¹⁶ Law no. 430 for the year 1955 cancelled the previous censorship law of 1947 and replaced it with the following article, “protection of public morals, maintaining public order and supreme state security,” without any additional provisions. Abū Shādī, “al-Qiṭā' al-‘āmm,” 313, and Farīd, “La censure,” 108.

¹⁷ Law no. 152 for the year 1955 reorganized the Syndicate of Film Professions from a labor union to a professional one. Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture*, 186; and Farīd, *Tārīkh naqabat al-fannānīn fī miṣr*, 38-42.

¹⁸ Jalāl al-Sharqāwī, “Languages in the Arab Countries,” in *Cinema and the Arab Countries*, ed., George Sadoul (Beirut: Interarab Centre of Cinema and Television, 1966), 61; ‘Alī, *Mā'at ‘āmm min al-raqāba*, 248. Also for a detailed chronological survey of laws concerning the film industry in Egypt, see ‘Alī Abū Shādī, “Chronologie 1896-1994,” in Wassef, 18-39.

hope in the revolutionary regime was reflected in the remake of his 1930 silent film *Zaynab*, in which he changed the ending from the death of the heroine to her survival, owing to the treatment she received in a new hospital built by the new regime. Although films showing realist features and addressing socio-economic issues like Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf's *The Beast (al-Waḥsh)*, 1954 – starring Anwar Wagdī and Sāmya Gamāl), Youssef Chahine's *Struggle in the Valley (Ṣirā' fi al-wādī)*, 1954 – starring Farīd Shawqī, Omar al-Sharif and Fātin Ḥamāma), and Tawfīq Ṣāliḥ's *Fools' Alley (Darb al-mahābīl)*, 1955 – starring Shukrī Sarḥān) did appear; they were, however, the product of individual initiatives rather than collaborative, state-instigated efforts. Admittedly, the non-emergence of state-commissioned propaganda films during the first years of the revolution was an obvious indication of the Free Officers' unpreparedness, and maybe indifference, to appreciate the political potential of the cinema.¹⁹

In fact, it was not until 1956 that the Egyptian authorities became aware of the powerful role that film—be it fiction or documentary—could play in mass mobilization. This sudden but tangible appreciation of the cinema as a propaganda tool came on the heels of the Tripartite Aggression, the invasion of Egypt by Israel, Britain and France to regain Western control of the Suez Canal, when several short films and documentaries covering the events succeeded in galvanizing Egyptian and regional public against blatant encroachments of Egyptian sovereignty, and by extension support for the military junta's challenge of colonial hegemony.²⁰ Almost every other film produced

¹⁹ Raymond Baker, "Egypt in Shadows, Films and Political Order," *American Behavioral Scientist* 17/3 (1974): 395-7. Needless to say, many differences could be made when comparing a political film commissioned by the state or promotes the state's ideology to a short promotional video produced by the Department of Information to mobilize masses. While the first could be considered art, the second is dismissed as merely commercial advertisement.

after 1956 either had a protagonist who was an army officer, revolved around a patriotic theme, or idealized religious coexistence and solidarity among the Egyptian people.²¹ It comes as no surprise that in the midst of this newfound cinematic sensibility, Badr Nash'at and Fathī Zakī co-authored a relatively progressive book entitled *Muḥākamat al-film al-miṣri: 'arḍ wa naqd al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya mundhu nash'atiha* (*Egyptian Film on Trial: A Review and Critique of the Egyptian Cinema since its Inception*). In this work the two authors highlighted Vladimir Lenin's often quoted statement, "that of all the arts the most important for [a rising nation] is the cinema."²² "[Egyptian] cinema," Ella Shohat writes, "became part of the initial stages of national building... As a vehicle of the new ideology, [cinema] had the role of producing solidarity and identity among the masses."²³ In light of all the above, questioning the state's realization of how influential cinema could be becomes redundant. But whether the state had any intention to exploit the film industry to influence public opinion and mobilize the masses remains a question, to which the following sections will attempt to answer.

C. CSI Established: Toward a Public Sector in Egyptian Cinema

It would be too simplistic to see the establishment of the Cinema Support Institution (*Mu'assasat da'm al-sīnima*—hereafter CSI) on 2 June 1957 merely as a

²⁰ *Let the World Witness* (*Fal-yashhad al-'ālam*), an 8-minute film produced by the Art Department and directed by Sa'd Nadīm in 1956. Abū Shādī, *al-Sīnima wal-sīyyasa*, 54.

²¹ For example, 'Izzaldīn Dhūlfīqār's *Give me back my Heart* (*Ruda qalbī*, 1957) which Nasser attended its premiere; Nīyyazī Muṣṭafa's *The Prison of Abū Za'bal* (*Sijn abū za'bal*, 1957); and Kamāl al-Shaykh's *Land of Peace* (*Arḍ al-salām*, 1957).

²² Badr Nash'at and Fathī Zakī, *Muḥākamat al-film al-miṣri: 'arḍ wa naqd al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya mundhu nash'atiha* (Cairo: Imprimerie La Patrie, 1957).

²³ Shohat, "Egypt: Cinema and Revolution," 28.

reflection of some sort of a cinematic awakening without giving any emphasis to the socio-economic changes that nudged the government towards more interventionist measures. After the Tripartite Aggression, the Egyptian President Gamal ‘Abdul Nasser issued sequestration orders mainly against British and French nationals and many wealthy Jewish families, followed shortly by the Egyptianization decrees targeting foreign capital.²⁴ Along with the denaturalization law of 1956, not only did these orders alarm other foreign populations residing in Egypt but they also affected them. Despite the reassurances given to these communities, many foreign residents, driven by fear of denaturalization, Egyptianization, and sequestration, left Egypt and relocated their businesses to other countries.²⁵ It is only plausible to assume that among the affected industries was the film industry, a large number of its shareholders being foreigners. Though there is no comprehensive record of these shareholders and the companies they owned, statistics show that the number of movie theatres and distribution houses plummeted after 1956, as did the number of imported and exported films.²⁶ The situation only got worse due to a shortage of imported European and American film stock.²⁷ In addition to the shortage in film stock, Egypt lacked the industrial know-how

²⁴ For a fuller understanding of the economic situation in Egypt following the Suez Crisis, see Robert L. Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire, State and Business in Decolonizing Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 114 – 192, and John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 57 – 103.

²⁵ For example, American companies moved the seat of their Middle East operations to Beirut. Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism*, 140-141.

²⁶ Ibrāhīm ‘Umar, “Azmat al-sīnima 3,” *al-Ahrām* 21030, 25 November 1971, 7; and *Arab Cinema and Culture, Round Table Conferences under the Auspices and with the Participation of the UNESCO* (Beirut: Arab Film and Television Centre, 1962), 76.

²⁷ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1532, 21 October 1957, 30; to be clear, not all companies were ‘Egyptianized.’ “When officials of the Kodak Corporation inquired whether their firm would be

to manufacture cameras, projectors, and film printers. For such reasons, as Andrew Flibbert noted, “all parties appealed to the state for relief, demanding stricter regulation of the industry through a more comprehensive cinema law, with producers seeking greater controls on foreign imports.”²⁸ Not yet prepared to exploit the cinema, nor to anger the restive cineastes, but more importantly, not being able to afford losing a great source of hard currency, the government felt it necessary to be more responsive and take measures to rescue an industry in dire need of assistance.

With the purpose of not only tackling these growing problems, but also enhancing the quality of Egyptian cinema and the country’s national and regional cinematic standing, the Ministry of National Guidance sponsored the formation of the CSI to become the first official cinema institution in Egypt as well as the Arab World.²⁹ Even though Fathī Raḍwān, then minister of National Guidance, insisted that in order for the arts to serve the state, the latter should not intervene, the mere existence of the CSI anticipated the decision to place the industry under more governmental sponsorship and supervision.³⁰

The CSI was founded in accordance with, and made possible by Law 32 of 1957 concerning public institutions, which, together with the Economic Institution (*al-Mu’assasa al-iqtisādīyya*), spearheaded the expansion of the public sector in Egypt. With this in mind, it becomes plausible to assume that the creation of the CSI marked

required to Egyptianize because it imported only cameras and films, [Muhamad] Abu Nusayr [the Egyptian Minister of Commerce] replied that because the firm was not the sole importer of these products the law did not apply,” Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism*, 141.

²⁸ Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture*, 76.

²⁹ Presidential Decree no. 495 for the year 1957, *al-Waqā’i’ al-miṣrīyya* 45, 6 June 1957, 9. See also Amal al-Jamal, *Aflām al-intāj al-mushtarak fi al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya, 1946-2006* (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-‘amma li-quṣūr al-thaqāfa, 2009), 25.

³⁰ Abū Shādī, “al-Qiṭā’ al-‘āmm al-sīnimā’ī, 311.

the emergence of a public sector in Egyptian cinema.³¹ It should be stated plainly here that establishing a cinema public sector is different from launching a public-sector film production. Whereas the former entails the establishment of a state body charged to support, financially or technically, manage, and provide assistance to the cinema sector, the latter denotes the state's direct involvement in film production, from script selection, filmmaking, distribution, and exhibition.

While a board of managers representing the Ministry of National Guidance and other Egyptian ministries determined production targets, financially, the CSI had an independent budget raised from subsidies given by the state, tax revenues or, as stipulated by Law 495, from Egyptian capital investment.³² Among its objectives as a service sector, the CSI was to encourage both the screening of Egyptian films locally and the opening of new distribution markets abroad. It also aimed to secure bank guarantees and financial loans for producers in an effort to orientate them towards the production of serious films that could reflect the state's general philosophy.³³ That same year, the CSI Charter was declared by a presidential decree stressing the need to raise the industry's professional and artistic level through various means, among which were eradicating the spread of exploitation within the film industry, cooperating and coordinating with the Fine Arts Department and establishing a cinema studies institute.³⁴ Furthermore, subsidies were only to be given for the purposes of purchasing

³¹ Almost 6 years before 1963—the often wrongly assigned birthdate of the public sector in Egyptian cinema.

³² Among the ministries were Education, Treasury, Social Affairs and Labor.

³³ Article 2 of the presidential decree no. 495.

³⁴ Issuance of the charter of the Cinema Support Institution, *al-Waqā'i' al-miṣrīyya* 78, 7 November 1957, 8-11.

equipment, encouraging the production of ideological and educational films, and covering the financial losses of such films.

Irrespective of the circumstances leading to its formation, CSI's establishment delineates a significant change in the state's cultural policy towards the film industry. In 1958 the newly created United Arab Republic underwent massive ministerial reorganizations whereby the Directorate of General Culture, previously belonging to the Ministry of Education, was annexed to the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance.³⁵ Under the auspices of the new minister Tharwat 'Ukāsha, a genuine advocate for the cultural role of the cinema, and Naguib Mahfouz as its president, the CSI embarked on fulfilling the following long-term objectives. With the help of the Fine Arts Department, the CSI was able to send students to Russia, England, Italy and Czechoslovakia to study filmmaking.³⁶ Furthermore, to ensure that funds did not fall into the wrong hands of "bankrupt parasites that ... could not care less about the arts," as stated by Yusuf al-Sibā'ī, then General Secretary of the Higher Council for the Arts and Literature (*al-Majlis al-'a'la li ri'āyat al-funūn wal-ādāb*), the CSI secured loans only for producers as well as distributors whose project proposals were examined by the Fine Arts Department and deemed technically, artistically, and ideologically promising.³⁷ On top

³⁵ Presidential Decree concerning the organization of the Ministry of National Guidance issued on 25 June 1958, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 17, 3 July 1958, 11; Presidential Decree concerning the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance issued on 26 June 1958, *ibid*, 13.

³⁶ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1512, 3 June 1957, 29.

³⁷ Article 24b of CSI Charter, *al-Waqā'i' al-miṣrīyya* 78, 7 November 1957, 10; it was reported in *Ruz al-yūsuf* that any producer interested in applying for a loan from CSI had to have at least a capital of 50000 £E, which pushed many producers to complain to Yusuf al-Sibā'ī, claiming that if they already had this amount, they would not have needed the loan in the first place. al-Sibā'ī informed them that not all of the amount is required in case the project had prestigious names on board. Faḥī Ghānim, "Yusuf al-Sibā'ī yudāfi' 'an siyyāsat da'm al-sīnima," *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1522, 12 August 1957, 29.

of that, applicants had to obtain at least one third of the film's total budget in advance to be considered financially eligible for a loan.³⁸ Additionally, the CSI dispatched missions to explore potential markets in Latin America, India and Indonesia, especially after some Arab and North African countries started banning Egyptian films owing to their presumed, or real, revolutionary content.³⁹ As for the film stock crisis, shipments of film raw materials were sent to Egypt from the Eastern bloc.⁴⁰ Meanwhile on the local front and as an indication of the state's new outlook regarding the role of the cinema, censorship tax exemptions were granted to films imported by the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance for cultural and educational purposes.⁴¹ In brief, the CSI did not aim to generate profit but provide services and develop the film industry's infrastructure.

Notwithstanding these initiatives, the CSI failed to gain the unanimous support of the press whilst exciting great commotion among the cineastes. Some journalists constructively delineated the failings of CSI's general policy and urged the state to find long-term solutions instead of the temporary remedies that the CSI allegedly promoted.⁴² Others directly accused its administration of abusing power and funds in

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ For a list of those missions, see al-Jamal, *Aflām al-intāj al-mushtarak*, 28. As for the boycotting of Egyptian films, perhaps the first Arab country to do so was Libya. In the summer of 1957, the Libyan government banned the screening of Egyptian films such as *Suqūt al-isti'mār*, *Mustafa Kāmil*, *Allah Ma'āna* and *Port Sa'īd*. *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1522, 12 August 1957, 29.

⁴⁰ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1532, 21 October 1957, 30.

⁴¹ Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture*, 108.

⁴² Among these journalists is the well-known novelist Faḥī Ghānim, who in his article, "Mushkilat al-sīnima," listed six long-term solutions that the film industry was in desperate need of. CSI failed to adopt any of them. *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 525, 2 September 1957, 29.

favor of ‘big names.’⁴³ Similar allegations were also made by a group of cineastes protesting particular acts of favoritism carried out by some CSI appointees.⁴⁴ According to the Syndicate of Film Professions, another body that claimed being targeted by the CSI, its members were deliberately excluded from playing any role, temporary or permanent, in CSI’s formation, let alone its administration.⁴⁵ Adding fuel to the fire, Law 118 of 1958 removed a fundamental clause from Law 142 of 1955 that previously made syndicate membership mandatory to anyone working in the film industry, even penalizing whoever violated it.⁴⁶ The ambiguity of both Article 8 and its supplementary note in the new law, which failed to define the boundaries of amateurism, provided all forms of ‘amateurs’ with a loophole to penetrate the film industry. Though this decree did not dissolve the syndicate, it certainly brought a storm of protest from its administration and members, for it incapacitated and deprived the syndicate of whatever extent of control it exerted over the cineastes. To be sure, it is extremely difficult to verify whether the state was intentionally targeting the syndicate to the advantage of the CSI, but so is the attempt to disprove such a claim. What is certain is that the decline of the Syndicate of Film Professions, which coincided with the faltering of the Chamber of

⁴³ Nāṣir Ḥusayn, “Kayfa nu‘awid mu’assasat al-sīnima ila da‘m al-sīnima al-‘arabīyya lā al-ajnabīyya,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2245, 21 June 1971, 54-5.

⁴⁴ For example, it was reported that Ḥasan Ramzī, who was on the committee in charge of establishing CSI, started his own company shortly afterwards to be able to take advantage of the benefits offered by CSI. See “Yusuf al-Siba‘i yarud ‘ala thawrat al-sīnimā’īyyīn,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1529, 30 September 1957, 33.

⁴⁵ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1528, 22 September 1957, 30; no. 1529, 30 September 1957, 33.

⁴⁶ The Article in question concerning the reorganizations of the syndicates for the theatre, cinema and music professionals stated that it is not mandatory for amateurs to join the Cineastes’ Syndicate in order for them to work in the film industry. *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 24A, 24 August 1958, 1-9. For the original text of the removed clause, see *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2018, 13 February 1967, 35.

the Film Industry that by then had nominal powers only, resulted in CSI practically becoming the sole public authority over cinema matters.

In spite of the syndicate's uproar, Egyptian cinema prospered in the late 1950s, both in quality and quantity. Although the CSI did not produce or co-produce any film in its early stages, it held film weeks in Cairo and selected Egyptian films to show in international film festivals. Towards the end of the decade, many books about cinematography and cinema theory were translated into Arabic, and in late 1959, Egypt witnessed the establishment of the Higher Institute for the Cinema (*al-Ma'had al-'ālī lil-sīnima*), the first institute to offer professional cinematic education in the Arab world.⁴⁷ The novelty of such institute lies in its diverse departments, which encompassed filmmaking, scriptwriting, editing, art direction, sound engineering, cinematography, and production. Moreover, permission for the creation of The Film Society (*Jam'īyyat fīlm*) was granted in hopes of holding regular cinema conferences and film screenings.⁴⁸ In other words, the CSI helped to create a nourishing atmosphere which allowed Egyptian cinema to “reach the peak of maturity and start being compared to [international cinemas].”⁴⁹ Highly acclaimed films such as Youssef Chahine's *Cairo Station* (*Bāb al-ḥadīd*, 1958 – starring Youssef Chahine, Farīd Shawqī, and Hind Rustum), Henri Barakāt's *The Nightingale's Prayer* (*Du'ā' al-karawān*, 1959 – starring Fātin Ḥamāma and Aḥmad Maẓhar), and Aḥmad Ḍiyā' al-Dīn's *The Teenagers* (*al-Murāhiqāt*, 1960 – starring Māgda and Rushdī Abāza) signaled the emergence of a new

⁴⁷ Classes started on 24 October 1959. See Ahmad Kāmil Mursī and Magdī Wahba, *Mu'jam al-fann al-sīnimā'ī* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-miṣrīyya al-'amma lil-kitāb, 1973), 74-5; and Muḥammad Kāmil al-Qalyūbī, “L'enseignement du cinema,” in Wassef, *Egypte*, 100.

⁴⁸ 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 454.

⁴⁹ Samīr Farīd, *Madkhal ila tārīkh al-sīnima al-arabīyya* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-miṣrīyya al-'amma lil-kitāb, 2001), 108.

cinema, one with a refreshing form, daring content and ‘realist’ tendencies.⁵⁰ What was regarded as the “marriage of literature and cinema”⁵¹ also dominated during that period of time, manifested by the cinematic adaptation of novels by Naguib Mahfouz, Yusuf Idrīs, Iḥsān ‘Abdul Qudūs and Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, all of which “reflected the problems and challenges of contemporary Egyptian life.”⁵²

The fact that the CSI did not commission the production of films as yet might potentially be viewed as an evidence of the state’s sole interest in organizing the infrastructure of the film industry, rather than directly contributing to artistic/ideological film production. Another possible interpretation, however, is the under-studied fact that up until 1960 the CSI did not have the necessary financial means to produce feature films, in particular since the lion’s share of cinematic resources, between 1957 and 1960, remained in private hands. Indeed, studios, distribution agencies, exhibition houses, and production companies were still owned by the private sector, the great generator of a commercial, politically detached cinema. The CSI was not financially strong enough to compete against private-sector film production, nor was fueling such a competition considered a state priority. As a matter of fact, it was not until the sequestration of Bank Miṣr in 1960 that the state coincidentally found itself the owner

⁵⁰ The three mentioned films were submitted for consideration for the 31st, 32nd and 33rd Academy Awards (Best Foreign Language Film) respectively, with *Cairo Station* being the first North African and Arab film to contend for the award. None were accepted as official nominees. They also participated in the 8th, 10th and 11th Berlin International Film Festival respectively.

⁵¹ Farugia, “The Plight of Women,” 53.

⁵² This statement was made by critic Rafīq al-Ṣabbān, see Joseph Fahim, “Arab Unity on the Silver Screen,” *al-Jazeera*, 4 April 2008, <http://aljazeera.com/amp/focus/arabunity/2008/04/200852517281747506.html> (accessed on 2 February 2017). Examples of these adaptations are: ‘Abdul Qudūs’ *The Empty Pillow* (*al-Wisāda al-khālīyya*, 1957) and *Dead End* (*al-Tarīq al-masdūd*, 1958) and Naguib Mahfouz’s *Beginning and End* (*Bidāyya wa nihāyya*, 1960) and *The Thief and the Dogs* (*al-liṣ wal-kilāb*, 1962).

of considerable film assets that would definitely facilitate its entry in the field of actual film production.

D. CSI Reorganized: From a Cinema Supporter to a Film Co-Producer

If economic necessities enabled the state to establish a public, largely supportive, sector in Egyptian cinema, financial convenience initiated the birth of public-sector film production in Egypt. In 1960, Nasser introduced Egypt's Second Five-Year Development Plan for 1960-1965, generally seeking progress on all economic fronts including but not limited to a heavier industrialization program and the construction of the Aswan High Dam.⁵³ In search of ways to finance such an extremely large-scale project, the Egyptian state turned its eyes towards private local capital, especially after many attempts to acquire sufficient foreign and joint capital proved a failure.⁵⁴ To this end, Bank Miṣr was sequestered on 11 February 1960, so were all of its industrial and commercial subsidiaries,⁵⁵ among which, interestingly enough, was Miṣr Company for Performance Arts and the Cinema (*Sharikat miṣr lil-tamthīl wal-sīnima*—hereafter MCPAC), the parent company of the renowned Studio Miṣr.⁵⁶ Taking into account firstly the £E 100 million of deposits that Bank Miṣr had, secondly the paid-up capital of its twenty-seven enterprises which amounted to more than £E 20

⁵³ Robert Stephens, *Nasser, A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1971), 356-377.

⁵⁴ Anne Alexander, *Nasser* (London: Haus Publishing, 2005), 123.

⁵⁵ Presidential decrees nos. 39 and 40 for the year 1960 concerning the ownership of Bank Miṣr and Bank al-Ahlī respectively, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 36, 11 February 1960, 176-177.

⁵⁶ Ilhāmī Ḥasan, *Tārīkh al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya 1896-1970* (Cairo: Sandūq al-tanmīyya al-thaqāfīyya, 1995), 164.

million, it is possible to claim that capital now became, in principle, available.⁵⁷ That being said, it becomes conceivable to consider the acquisition of Studio Miṣr, along with its parent company, more an inadvertent byproduct of broader financial objectives than a pre-determined, comprehensive scheme.

Besides being the first and most prominent film studio in Egypt during that period of time, Studio Miṣr, like its contemporary counterparts, was a self-contained unit that incorporated four film plateaus well-equipped with lighting facilities, a black and white film laboratory, sound and camera equipment, and editing suites as well. Although in need of modernization and upgrade, it was capable of producing feature films. The significance of owning such a valuable cinematic asset did not go unnoticed by a state that during the preceding three years had been tirelessly trying to revive its film industry in all respects. Indeed, the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance secured a considerable budget “to develop ... and provide [Studio Miṣr] with modern sound equipment, cameras, developing factories, as well as processing apparatus for both color and black and white films.”⁵⁸ It was around the same time that the state transferred the management of all its cinema-related affairs to the CSI, making the latter the executive director of MCPAC and Studio Miṣr.⁵⁹

A few months later, on 15 May 1960, Nasser signed a decree reorganizing the CSI by adding a new, essential clause that listed among the institution’s main objectives

⁵⁷ These figures were taken from Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, 72 and Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire*, 161. According to them, the Miṣr Group for Textiles (Miṣr Spinning and Weaving Company and the Miṣr Fine Spinning and Weaving Company), for example, produced 60 percent of all textile production in Egypt.

⁵⁸ ‘Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 454.

⁵⁹ Presidential decree no. 93 for the year 1960 concerning management transfer from the directorate of cinema affairs in the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance to CSI.

the “production of films that are deemed necessary for national purposes or [crucial] in raising the level of Egyptian cinema.”⁶⁰ Apart from this article and a few minor changes, the absence of any substantial difference between this decree and its predecessors might support the argument that only when the state acquired the appropriate cinematic assets did it really consider venturing into the field of film production. In any case, the said decree certainly marks a shift in the government’s role from a cautious cinema supporter to an enthusiastic, capable film producer. In this sense, Decree 855 of 1960 officially established public-sector film production in Egypt, almost three years after the establishment of a public sector in Egyptian cinema—not before and definitely not after, as it has been frequently argued.⁶¹

Despite having the means, it was too perilous to embark on an ambitious, solo journey to produce films when the state had no direct control whatsoever over the private sector, especially the distribution and exhibition agencies. The Ministry of Culture and National Guidance was extremely careful not to “get caught up in the labyrinth of cinematic operations except for a few calculated steps.”⁶² Over a period of three years, the CSI participated in the co-production of three films only. Although considered as the state’s first large-scale attempts at film propaganda, neither film was instigated by the CSI. In contrast to the U.A.R. Radio Organization’s annual budget, for

⁶⁰ Presidential decree no. 855 for the year 1960 concerning the reorganization of CSI, Article 2, Section 3, Point 7, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 121, 28 May 1960, 846-848.

⁶¹ See footnote 31. The establishment of public-sector film production in Egypt is wrongly assumed to coincide with the annexation of the CSI to the General Egyptian Institution for the Cinema, Radio and Television in 1963, which in turn is incorrectly referred to as the onset of the nationalization of the film industry.

⁶² ‘Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 454.

example, the budget of the CSI was ridiculously small.⁶³ Given the financial and ideological attention that Nasser paid to the Radio as a propaganda tool since the early years of the revolution, the huge difference between the Radio's and CSI's budgets could perhaps be indicative of the fact that the Egyptian state was still hesitant to take the initiative to use the cinema widely and for similar ends. It is perhaps important to state here that in contrast to Sawt al-‘Arab, a non-profit state agency established to communicate political messages to the Egyptians and the Arab World, the cinema sector, brimming with profit-oriented mentalities, was more difficult and more expensive to control and exploit.

O, Islam (Wa-islāmāh—also released as *Love and Faith*), the first Egyptian movie to be co-produced by the CSI, through the MCPAC in cooperation with Ramsīs Naguīb's the Arab Company for the Cinema (*al-Sharika al-arabīyya lil-sīnima*) and directed by the Hungarian-American director Andrew Marton, appeared in 1961. Roughly around the same time, the famous actress-producer Asya Dāghir, who was also the owner of the production house Lotus Film, requested a loan from the CSI to produce Youssef Chahine's *Saladin the Victorious (al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn*, 1963). Not only did the CSI accept, but it opted to become more involved by means of providing production facilities, namely services offered by Studio Miṣr.⁶⁴ In addition to meeting CSI's loan conditions and requirements, both of these epic historical films presumably contained

⁶³ According to ‘Ukāsha, CSI's budget for 1958-59 was 241,300 Egyptian pounds. It increased slightly to £E 300,000 in 1960-61 only to decrease to £E 214,300 in 1961-62. However, U.A.R Radio Organization's budget for 1960-61 was £E 2,403,000 and £E 2,320,000 for 1961-62. See the annual production budget as published in *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 156, 13 July 1961, 941-978. Also see *Mudhakirāt Tharwat ‘Ukāsha* (Cairo: Dār al-shurūq, 2000), 452-3.

⁶⁴ The services provided for *Saladin the Victorious* by Studio Miṣr were sound recording and processing.

features implicitly glorifying Nasser and his anti-colonial message.⁶⁵ It is not possible to ignore the fact that these films were made at a time when relations between the U.A.R. and some Arab states were growing increasingly bitter. While the fact that both films might have conveyed ideological sentiments that probably encouraged the CSI to be a willing producer, having prestigious names on board—that naturally ensured low-risk investment and very high revenue—might have been the main clincher that persuaded it to finance and proceed with the co-production.⁶⁶ The third co-production was *It Happened in Egypt* (*Ḥadatha fi miṣr*, 1963), this time with the Hungarian state-run company *Hungaro*,⁶⁷ probably in an effort to open international markets for Egyptian films.

At this point, a chain of concurrent events steered the Egyptian state towards a more interventionist policy, which ultimately catapulted the various levels of the government into fast-paced socialism.⁶⁸ As a first measure, the socialist laws of July

⁶⁵ To give an example of how film scholars perceived one of these films, see what Qussai Samak had to say about *Saladin the Victorious*, “Parallels were alluded to between the historical role of Saladin and the historical role of present-day Gamal Abdul Nasser.” In Qussai Samak, “The Arab Cinema and the National Question, from the Trivial to the Sacrosanct,” *Cineaste* 9/3 (1979): 32.

⁶⁶ Besides being produced by prominent producers as mentioned above, *O Islam* featured top-ranked actors such as Ahmad Maḥzar, Lubna ‘Abdul ‘Azīz, Rushdī Abāza, Tahīyya Karīyyuka, Maḥmūd al-Milīgī, Farīd Shawqī and many other Egyptian and European actors such as Luisa Mattioli, Folco Lulli, and Silvana Pampanini. As for *Saladin the Victorious*, not only did it feature Ahmad Maḥzar and Maḥmūd al-Milīgī, but was also directed by Youssef Chahine, adapted from Naguib Mahfouz’s novel, written by Yusuf al-Sibā‘ī (plot) and ‘Abdul Rahmān al-Sharqāwī (script).

⁶⁷ Not a lot of information is available concerning this film, its crew and cast. According to Samīr Farīd, it was screened in Hungary in 1963 but was not shown in Egypt until 1967. At first, this film was supposed to be co-directed by the Hungarian filmmaker László Ranódy but was later assigned to his colleague Dola Mészáros who co-directed it with Sayf al-Dīn Shawkat from Egypt. Amal al-Jamal, *al-Sīnima al-‘arabīyya al-mushtaraka, filmūghrāfyā* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-a‘la lil-thaqāfa, 2008), 22.

1961 were introduced in three consecutive presidential decrees, basically targeting almost the whole private sector under the guise of “expanding capacities to support national interest.”⁶⁹ What is surprising, however, is that aside from a small number of movie theatres, probably acquired incidentally as a result of the sequestrations of many holding companies, no major private film-related company was nationalized or sequestered so far.⁷⁰ Even more striking is the fact that when Nasser issued a decree concerning the redistribution of the seized 367 companies, only one company was listed under the CSI, the previously sequestered MCPAC.⁷¹

Within a one-year period, the National Charter was declared, and even more drastic measures were taken in general.⁷² Consequently, more sequestration orders were issued, ultimately affecting some shareholders of two of the biggest privately-owned film studios in Egypt, namely, Studio al-Ahrām and Studio Naḥās (or Studio al-Nīl).⁷³

⁶⁸ Among these events were the increasing difficulties with Syria, the growing tension between the old bourgeoisie and the new bureaucrats, the strong alliance between Egypt and the Soviet Union, in addition to the crushing financial burden of the Five-Year Plan as well as Egypt’s intensified need for a self-reliant economy, and, last but not least, the failure, or maybe reluctance, of the private sector to play a dynamic role in mobilizing large amounts of capital required for the development plan. Peter Johnson, “Egypt under Nasser,” *MERIP Reports* 10 (1972): 6-7 and Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society, the Army Regime, the Left and Social Change under Nasser* (New York: Random House, 1968).

⁶⁹ Presidential decrees nos. 117, 118, and 119 for the year 1961 concerning the nationalization of certain companies and institutions, buying shares from certain companies, and the special regulations of existing companies respectively, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 162, 20 July 1961, 1046-1053.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* See also Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, 76.

⁷¹ Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society*, 168-9.

⁷² The National Charter was later misinterpreted and used by the private sector in Egyptian cinema to justify its existence and function. For an English translation of the National Charter, see Alan W. Horton, “A Charter for National Action of the U.A.R.,” *Northeast Africa Series* 9/5 (1962).

Paradoxically, neither of these studios was put under the authority of the CSI. While the management of the former was transferred to the General Organization for the Radio and Television (*al-Hay'a al-'amma lil-idhā'a wal-talviziūn*), the latter was brought under the supervision of the Sequestration Committee (*Lajnat al-ḥirāsa*),⁷⁴ showcasing, perhaps, the state's inability to handle certain sequestered film properties. These random take-overs of cinematic assets might only reflect the lack of advanced planning on the part of the Egyptian government. Moreover, the volume of these sequestered assets was too restricted to be viewed as an attempt at comprehensive film nationalization. In fact, little if any sign did the state show to indicate its inclination towards nationalizing the film industry. In 'Ukāsha's words:

Until September 1962, when I left the ministry, there was no intention to nationalize the cinema nor [was the state] thinking of taking over cinematic production, for such a [step] entailed tumbling into countless problems with no sense of advanced planning.⁷⁵

Clearly, to Nasser and his regime, there were more pressing issues at stake than establishing a monopoly over film production.

E. Conclusion

To recapitulate, the establishment of the public sector in Egyptian cinema preceded the creation of public-sector film production. Whereas the former was the product of the government's response to both a new cinematic perception and economic

⁷³ Studio al-Ahrām was established in 1945 by shareholders of different nationalities. To mention a few in alphabetical order, D. Akonono, A. Attinogen, B. Bellini, A. Mukhtār, M. Shākir, M. Thābit, and S. Wissa. As for Studio Naḥās, it was established in 1948 by Gabriel Edward Naḥās, A. Khūrī and Yusuf Wahbī.

⁷⁴ 'Umar, "Azmat al-sīnima 3," 7.

⁷⁵ 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 454-455.

imperatives, the latter was in a way the by-product of the sequestration of Bank Miṣr, which happened to be the holding company for the MCPAC, including Studio Miṣr. Both sectors, however, operated under CSI's purview. To the greatest extent, cinema remained primarily Egypt's "most popular form of urban entertainment" and the state acted as such,⁷⁶ tasking CSI with the responsibility of keeping the film industry afloat, with a minor, yet growing, interest in the production of quality films. In fact up to 1962, the successive waves of nationalization had yet to hit the film industry. Apart from coincidental sequestration of a few cinema-related assets, the state had expressed little interest in embarking upon film production, limiting its involvement to the sponsorship, supervision, financial aid, and occasionally co-production ventures.

⁷⁶ Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture*, 3 and 48.

CHAPTER III

THE EXPANSION OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN EGYPTIAN CINEMA, 1963-1966

Notwithstanding CSI's efforts to heal the Egyptian cinema from some of its particular ailments, the general socio-political and economic changes that Egypt experienced between July 1961 and September 1962 led to the rise of new complications, the ramifications of which heavily affected Egyptian cinema and the government's attitude to it. This chapter begins by contesting the prevailing misconceptions surrounding the expansion of public-sector film production in order to uncover the driving forces behind such a development. The rest of the chapter, first, addresses the evolution of the said sector beginning in 1963, and ends with surveying its manifold efforts to reinvigorate the film industry up to 1966.

A. Triggers for Change.

1. Prevailing Misconceptions

Perhaps the plurality of explanations surrounding the Egyptian government's resolution to expand public-sector film production might be an indication of how multilayered the circumstances culminating in such an eventuality really were. To some commentators, this expansion was inevitable in a society undergoing a general process of socialist transformation, mostly manifested by sequential waves of nationalization

touching almost all sectors of the economy.¹ Such an argument falls short of plausibility for it assumes the expansion of the public sector was predetermined, an automatic result of decade-long historical developments. This theory will be repeatedly challenged in this thesis; the assumption of inevitability deliberately excludes other possibilities in our understanding of the public sector, mainly the impact of unexpected complications arising from unforeseen events.² Almost all of the state's decisions concerning cinema affairs, including the establishment of CSI in 1957 and its reorganization in 1960, were not part of a preplanned, purely ideologically-driven strategy, but rather pragmatic, somewhat experimental, responses to the many ramifications of the ever-changing socio-political and economic realities that Egypt was witnessing at the time.

Other historians and film critics give precedence to predetermined ideological factors in their analyses, which they ground in Nasser's declaration about the necessity of placing the intended Egyptian cultural revolution "at the service of the political and social revolution."³ According to this view, in order to achieve the purpose of being "hostile to imperialism, hostile to feudalism, hostile to the domination and dictatorship of capitalism, hostile to all forms of exploitation," cinema ought to be brought under the wing of the state.⁴ To make this possible, as these scholars reasoned, the state had to nationalize the film industry and take control of its modes of production but also its

¹ For an example of these arguments, see Chapter 1: Introduction, footnote 2.

² The Tripartite Aggression in 1956, the dissolution of the U.A.R. in 1961, the Six-Day War and the *Naksa* in 1967, Nasser's Death in 1970, and the Corrective Revolution of 1971 were all unexpected events that gave birth to numerous complications affecting the whole economic sector in Egypt, including the film industry, which required prompt and pragmatic responses from the government.

³ Crabbs, Jr., "Politics, History, and Culture," 387.

⁴ *ibid.*

content and general philosophical assumptions, by means of a “socialism dictated from above,”⁵ if not as “part of an overall plan to move Egyptian society in a new direction,”⁶ then to freely “use the cinema as a propaganda tool,”⁷ or at the minimum to keep it “out of hands hostile to government policies.”⁸ To challenge these arguments is difficult, for the cinema was indeed expected to play a role in conveying ideological messages and promoting socialist philosophies. In the words of Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf, the prominent film director who also happened to be the chairman of one of the public-sector film production companies:

Now that the revolution has expressed in the National Charter a global vision of history and of the future in a solid revolutionary context, it is imperative to [realize] how [feeble] our films are on the analytical and political level. It is now the task of the state to create, [on] the basis of the [National] Charter, a mature cinematographic world where man’s struggle against fatal social conditions and his striving to change his destiny are expressed.⁹

Nonetheless, all of these commentators base their analyses on the presumed assertion that the film industry was nationalized. In so doing, they fail to realize that, unlike other

⁵ Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 20. See also Ilhāmī Ḥasan, *Tārīkh al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya*, 164, in which he argued that these developments fell in line with the prevailing socialist regime in an effort to put all the financial and artistic capacities at the service of the people; “State involvement, which culminated in 1961, took place in the context of Nasser’s concern with the implementation of Arab socialism, which found its full expression in the 1962 Charter of National Action. This called for public ownership of much of the economy, control of all import trade and of three-quarters of the export trade.” Lizbeth Malkmus and Roy Armes, *Arab and African Filmmaking*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1991), 51.

⁶ Crabbs, “Politics, History, and Culture,” 392-93.

⁷ al-Qalyūbī, “al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya,” 61. See also Marjorie A. Franken, “Egyptian Cinema and Television: Dancing and the Female Image,” *Visual Anthropology* 8/2-4 (1996): 276.

⁸ William A. Rugh, *The Arab Press: News Media and Political Processes in the Arab World* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1979), 128.

⁹ As cited in Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 29. See also Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf, “Naḥwa fann sīnimā’ī ishtirākī,” *al-Ṭalī’a* 6 (1965): 93-6.

Egyptian economic sectors, ‘socializing’ the film industry did not ensue from or require systematic nationalization, the centerpiece of Nasser’s socialist agenda. To put it plainly, in order for a state to be able to control the modes of production of any industry, it has to either own or manage a significant volume of that industry’s assets and personnel, monopolize the distribution of the product or the supply of raw material, or tighten its grip over the private sector. In the case of the film industry in Egypt, neither requisite was fulfilled. The state never showed any inclination to comprehensively control the film industry in its entirety nor did it, except perhaps implicitly, target the film private sector, which continued to own the majority of cinematic resources.¹⁰ Quite the contrary, the public sector was supposed to establish and maintain a trusting relationship with the private sector, to which, incidentally, it continued to provide services.¹¹

Perhaps the expansion of public-sector film production was somehow the outcome of a general drift towards socialism on part of the government, but to recognize ideological factors, however, as the sole driving force behind such an expansion is simply misleading, if not erroneous. Besides, cinema was never the Egyptian government’s preferred means of mass mobilization, not even the second. Before exploiting the cinema for its propagandistic potentials, the state had to first develop the infrastructure of the film industry to make it more accessible for a far wider audience. It makes no sense for a state in times of economic and political turbulence to

¹⁰ According to ‘Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan, a professor of economics who also held the position of the chairman of a public-sector film production company between 1966-67, “people think the cinema in Egypt [was] nationalized, and this [was] not true ... more than sixty percent of the [cinematic] operations [were] not in the state’s hands... even the studios were not nationalized but bought,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.2049, 18 September 1967, 25.

¹¹ Interview with Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf, *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1804, February 1963, 41; interview with Ṣalāḥ ‘Āmr, *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1881, 29 June 1964, 42.

embark on a complex and expensive program of politicizing films that rarely reached rural areas and were, more often than not, banned in a number of Arab countries,¹² at a time when it had absolute control over the radio and television, which incidentally were much easier to manage, less costly, more effective and far-reaching.¹³

Another cause for presumed state take-over of the film industry was thought to be artistic and intellectual considerations. The film industry, it was claimed, was “drowning in the muddy waters of money, capitalism ... and intellectual backwardness,”¹⁴ forcing the state to intervene and reverse further artistic decline.¹⁵ Albeit somewhat plausible, this explanation is tainted by exaggeration. Although voices calling for better quality and more artistically oriented Egyptian films did arise, apparently they were not loud enough to drown other concerns and convince Muḥammad ‘Abdul Qādir Ḥātīm, the new Minister of Culture and National Guidance who was appointed in late 1962, and other cineastes to perceive film primarily as an art form.¹⁶ Even after the expansion of public-sector film production, discussed in

¹² According to a report done by the UNESCO, most of the exhibition houses were found in Cairo and Alexandria. The average of movie-going in Āsyūt and al-Gīza was once a year, twice a year in al-Buḥayra and Sūhāj, and 4 times a year in al-Munūfiyya. As cited in ‘Umar, “Azmat al-sīnima,” 7.

¹³ When writer Iḥsān ‘Abdul Qudūs confronted the Minister of Culture and National Guidance ‘Abdul Qādir Ḥātīm about his preference of television to cinema, the latter denied but not before saying that it was much easier to make a new project successful than to fix the problems of an old one, *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1809, 11 February 1963, 37. In another article, Ḥātīm talked about the important role of the television and radio in a socialist society without mentioning the cinema., ‘Abdul Qādir Ḥātīm “al-Idhā ‘a wal talvizyūn fī al-mujtama‘ al-ishtirākī,” *al-Thaqāfa* 52, 14 July 1964, 2-3.

¹⁴ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1914, 15 February 1964, 44.

¹⁵ As stated by Iḥsān ‘Abdul Qudūs in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1874, 11 May 1964, 44.

¹⁶ Munīr ‘Āmr, “Awal duktūra fī al-sīnima,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.2069, February 1968, 66. See also Muḥammad al-‘Asharī, “Iqtisādīyyāt šinā‘at al-sīnima fī miṣr: dirāsa muqārana” (PhD diss., Cairo University, 1968).

following sections, filmmaking was still expected to be profitable and cinema never ceased to be regarded as being, above all, other than a profit-making entertainment business. A necessary expectation of any film produced by the public sector was to, as a minimum, cover its costs of production.¹⁷ To be sure, the leadership of the public sector did favor films with a socialist drift and certain aesthetic standards; nevertheless, there was never any doubt about this sector's additional, but equally crucial, *raison d'être*—potentially contributing to national economic development.¹⁸

By giving emphasis solely to the aforementioned powerful ideological or artistic factors in their analyses of the expansion of the public sector, these critics tended to overlook, or perhaps ignore, the significant role of other key elements. For reasons discussed below, it becomes conceivable to view economic imperatives as a central propelling factor behind the state's inclination for more involvement in cinema affairs.

2. Economic Imperatives: At the Heart of Change

To begin with, political tension between Egypt and other neighboring countries started to grow in the early 1960s. Iraq was the first Arab country to ban the importation of Egyptian films, followed shortly by Syria after the dissolution of the U.A.R.¹⁹ This practice of boycotting Egyptian cinema spread to other countries when the governments of Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco, deeply concerned about the implicit political content

¹⁷ Nāṣir Ḥusayn, interview with Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf, *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1809, 11 February 1963, 38.

¹⁸ Article 3 of decree no. 48 for the year 1963 concerning the organization of the GEICRT, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 7, 8 January 1963, 14

¹⁹ ‘Abdul Fatāḥ Fishāwī, “Lā ṣirā‘ bayna al-aflām al-miṣrīyya wal-aflām al-lubnānīyya,” *al-Kawākib*, 12 July 1966, 17; and al-Jamal, *Aflām al-intāj al-mushtarak*, 27.

that some Egyptian films might contain, followed suit.²⁰ As a result, the number of exported copies of Egyptian films dropped from 1115 in 1959 to 744 in 1963.²¹ Because sixty percent of the Egyptian film industry's revenues came in hard currency from the Arab markets, this ban, naturally, had a dramatic impact on the film distribution sector in Egypt.²² Driven by fear of inevitable bankruptcy, a large number of foreign and Egyptian distributors shut down their offices in Egypt only to relocate to Beirut, making the latter, though for a very short period of time, the distribution hub of the Middle East.²³ The direct repercussion of these relocations was unmistakably a diminishing cash flow that limited available capital for distribution advances, the oldest and most common method of funding film production in Egypt.²⁴ Prior to filming, producers relied heavily on cash subsidies provided by distributors with the stipulation that all these advances would later be reimbursed from the film's revenues, otherwise the film's copyright ownership would remain in the hands of the distributor.²⁵ This was a formula

²⁰ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1931, 14 June 1965, 46; Murād, “Ḥiwār ma‘ Tawfīq Šāliḥ,” 205-07; and Gaffney, “The Egyptian Cinema,” 60.

²¹ These figures are given by al-Qalyūbī, *al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya*, 61-2.

²² Karen Finlon Dajani, “Cairo: The Hollywood of the Arab World,” *Gazette* 26 (1980): 91-2; ‘Ukāsha, *Mudhakirāi*, 767; Faṭīn ‘Abdul Wahāb, proceedings of Arba‘ mu’tamarāt, 12-13 October 1966, *al-Kawākib*, 25 October 1966, 30-35. See also Medhat Mahfouz, “Les salles de projection dans l’industrie cinématographique,” in Wassef, ed., *Egypte*, 127.

²³ “The efflorescence of Lebanese commercial production occurred when the Egyptian public sector was at its peak... It was still possible to produce privately financed films in Egypt, but much of the capital that had previously financed Egyptian cinema nonetheless went to Beirut.” Walter Armbrust, “Cinema and Television in the Arab World,” 633-634. This ‘emigration’ phenomenon would last for years after the establishment of GEICRT. See Nāšir Ḥusayn, “Ḥarb al-a‘šāb dud al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2021, 6 March 1967, 34. Naguib Mahfouz addressed this issue in his testimony in “al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba al-‘amma bi hafz al-taḥqīq fi qaḍīyyat khasā’ir al-qitā‘ al-‘amm al-sīnimā’ī fi miṣr,” *al-Sīnima wal-tārīkh* 7 (1993): 80.

²⁴ Madkūr Thābit, “Ḥawla nash’at,” 27-30.

that not only empowered the distribution sector at the expense of other sectors, it also held the economic development of the film industry hostage to the big distribution networks, the end result being the placement of Egyptian cineastes at the mercy of businessmen.

Another victim of these changing circumstances was the exhibition sector, for distributors were also in charge of importing foreign films and selling them to theatre owners. When these distribution companies relocated, the least fortunate of theatre owners lost their main suppliers, finding themselves short of material to screen, and before long out of business.²⁶ Others, who were audacious, or maybe desperate enough, to defy the law, resorted to illegal means of trade such as smuggling films in and out of Egypt to keep their businesses running,²⁷ potentially causing the state to lose a hefty sum of tax revenues from film importation and exportation.²⁸ Furthermore, television was introduced in Egypt in 1960, immediately becoming the primary source of family entertainment. As a result, the movie attendance dropped dramatically from 1960 onwards, negatively affecting the exhibition sector, which plummeted from 400 cinema houses in 1960 to 298 in 1963.²⁹ Within a one-year period between 1961 and 1962, the subsectors of the Egyptian film industry, like a falling row of dominoes, crumpled one after another. As the volume of exhibition houses shrank and the number of

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ The number of movie theatres plummeted from 450 in 1955 to 350 in 1962. Obviously, Egypt was suffering from severe shortage of theatres. *Arab Cinema and Culture*, 73.

²⁷ Nāṣir Ḥusayn, “Limādha umimat sharikāt al-tawzī’,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1869, 6 April 1964, 44.

²⁹ Mahfouz, “Les salles de projection,” 126-28.

moviegoers decreased (and vice versa), the less profitable the films became and the fewer funds invested, leading to a considerable stagnation in film production.³⁰

Many of those who were not affected by the lack of cash flow but alarmed by the colossal political changes in the country rushed to liquidate their assets in fear of being sequestered,³¹ while others prospered in the absence of competition, thus succeeding in establishing a quasi-monopoly over continuing, but anemic, film production. This kind of control aimed first and foremost to garner commercial success, encouraging the expansion of an existing star system, which entailed the selection of only famous actors, directors, and conventional plots. Consequently, this only deprived less known cineastes, who formed the majority of film professionals, of the opportunity to find a decent job,³² eventually leading to another wave of cineastes fleeing the country, seeking opportunities abroad.³³

As a result of all these transformations, the Egyptian film industry found itself suffering its worst recession since its inception in the early twentieth-century, pushing the cineastes to raise their voices in protest.³⁴ While some sought help from the state in hopes of sparing the national film industry more humiliation and degeneration, others, it was claimed, had ulterior, and somewhat more personal, motives for exhorting the state

³⁰ To follow the production rate in the Egyptian film industry across various years, see Figure 3.3, Egypt: Film Production, in Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture*, 47.

³¹ It was mentioned that among the factors that facilitated the state's takeover of some film companies was the owners' willingness to sell and leave before having their properties sequestered. See 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 756 and al-Naḥās, "Qirā'a fī taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 22.

³² To read more about the star system in Egypt, see Christophe Ayad, "Le star-système: de la splendeur au voile," in Wassef, *Egypte*, 134-37; Lizbeth Malkmus, "The 'New' Egyptian Cinema, Adapting Genre Conventions to a Changing Society," *Cineaste* 16/3 (1988): 31; and 'Abdul 'Azīz, "al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya," 140-2.

³³ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2021, 6 March 1967, 34.

³⁴ "al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya fī khaṭar," *al-Hilāl* 10, 1 October 1967, 113-14.

to interfere.³⁵ It was in the benefit of those who were not making profit anymore or were drowning in debt that the state would take over particular film companies, thus availing themselves of a convenient opportunity to escape monetary burdens.³⁶ To these restive voices the state listened, but what encouraged the latter to oblige was its own interests in having a thriving film industry. On top of all the pressing issues that were at stake at the time, it was obvious that the Egyptian government could not afford to lose another source of income. Previous policies of supervision and sponsorship were no longer tenable. The government felt it necessary to take more drastic measures to expand its control over the various modes of production, with a view to get the stagnant film industry moving.

A point here should be made, by fostering such an extremely interventionist film policy, the state was to a certain extent trying to save face. A rising socialist regime promising in its National Charter to offer all of its citizens “the right to secure the job that suits educational background, abilities and interests,”³⁷ could not have possibly tolerated a relatively high rate of unemployment in any industry, let alone the film industry.³⁸ Even more so, at the basis of both the socialist laws of 1961 and the National Charter of May 1962 was an urge to reclaim the forces of production from “parasitic exploitation,” most probably pushing the government to find new means to secure enough cash flow to liberate the film industry from the control of the large private

³⁵ ‘Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 756 and al-Naḥās, “Qirā’a fi taqrīr al-nīyyāba,” 22.

³⁶ Both of ‘Ukāsha and Samīr Farīd argue that some cineastes wanted and exerted pressure on the state to take over film production. ‘Ukāsha, *ibid.*; Samīr Farīd, *al-Aḥālī*, 28 September 1994.

³⁷ Excerpt from the National Charter as translated in Horton, “A Charter,” 16.

³⁸ See what Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf had to say about the emigration of the cineastes and the high unemployment rate in his testimony in “al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba,” 86.

companies.³⁹ For all of the abovementioned reasons, the state expanded the public sector in Egyptian cinema, becoming a producer, a distributor, an exhibitor, and sometimes, a spectator as well.⁴⁰

B. The Birth of a New Era of State Involvement in the Film Industry.

But control over all the tools of production does not mean the nationalization of all the means of production, the abolition of private ownership, or interference with the rights of inheritance.⁴¹

Thus spoke President Nasser in May 1962 as he discussed the National Charter of the U.A.R. Indeed, by establishing the General Egyptian Institution for Cinema, Radio and Television (*al-Mu'assasa al-miṣrīyya al- 'amma lil-sīnima wal- 'idhā'a wal-talviẓyūn* – hereafter GEICRT) on 6 January 1963,⁴² the state was aiming to claim considerable control of the film industry's modes of production with a view to reinvigorating an industry in jeopardy, rather than nationalizing the said industry in its entirety.⁴³ Before embarking on telling the story of the GEICRT, it should be stated

³⁹ For example, the largest chain of movie theatres was owned by Elias Georges Lutfi, who owned 26 cinemas in Cairo and Alexandria. The second largest was controlled by the Eastern Company for the Cinema. See Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture*, 187.

⁴⁰ In an interview with Tawfīq Ṣālih, the latter stated that “the revolution did not only give financial aids, but also [used to] fill the theatres with soldiers twice a week.” Mūrād, “Ḥiwār ma' Tawfīq Ṣālih,” 204.

⁴¹ Horton, “A Charter,” 13.

⁴² Decree no. 48 for the year 1963 concerning the organization of the General Egyptian Institution for the Cinema, Radio and Television, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 7, 8 January 1963, 13-16.

⁴³ In his testimony during the trial of the public sector in Egyptian cinema that took place in the early 1980s, Ṣalāḥ 'Āmr, the chairperson of the said sector between 1963 and 1966, repeatedly reiterated that the public-sector film production came into being only to save an industry on the verge of collapse. See “al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba,” 83.

plainly that the film industry, as it existed, was not nationalized in 1963, contrary to oft-repeated claims. To be absolutely clear, the Egyptian government never established a complete control of all aspects of filmmaking nor had it the intention to do so in the first place; the orders for sequestration of cinema-related assets were too sporadic and unplanned to imply the existence of a state ideologically motivated strategy aimed at comprehensively nationalizing all the various sectors of national film industry. Moreover, throughout the public sector's experiment, the volume of state-owned and state-managed properties did not exceed thirty percent of all Egyptian cinematic assets, the rest remaining in private hands.⁴⁴ A more accurate version of what took place as of 6 January 1963, the presumed birthdate of film "nationalization" in Egypt, will reveal how a relatively modest public, and in so many ways experimental, institution known as the CSI was merely expanded into the GEICRT, another public institution but one in charge of three different means of mass communication, of which perhaps cinema was the junior partner.⁴⁵ Because radio and television matters fall outside the scope of this thesis, only decisions governing cinema affairs will be the object of analysis.

Unlike the socialist laws of July 1961, Decree 48 of 1963 creating the GEICRT did not employ the usual terms of "nationalization," "sequestration," "expropriation" or

⁴⁴ Based on numbers provided by many sources, the total number of films produced by the public sector did not account to more than 40 percent of the total number of all films produced in Egypt during the same period. See Abū Shādī, "al-Qiṭā' al-'āmm al-sīnimā'ī fī miṣr, 322-24; Tharwat 'Ukāsha's report to the Speaker of the Egyptian Parliament on 15 April 1972, published under the title, "al-Qiṭā' al-'āmm al-sīnimā'ī fī miṣr," in the archives section in *al-Sīnima wal-Tārīkh* 8 (1993); and a personal document provided by the Rare Books and Special Collections Library at the American University in Cairo listing all the produced films between 1951 and 1970. According to a table created by Andrew Flibbert based on numbers provided by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics and *al-Sīnima wal-masrah*, the size of the public exhibition sector did not exceed one-fourth of the whole exhibition sector in Egypt. See Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture*, 188.

⁴⁵ Decree no. 48, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 7, 8 January 1963, 13-16.

“confiscation;” instead the key term used was the somewhat benign “incorporation” (*indimāj*) of the CSI into the GEICRT.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, maintaining that the terms employed did not evoke any form of nationalization should not undermine GEICRT’s distinctiveness, nor negate the fact that it inaugurated a new vigorous stage of state involvement in the film industry.

Though very analogous in outer form and administrative structure, a closer examination would reveal that not only did the CSI and the GEICRT differ in essence, but also their *raisons d’être* were on different ends of the scale. To begin with the essential similarities, in their quest to raise artistic and professional cinematic standards, encourage the exhibition of Egyptian films at home and abroad, as well as secure loans, financial aid, and offer prizes for serious projects, the GEICRT and the CSI were identical.⁴⁷ Both, indeed, came into being at a time when the film industry was in dire need of assistance. As for the differences, while CSI’s rules predicated the receipt of financial aid to the production of films that “fall in line with the state planning policy,”⁴⁸ still GEICRT’s regulations closely linked its annual production plan with the laws of supply and demand.⁴⁹ Clearly, economic considerations played a decisive role

⁴⁶ Article 1, *ibid.*, 14. Almost every scholarly work examining the history of Egyptian cinema refers to what took place in January 1963 as the onset of film nationalization in Egypt. Being the exceptions, Ali Abu Chadi and Andrew Flibbert are perhaps the only ones to use the most accurate terms—incorporation or consolidation—to describe the development in question. See Flibbert, *Commerce in Culture*, 108 and Abū Shādī, *al-Waqā’i’*, 181.

⁴⁷ Articles 2 and 6, decree no. 495 for the year 1957 concerning the establishment of CSI, *al-Waqā’i’ al-miṣrīyya* 45, 6 June 1957, 9; article 2 of decree no. 855 for the year 1960 concerning the reorganization of CSI, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 121, 28 May 1960, 846; and article 3 of decree no. 48 for the year 1963 concerning the organization of GEICRT, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 7, 8 January 1963, 14.

⁴⁸ Article 2, clauses 3 and 8, decree no. 855 for the year 1960 concerning the reorganization of CSI, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 121, 28 May 1960, 846

in Egypt's film policy, much to the chagrin of former Minister of Culture and National Guidance, Tharwat 'Ukāsha, who viewed the cinema primarily as belonging to the cultural sphere and warned of the dreadful impact that would result from subjecting art to business or ideological considerations, as it appeared to be the case for the radio and television.⁵⁰ This particular understanding of the role of the cinema was not shared by the succeeding minister Muḥammad 'Abdul Qādir Ḥātīm, which might explain, to some degree, this shift in the ministry's film policy under the latter's purview. In fact, under Ḥātīm, the GEICRT was to become an institution preoccupied with financial concerns,⁵¹ not the least of which was the requirement that GEICRT should generate enough income to cover expenses and capital costs,⁵² a stipulation that was overlooked later on. Moreover, by providing it with a separate "juridical personality,"⁵³ the Egyptian government bestowed on the GEICRT the right to instigate litigations, enter contracts, incur debts, sign agreements, and own property.⁵⁴ The flip side of this

⁴⁹ Article 8, clause 1, decree no. 48 for the year 1963, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 7, 8 January 1963, 15.

⁵⁰ 'Ukāsha seems to disapprove of the incorporation of CSI into GEICRT; he thought such a step would only confuse the mission of art and culture with that of proper media. 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 662 and 756.

⁵¹ Article 1, decree no. 48, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 7, 8 January 1963, 14.

⁵² Law no. 256 for the year 1960 concerning the organization of public institutions of economic nature; see also Ḥilmī Hilāl and Nāṣir Ḥusayn, "Hal tadhkhal al-sīnima majjānan," *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2020, 27 February 1967, 36-7; In his article, journalist Jamīl al-Bājūrī quoted Naguib Mahfouz referring to GEICRT as an "institution with an economic aspect that aim[ed] not only to [provide services] but to make a profit." *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1878, 23 March 1964, 44-5. ⁵² Despite this, GEICRT continued to be a financial burden on the state. More to read about this issue in the following chapter.

⁵³ Article 1, decree no. 48, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 7, 8 January 1963, 14.

⁵⁴ See Articles 52-3 concerning the juridical personality in the second chapter of the Egyptian Civil Code which was promulgated by Law no. 131 of 1948 (personal copy). In his book, *The law of the United Nations: A Critical Analysis of its Fundamental Problems*, Hans Kelsen states

arrangement was that the state could no longer shield the GEICRT from legal liability, making the latter susceptible to lawsuits.⁵⁵ As a consequence, in theory at least, the GEICRT was no longer a non-profit service public institution, financially dependent on or legally protected by the state as the CSI had been, instead it was an institution in which fiscal responsibility was at a premium. Although still a public body it answered to the same higher authority as before, in part, operating as an autonomous holding company that was meant to run strictly along economic lines.⁵⁶

What markedly differentiated the GEICRT from the CSI was the former's wide range of capacities, allowing it to "execute industrial and commercial projects [...], initiating commercial distribution of its products [as well as products of other companies]," and "establishing, buying, exploiting, or renting studios and exhibition houses [...]."⁵⁷ Combined together, these newly introduced provisions marked more direct state involvement, gradually fostering an omnipresent, expansionist state role in film industry. From merely a supporter of non-profit seeking film industry, the GEICRT deliberately and self-consciously became a key film producer aiming at exploiting revenues to finance further projects. In this sense, it becomes conceivable to view the emergence of the GEICRT, in light of its recent financial structure and constraints, not as a logical continuation of previous cinematic trends, rather as a breakaway from existing operating patterns.

that "juridical personality means the capacity of being a subject of legal duties and legal rights, of performing legal transactions and of suing and being sued at law," (London: Stevens and Sons, 1964), 329.

⁵⁵ A detail that would allow the instigation of a decade-long lawsuit against the public sector as discussed in the conclusion.

⁵⁶ Magdi Wahba, *Cultural Policy in Egypt* (Paris: UNESCO, 1972), 32.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

In line with this change of priorities went a change of funding sources and modes of production. In the hopes of arming itself with the appropriate means to achieve the highly ambitious and costly above-mentioned objectives, the GEICRT was to exploit the capital of the MCPAC and Studio Miṣr, along with other companies that were to be determined by a presidential decree.⁵⁸ By such power vested in it, the GEICRT was able to dissolve and liquidate the MCPAC, only to replace it by other companies, each of which was tasked with a distinct mission.⁵⁹ In a matter of few weeks, the GEICRT had become a bureaucratically-run, vertically-integrated film production company, not only capable of producing, distributing and exhibiting films, but enthusiastically willing to plunge into the murky field of film production. That a long leap forward beyond the state's initial and cautious plan for the cinema had occurred is evidenced in 'Ukāsha's memoirs:

From an attempt to raise the status of the cinema whilst still in the hands of its private owners and without any direct interference from the state, except for the occasional participation in co-production or the production of a small number of good quality films, the plan changed upside down to constitute [direct involvement] in production, distribution, and exhibition; this philosophy [was] completely different from what I had envisioned in this respect.⁶⁰

Thus when Decree 48 of 1963 was announced, it came as a surprise, for it was not in consonance with previous state film policies represented by the CSI, which had limited its role to encouraging, sponsorship and carefully selected co-production projects. Even more, the hasty manner in which the GEICRT was established manifested a sense of urgency on the part of the Egyptian government.

⁵⁸ Article 4, clauses b and e, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ 'Ukāsha, "al-Qiṭā' al-'āmm al-sīnimā'ī fi miṣr," 6.

⁶⁰ 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 455.

C. The Public Sector Expanded: To the Rescue.

On 14 January 1963, only eight days after the establishment of the GEICRT, its board of directors, chaired by Ṣalāḥ ‘Āmr and with Naguib Mahfouz and director Aḥmad Badrakhān as its consultants,⁶¹ oversaw the creation of four separate companies. With the intention to produce feature films, the General Company for Arab Film Production – *Filmontage (al-Sharika al-‘amma lil-intāj al-sīnimā’ī al-‘arabī)* was created, operating under the supervision of filmmakers Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf and Ḥilmī Rafla. As for the business of co-production, the GEICRT established the General Company for International Film Production – *Coprofilm (al-Sharika al-‘amma lil-intāj al-sīnimā’ī al-‘ālamī)*, whose chairman Muḥammad Ṭayfūr shortly announced its primary objective— attracting the attention of great international film producers.⁶² Right after their establishment, both *Filmontage* and *Coprofilm* eagerly confronted such issues as the unemployment and relocation of film professionals by employing as many professionals as possible, purchasing scripts and film plots to be adapted for the big screen, and signing numerous film deals with cineastes from the private sector with a view to start early production.⁶³

⁶¹ From 1963 to 1966, the Chairman of the GEICRT was the engineer Ṣalāḥ ‘Āmr, who is regarded as the father of broadcast engineering in Egypt. Among the board members were Naguib Mahfouz and the well-known director Ahmad Badrakhān, both held the post of consultant. For a full list of GEICRT’s board members, see decree no. 49 for the year 1963 concerning the formation of GEICRT’s board of directors, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 7, 8 January 1963, 16.

⁶² The co-production phenomenon between Egypt and another country emerged years before the public sector, precisely in 1948, and was claimed as a great generator of income. See al-Jamal, *Aflām al-intāj al-mustarak* for a comprehensive investigation of co-production.

⁶³ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1808, 4 February 1963, 42; Samīr Farīd, “al-Qiṭā’ al-‘amm fī al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya,” *al-Ma’rifā* 130 (1973). See also the testimonies of Fahmī ‘Alī Ḥasan, a member of the financial committee that evaluated the public sector, and Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf in “al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba,” 78, 86-87.

The third company to be created by the GEICRT was the General Company for Studios (*al-Sharika al-‘amma lil-studiūhāt*) that was tasked with running Studio Miṣr, developing the infrastructure of the old studios as well as buying and building new ones. In addition to acquiring Studio Miṣr and Studio al-Ahrām, the General Company for Studios purchased Studio Galāl from the actress-producer Mary Quīny and Studio Naḥās from the relevant Sequestration Committee.⁶⁴ Furthermore, in response to the cineastes’ complaints about the high production costs, the rising prices of film stock, the increase in plateau rents, and the lack of sound tapes and special lighting equipment,⁶⁵ the cornerstone of a new ‘Cinema City’ was laid by ‘Abdul Qādir Ḥātim in Gīza as compensation to include studios and factories, mostly to start manufacturing cinematic equipment and raw material locally, and partly to attract international directors and producers to choose Egypt as their films’ set location.⁶⁶

Finally, the GEICRT established the General Company for Film Distribution and Exhibition (*al-Sharika al-‘amma li tawzī‘ wa ‘arḍ al-aflām*) to supervise the purchase and construction of new movie theatres.⁶⁷ As a first measure, the state transferred the management of previously sequestered exhibition houses to the General Company for Film Distribution and Exhibition.⁶⁸ This company, it was suggested, allegedly aimed at constructing 4000 movie theatres, one theatre for every village, in an

⁶⁴ ‘Umar, “Azmat al-sīnima 3,” 7.

⁶⁵ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1937, 26 July 1965, 59; and no. 1938, 2 August 1965, 46-7.

⁶⁶ *Ruz al-yūsuf* 1931, 14 June 1965, 46; ‘Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 757; Nāṣir Ḥusayn, “Kayfa nu‘awid muassasat al-sīnima ila da‘m al-sīnima al-‘arabīyya lā al-ajnabīyya,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2245, 21 June 1971, 54-55.

⁶⁷ ‘Ukāsha, “al-Qiṭā‘ al-‘āmm,” 4; and Abū Shādī, *al-Waqā‘i*, 182.

⁶⁸ Abū Shādī, *al-Waqā‘i*, 182. For a list of the 298 movie theatres in Egypt in 1963, belonging to both the public and private sector, see Mahfouz, “les salles de projection,” 128.

effort to “generalize socialist entertainment and culture.”⁶⁹ Such a figure is most probably an exercise in exaggeration attesting to GEICRT’s over-enthusiasm rather than a building program that it meant to fulfill. Indeed, at that stage, the GEICRT can be criticized only for being too ambitious, almost blinding itself from seeing beyond its own tunnel vision.

As a result of these actions, the total amount of salaries paid out to GEICRT’s employees increased from £E 29,000 in 1962 to £E 118,000 in 1963, and, if ‘Ukāsha is to be believed, to £E 1,939,000 in 1964.⁷⁰ Not to dismiss ‘Ukāsha’s figures as farfetched, this huge rise of salaries might become plausible only if they included as well the wages given to actors, directors, scriptwriters and other film professionals commissioned by the GEICRT on a contractual basis. Suggested as it was, the GEICRT succeeded in reviving the film industry, dodging the escalation of one adverse situation—unemployment and stagnation—only to get caught up in the labyrinth of another, namely, liquidity deficit.⁷¹

The hurried fashion in which these four companies were created left little if any room for advanced planning or enough time for the GEICRT to raise sufficient capital,⁷² hampering its future operations by undercapitalization, which happened to be the case

⁶⁹ Medhat Mahfouz, “les salles de projections dans l’industrie cinématographique,” in Wassef, *Egypte*, 127.

⁷⁰ These figures are taken from ‘Ukāsha, “al-Qiṭā‘ al-‘āmm,” 5. Some might argue that the increase in salaries in 1963 is due to the fact that in that year, CSI was incorporated into GEICRT. Unlike CSI, not only did GEICRT get involved in cinema affairs, but also oversaw the operation of two other means of mass communication; hence, the number of employees naturally increased. This argument, while it might explain the increase between 1962 and 1963, fails to clarify the massive increase in the total salaries of 1964.

⁷¹ Ibrahim ‘Umar, “Azmat al-sīnima 1,” *al-Ahrām* 21028, 23 November 1971, 7; Naguib Mahfouz’s testimony as cited in “al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba,” 80-81.

⁷² From the required capital of £E 3,570,000 only £E 2,018,000 were secured by the Ministry of Treasury. ‘Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 757.

for the entire public sector.⁷³ GEICRT's budget for the year 1963 was spent on refurbishing and developing the film infrastructure, leaving little or no money for actual film production.⁷⁴ Because the GEICRT was consistently trying to up-date the necessary tools for production, it bought the above-mentioned studios without any asset valuation, unknowingly paying much more for what was basically considered as dead or useless assets—either not functioning properly or in desperate need of up-grading.⁷⁵ This, of course, added to GEICRT's financial burden, for it felt obligated to renovate and equip these studios, along with the exhibition houses, with up-to-date machines before initiating film production. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that by the end of 1963, *Filmontage*, in spite of the number of scripts it paid advances for, had only produced three feature films, two of which had basically the same plot; Maḥmūd Dhūlfīqār's *The Soft Hands* (*al-Aydī al-nā'ima*, starring Sabāḥ and Aḥmad Maẓhar), Muḥammad Sālīm's musical film *Cairo at Night* (*al-Qāhira fī al-layl*, starring Sabāḥ, Shādyā, and Fāyza Aḥmad), and the latter's remake *Utmost Joy* (*Muntaha al-farah*, featuring Sabāḥ, Shādyā, Muḥammad 'Abdul Wahāb, Farīd al-Aṭrash, Najwa Fuād and Fāyza Aḥmad as themselves). Interestingly, the heading, "[*Filmontage*] presents the greatest cinematic event," was boldly positioned at the top of the *Utmost Joy*'s poster, referring probably to the wide selection of big names in hopes of attracting large number of moviegoers. Indeed, the reception of these films helped the GEICRT to

⁷³ *ibid.* See also Mursī, "al-Qiṭā' al-'āmm wal-istithmār al-khāṣ," 17.

⁷⁴ See the testimony of Ḥasan Fā'iq 'Abdul Ḥamīd, then general director of Bank Miṣr and a member of the financial committee that evaluated the public sector in "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 79.

⁷⁵ 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 757. For more on the issue of asset valuation, especially the case of Studio Galāl, see the testimonies of Fahmī 'Alī Ḥasan, 'Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan, and Mary Buṭrus Yūnis (Quiny) in "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 78, 83 and 85.

identify weaknesses in its initial programme.⁷⁶ For instance, *The Soft Hands* remained in theatres for seven consecutive weeks, outlasting all other films in 1963, however, its box office revenues paradoxically did not exceed £E 11,000, a relatively very low turnover.⁷⁷ Taking into consideration that an average film's budget in the mid 1960s roughly estimated to £E 25,000, it becomes reasonable to speculate that *The Soft Hands* was not commercially successful,⁷⁸ most probably for reasons that have to do with the number and kind of theatres in which it was projected. It did not escape GEICRT's attention that this required, first, a re-evaluation of its existing distribution plan, and then an immediate action to increase the number of its movie theatres. In order to increase its films' revenues, the GEICRT had to improve its distribution sector, expand its exhibition capacity, and bisect its production division into two separate entities, one in charge of making low-budget, profit-making films or ones to be sold to the television sector (known as B-Films) and the other responsible for the production of good quality films (A-Films). Such a GEICRT *modus operandi* suggests the prevalence of a pragmatic approach to solving problems, based on a trial-and-error method of learning, as it appeared to be the case for other sectors of the Egyptian economy.

It is not possible, in this thesis, to list all of GEICRT's efforts to further expand the parameters of the public sector, only the most important ones will be the subject of analysis. In 1963, the GEICRT sponsored the formation of the Scriptwriting Institute

⁷⁶ See the testimonies of Ḥasan Fā'iq 'Abdul Ḥamīd, Khalīl Shawqī, and Yūsuf Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 79 and 82.

⁷⁷ The box office revenues of *The Soft Hands* and the films of that season were reported in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1884, 20 July 1964, 65.

⁷⁸ As reported in *Ruz al-yūsuf* based on the proceedings of a meeting held between Ṣalāḥ 'Āmr and Egyptian filmmakers, no. 1938, 2 August 1965, 46-7. For example, the budget of an average film in 1952 was around £E 22,700. See *al-Kawākib* 76 (1952).

(*Ma'had al-sināryū*), hiring respected writers and scriptwriters such Yūsuf Idrīs, Anīs Mansūr, James Hetz, 'Alī al-Zurqānī, Hilmī Ḥalīm and Ṣalāḥ 'Izz al-Dīn to lecture and train students to become professional scriptwriters.⁷⁹ This arrangement came as a reaction to the shortage of scriptwriters, a large number of whom left Egypt.⁸⁰ Furthermore, in mid 1964, the General Company for Distribution and Exhibition resumed relations with international distribution companies especially after the GEICRT took over three of the most prestigious film companies in Egypt, the Eastern Company for the Cinema (*al-Sharika al-sharqīyya lil-sīnima*),⁸¹ Dollar Film, and the Orient Company (*Sharikat al-Sharq*).⁸² This resulted, first, in the partial eradication of the control that some private distributors exerted on Egyptian cineastes, and second, the importation of a considerable number of foreign films which were to be screened at a number of newly built or renovated state-owned exhibition houses.⁸³ Additionally, cinematic delegations were sent to Baghdad, Beirut, and Rabat, among other cities, in an effort to reopen Arab markets for Egyptian film.⁸⁴ *Coprofilm*, under the direction of cineaste Faṭḥī Ibrāhīm, also invigorated international film co-productions in Egypt by

⁷⁹ al-Qalyūbī, "L'enseignement," 100.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Decree no. 285 for the year 1964 concerning the sequestration of al-Sharika al-sharqīyya lil-sīnima wa dār sīnima Rivoli, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 10, 13 June 1964, 74.

⁸² Nāṣir Ḥusayn in "Limādha umimat sharikāt al-tawzī'," *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1869, 6 April 1964.

⁸³ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1867, 30 March 1964, 51.

⁸⁴ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1873, 4 May 1964, 44; no.1885, 27 July 1964, 59; and no. 1904, 7 December 1964, 42.

initiating its first co-productions with Italy and France, while negotiating with Algeria, Greece, India, Jordan, Kuwait and Lebanon for potential collaboration.⁸⁵

From 1964 onwards, the GEICRT persevered in its mission to upgrade and modernize the infrastructure of the film industry. A new public production company was created by the GEICRT under the name of Cairo Company for the Cinema (*Sharikat al-qāhira lil-sīnima*) to produce committed or directed films (*aflām hādifa*). A few months later, the General Company for Film Distribution and Exhibition was split into two companies, the General Company for Film Exhibition (*al-Sharika al-āmma li dūr al-‘arḍ*) and the General Company for Film Distribution (*al-Sharika al-āmma li tawzī‘ al-aflām*), increasing the number of GEICRT’s film companies from four to six.⁸⁶ By early 1965, the recently created General Company for Film Exhibition had purchased the entire first degree exhibition houses in Cairo from the Sequestration Committee⁸⁷ and built four theatres in four different villages amounting to 58 state-run theatres in total, while signing a five-year plan entailing the construction of one hundred theatres in various rural areas.⁸⁸ With a view to ameliorating the quality of film scripts, a writing bureau was established by the GEICRT to be run by two respected writers Sa‘d Makāwī and ‘Abdul Rahmān al-Sharqāwī with the intention of evaluating scripts before purchasing them.⁸⁹ In a campaign targeting the long-established star system,

⁸⁵ For a list of these co-productions see al-Jamal, *Aflām al-intāj al-mushtarak*. Also see *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1896, 12 October 1964, 44; no. 1903, 30 November 1964, 42; no. 1932, 12 June 1965, 43; and no. 1935, 12 July 1965, 67.

⁸⁶ ‘Ukāsha, “al-Qiṭā‘ al-‘āmm,” 14.

⁸⁷ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no.1894, 28 September 1964, 39.

⁸⁸ Munīr ‘Abdul Wahāb, “The Cinema and Government,” in *The Cinema in the Arab Countries*, 168-70.

while also paving the path for new aspiring scriptwriters, GEICRT's production companies were prohibited to buy the copyright of more than one novel annually from anyone, regardless of who and how famous they were.⁹⁰ Also, filmmakers and scriptwriters were restricted to no more than three public-sector films per year.⁹¹ This series of developments continued and peaked in 1966, and by taking certain procedures such as bestowing on *Coprofilm* the exclusive right to import and distribute foreign films in Egypt,⁹² the GEICRT was proceeding forward with its plans to rescue Egyptian cinema.

D. Conclusion

The wide variety of responsibilities that the GEICRT undertook shortly after its establishment, and most importantly, the trial-and-error manner in which it pursued some of its tasks, might conceivably be construed more as an immediate response to pressing concerns than a well-studied plan to eliminate the growing problems of the film industry. The state's initial mission was to tackle the issues of unemployment and cash flow deficiency, both of which were successfully resolved. In so doing, the state single-handedly revived a threatened industry, but inevitably generated unexpected problems, to be discussed in the following chapter. Among the relatively large number of films produced by *Filmontage* and Cairo Company for the Cinema between 1963 and

⁸⁹ The center had two departments, one for dialogue ran by Sa'd Makāwī and another for scenario managed by 'Abdul Rahmān al-Sharqāwī. *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1934, 5 July 1965, 49.

⁹⁰ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1912, 1 February 1965, 44.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1963, 24 January 1966, 47.

1966 that stood at fifty-seven, only a handful were critically acclaimed and some were commercially successful,⁹³ understandably a result of the hasty but prompt action plan. As for the content of some of these films, it was clear that social realist features started to appear, addressing such issues as poverty, labor, corruption, and social injustice,⁹⁴ problems that the Nasserist regime was trying to tackle as well. Not surprisingly, the total amount of income that the public-sector films generated was insufficient for the finance of other films, leading the GEICRT to consume capital reserves, secure state subsidies and undergo further re-organizations, all now conceivable because it was, after all, a kind of state adventure.

⁹³ See Appendix at the end of this thesis for a list of these films.

⁹⁴ Among these films were Tawfīq Ṣālih's *The Rebels* (*al-Mutamariidūn*, 1968), Henri Barakāt's *The Sin* (*al-Ḥarām*, 1965) and Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf's *Cairo 30* (*al-Qāhira 30*, 1966).

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN EGYPTIAN CINEMA, 1966-1971

Through steady and effective endeavors, the GEICRT achieved its primary purpose for existence—the revival of a dying national film industry. Since its inception in 1963, the GEICRT had begun to expand its parameters to include an increasing volume of film assets in a palpable effort to eliminate film stagnation and, as a byproduct, reduce overall unemployment in the country. This expansion was discussed in the previous chapter, which also showcased how, between 1963 and 1966, the GEICRT responded quickly to mounting and, more often than not, unexpected problems. Because such challenging issues, both old and recent, required immediate action, GEICRT's modes of operation were understandably pragmatic, making it more difficult and impractical to follow a set plan of action; hence, the drift towards an ever-changing but reactive film policy. From initially aspiring to maximize revenues in order to contribute to national economic welfare to eventually securing loans to persevere its being, GEICRT's priorities revealed greater ambition. Its ultimate objective, however, remained unaltered; to rescue an industry in jeopardy, a mission that the GEICRT single-handedly and consciously undertook.

While fairly efficient at grappling with impediments that required prompt attention, the GEICRT did not embark on tackling systemic problems. Instead it had to attend to a host of cinema-related difficulties. This is where this chapter begins. The

following sections subsequently address the downsizing policy adopted by the state in 1966 to counter difficulties in the management of the cinema sector, only to have it modified in the wake of the *Naksa* in 1967. For the first and probably last time, ideological considerations were exceptionally given higher priority in state film policy over economic imperatives, manifested in a noticeable change in the political discourse of both Egyptian cinema and the public media at large. The outcome of such a transformation was the ascendancy of a short-lived, politically critical national cinema. With the launching of Anwar al-Sadat's Corrective Movement (*al-Haraka al-taṣḥīḥīyya*) in 1971, which basically aimed at dismantling the Nasserist experiment including the public sector in general, both this chapter and the story of public-sector film production reach an end.

A. A Struggling GEICRT: Between Inherent Problems, External Problems and Unexpected Complications.

1. Internal Problems

When addressing problems that the GEICRT inherited from the past and which dramatically affected present operations, only one specific issue stands out as being the most crucial and menacing of all, namely the prevalence of a profit-oriented mentality in the film industry.¹ In order to comprehend the actual threat posed by such a mindset on the progress of the public sector in Egyptian cinema, it would be essential to look back to the origins and subsequent evolution of this mentality. Since its beginning in the twentieth century, the film industry had been, and probably still is, commercial in orientation, concentrating exclusively on the seeming entertainment needs of the film-

¹ For a fuller appreciation of the inherent problems of Egyptian cinema, see 'Abdul 'Azīz, "al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya," 140-42.

going public, composed overwhelmingly of the laboring and middle classes seeking consolation in the make-belief world of films.² In his book *The Cinema*, first published in 1936, Egyptian director Aḥmad Badrakhān, who later became chief consultant of GEICRT in 1963, explained what he regarded as the essence of Egyptian popular cinema, clearly romantic in nature:

Love is the basis of all scripts [...]. Love in cinema is simpler than in novels and plays: no psychological analysis, no conflict of conscience, none of this. All that is required is a rivalry between two men who love the same woman, or two women who vie for the love of one man, and this is what a film can best show [...]. A good story takes place in a location with beautiful scenery or in splendid houses, and entails the emergence of sudden or natural obstacles that threaten the protagonists' happiness and endanger their lives. However, it is much better if they are able to overcome [these difficulties] in the end.³

According to film critic Samīr Farīd, this book was regarded as the constitution of Egyptian cinema,⁴ introducing a formula, heavily influenced by Hollywood, that producers, filmmakers, scriptwriters and distributors consistently followed in order to guarantee commercial success. Films challenging this formula, for example Kāmil al-Tilimsānī's *The Black Market* (*al-Sūq al-sawdā'*, 1945), though critically acclaimed, were, not surprisingly, box office failures. A possible reason for this, if Badrakhān's explanation is taken into account, lies in the fact that the viewing public "does not like to see the world in which it lives. On the contrary, [it] aspires to see a [magic] world

² According to Lizbeth Malkmus, "one should know that Egyptian cinema has always been plot-oriented—if nothing else, you always get a story. This is sometimes known, pejoratively, as 'commercial' cinema." In "The 'New' Egyptian Cinema," 33. For a fuller appreciation of the origins of commercial cinema, see Walter Armbrust, "New Cinema, Commercial Cinema, and the Modernist Tradition in Egypt," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 15, Arab Cinematics: Toward the New and the Alternative (1995): 81-129.

³ Although I was not able to find a copy of *The Cinema*, many excerpts are cited in Faīd, "La censure," 105 and "Nahwa manhaj 'ilmī li kitābat tārīkhuna al-sīnīmā'ī," *al-Ṭalī'a* 3 (1973): 152.

⁴ *ibid.*

that can only be found in fiction.”⁵ Added to that equation is the dominance of private capital in the film industry. The essential tools and necessary resources for film production were predominantly in the hands of foreigners and local entrepreneurs who were largely seeking to maximize profit. This being the case, it is only logical that naïve comedies, romantic melodramas, and musicals brimming with belly dancers, all of which resulted in a high turn-over, prevailed on the big screen. Notwithstanding efforts made by Ṭal‘at Ḥarb, the founder of Bank Miṣr, to foster the birth of a national cinema by establishing Studio Miṣr and the Miṣr Company for Performance Arts and the Cinema, the film industry remained at the mercy of foreign investors. Paradoxically, this was regarded the Egyptian cinema’s first Golden Age, occurred “at least financially, when movie-going became the most popular form of urban entertainment in Egypt and much the rest of the region,”⁶ eventually making Cairo “Hollywood on the Nile.”⁷ The protracted exposure to this type of commercial cinema, imported or locally produced, gradually shaped the mentality of both Egyptian filmmakers and spectators to perceive films primarily as a form of entertainment and, more probably, escapism.⁸

Even after the Free Officers’ Revolution succeeded in abolishing the constitutional monarchy of King Fārūq and ending the British occupation of Egypt in 1952, Egyptian cinema was not transformed into a kind of revolutionary cinema, one

⁵ Farīd, “La censure,” 105

⁶ Flibbert, *State and Cinema*, 451.

⁷ Viola Shafik, “Egyptian Cinema: Hollywood on the Nile,” in *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/print/opr/t343/e0209> (accessed April 9, 2017). Other appellations given to the Egyptian cinema included “Hollywood of the Middle East”, “Hollywood of the Arab East,” and “Hollywood of the Arab World.”

⁸ In his memoirs, ‘Ukāsha explains how years of exposure to imported American films left a huge impact on the Egyptian audience’s taste. *Mudhakirātī*, 777-778.

that recognized “the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, [...] the decolonization of culture.”⁹ Nor did the Egyptian cineastes follow in the footsteps of their Indian counterparts, who roughly around the same time India took its independence in 1947, launched the Parallel Cinema as an alternative to the mainstream dance-and-song commercial Hindi cinema (known today as Bollywood).¹⁰ It appears as if the received commercial conventions of filmmaking were so deeply rooted in the minds of Egyptians that neither the cineastes nor the viewing public were eager to break away from the long-established system or experience a new brand of cinematic language.¹¹ When the post-revolutionary regime replaced the censorship law of 1947 with a more general and less restrictive one in 1955,¹² many filmmakers continued to consciously, or maybe unconsciously, avoid topics or scenes that were previously prohibited by law—as is clearly evident in the films of that time-period.¹³ The fact that

⁹ Also referred to as Third cinema; the definition of Third Cinema differs from one scholar to another but they almost unanimously agree that it is not the same as Third World Cinema, which mostly denotes “ [the production] of commercial cinema that competes, with varying degrees of success, with Hollywood product in domestic markets.” See Stephen Crofts, “Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14/3 (1993): 54. For a fuller appreciation of the different types of cinemas, see Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000). Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, “Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World,” in *New Latin America Cinema: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations*, vol. I, Michael T. Martin, ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 37.

¹⁰ To read more about India’s Parallel Cinema, a new cinematic movement and a precursor to the Indian New Wave, see Pradip Krishen, “Knocking at The Doors of Public Culture: India’s Parallel,” *Public Culture* 4/1 (1991): 25-41.

¹¹ Ilhām Sayf al-Naṣr, “George Sadoul yaktub ‘an al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1927, 17 May 1965, 56-7; and al-Tilimsānī, “Sīnima al-dawla sīnima badīla,” 70. In Malkmus’ words, “years of confused distribution and marketing policies in Egypt have privileged exploitation films, and filmgoers have become so used to slick, fast-paced action in movies [...] that they no longer know there is an alternative.” In “The ‘New’ Egyptian Cinema,” 30.

¹² For more details about these laws, see chapter 2, footnote 25.

these cineastes were subjected to fifty years of a politically detached and privately funded type of cinema could be, perhaps, viewed as the origin of this particular practice of self-censorship.¹⁴ However, the apparent lack of commitment on the part of Egyptian film professionals, in the sense that they did not wholeheartedly commit themselves to the mission of the revolution in decrying all forms of imperialism, should not be simply overlooked when critically analyzing Egyptian cinema.¹⁵ It is not possible for a state to create, on its own, a cinematic movement that reflects social and political developments without the cineastes' approbation.¹⁶ As long as Egyptian cineastes were held hostage to private capital and placed at the mercy of businessmen, they were incapable of thoroughly rejecting the capitalist system or openly challenging ingrained conventions. Fearing the shortage of funds, even more, the disdain of viewers, filmmakers willingly continued to apply Badrakhān's formula for commercial success, replacing traditional melodramas with "revolutionary melodramas."¹⁷ Thus, in the first years that followed

¹³ For a list and analysis of some of these films, see Viola Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Muṣṭafā Darwīsh, "Sīnima muftara 'alayha," *al-Hilāl* 95 (1987); Sharaffudīn, *al-Sīyyasa wal-sīnima*, 82-4; and Hussein Amin, "Freedom as a Value in Arab Media: Perceptions and Attitudes among Journalists," *Political Communications* 19/2 (2002): 130. Amin speaks mainly about Journalists but his definition of self-censorship could be applied here as well.

¹⁵ The principles of the revolution were laid out in Nasser's book, *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution*, Dorothy Thompson, trans. (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1955).

¹⁶ Alā' al-Dīb addressed a similar concern in his article, "al-Fann wal-dawla," *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1803, 31 December 1962, 44.

¹⁷ For a comprehensive survey and analysis of this type of cinema, see Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*. In another article, Gordon argues, "I do not suggest that from a cinematic perspective these films are in any way revolutionary, or that they were intended to fuel either an artistic or cultural revolution. They look and sound entirely conventional by Egyptian studio—or even Hollywood—standards. Yet by openly challenging traditional politics and social constructs, and by expressing hopes for a new Egypt, the producers of these films hoped to

the revolution, Egyptian cinema remained true to its original non-committal, profit-seeking nature.

Beginning, however, with the establishment of the public sector in Egyptian cinema in 1957, represented first by the CSI and then by the GEICRT from 1963 onwards, attempts were made to encourage the production of quality films that cohered to a certain political and aesthetic program. Clearly, the economic, cultural, and ideological benefits of having a vigorous cinema sector had begun to be recognized by the state, propelling the creation of sustainable public film institutions. As a result of a brief cinematic awakening in the late 1950s, the Minister of Culture and National Guidance, Tharwat 'Ukāsha, founded the Higher Institute for the Cinema ultimately to serve as an incubator for next-generation film professionals, who were meant to be “responsible for the relative homogeneity and continuity of Egyptian filmmaking.”¹⁸ Irrespective of these initiatives, the public sector was not able to liberate the film industry from the entrenched, traditional profit-conscious mindset. Indeed, apart from a few individual endeavors reflecting a drift towards a more realistic cinematic representation of Egyptian society,¹⁹ the models of production, distribution and exhibition never ceased to follow those of mainstream Hollywood cinema, depending heavily on the existence of a star system and the re-projection of stale plots.²⁰

move the nation in bold new directions.” In “Class-Crossed Lovers: Popular Film and Social Change in Nasser’s New Egypt,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 18/4 (2001): 389-390.

¹⁸ Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 24.

¹⁹ Examples are available in the second chapter of this thesis.

²⁰ Lizbeth, “The ‘New’ Egyptian Cinema,” 31.

2. External Problems

The situation became more complex, and seemingly more dangerous, as the commercial mentality started to feed upon external problems, and vice versa. The administration of the public sector embarked on improving the quality of films by means of securing loans for serious films that were deemed artistically promising or could steer the audience in the socialist direction. The countervailing response to this development, however, came from a group of external distributors who created an alternative distribution society in Beirut, the General Organization for Distributors (*al-Jam'īyya al-āmma lil-muwazi'īn*) in 1963, aiming at financing Egyptian private film professionals with the intention of sustaining a type of shallow cinema not that different from those produced under the ancient regime.²¹ Furthermore, although the GEICRT had tried tirelessly to resume the exportation of Egyptian films to Arab markets, not all of the Arab governments were cooperative. The establishment of the GEICRT coincided on one hand with the creation of similar institutions in Iraq, Syria, Algeria, and Tunisia,²² and on the other hand with the rise of other national cinemas in neighboring and friendly markets such as Iran and Turkey.²³ The governments of these

²¹ Nāṣir Ḥusayn, "al-Muntij al-jadīd wa ashya' ukhra," *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1850, 25 November 1963, 44. See also Naguib Mahfouz's testimony in "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 80.

²² In 1959, shortly after King Fayṣal II's government was overthrown, the Iraqi new government established the General Institution for the Cinema and Theatre (*al-Mu'assasa al-āmma lil-sīnima wal-masrah*). Four years later, its Syrian counterpart founded the Cinema Institution (*Mu'assasat al-sīnima*) in 1963. As for the Maghrib part of the Arab world, the Algerian government established the National Office for Film Trade and Industry (*al-Diwān al-waṭanī lil-tijjāra wal-ṣinā'a al-sīnimā'īyya*) in 1964 directly after nationalizing the film industry. That same year, the Tunisian state created the Anonymous Tunisian Society for Film Production and Expansion (*Société Anonyme Tunisienne de Production et d'Expansion Cinématographique - SATPAC*).

²³ Reza J. Poudeh and M. Reza Shirvani, "Issues and Paradoxes in the Development of Iranian National Cinema: An Overview," *Iranian Studies* 41/3 (2008): 324; and Ahmet Gürata, "Tears

countries, now promoting and expanding their own national film production, decreased their intake of foreign films, including Egyptian films.²⁴ If statistics were to be believed, Egypt did not export any film to Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco in 1965, while the number of its exports to Syria dropped from 54 in 1961 to 19 in 1965, from 74 to 53 in Lebanon, 99 to 24 in Gaza, 58 to 32 in Jordan, 127 to 67 in Libya, and from 69 to 25 in the Sudan.²⁵ To translate these numbers into words, this drop in the number of exported films, which historically used to amount to 60% of the total revenue of Egyptian film production, might plausibly explain the financial failure of some public-sector initiatives—a factor that, surprisingly, is not taken into consideration in the existing literature.

3. *Recent Complications*

Combined together, this inherited mindset and external problems were ample to stir up a crisis in the film industry, but adding to them new complications arising from recent measures, the situation inexorably exploded. When ‘Abdul Qādir Ḥātim succeeded ‘Ukāsha in late 1962 as the Minister of Culture and National Guidance, their different understandings of the cinema became evident, particularly in their dissimilar attitude to the film industry. Whereas ‘Ukāsha regarded the cinema as a great art form conveying a cultural and educational message,²⁶ Ḥātim, who prioritized radio and

of Love: Egyptian Cinema in Turkey (1938-1950),” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 30 (2004): 55-82.

²⁴ Al-Qalyūbī, “al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya,” 61-2.

²⁵ Karen Finlon Dajani, “Cairo: The Hollywood of the Arab World,” *Gazette* 26 (1980): 94.

²⁶ To learn more about ‘Ukāsha’s perception of the cinema, see his speech at the National Assembly on 16 June 1969 as cited in Wahba, *Cultural Policy*, 34-35.

television over cinema, still perceived the latter as a mere communication instrument, reliant for its success on the production of films rendering to the presumed tastes of the Egyptian public.²⁷ Apart from this, the socio-political and economic transformations that Egypt was experiencing at the time Ḥātīm was appointed drove him to take more drastic and interventionist actions than his predecessor. Shortly after the creation of the GEICRT, Ḥātīm began actual public film production, which in fact ignited an eight-year debilitating competition between an anxious private sector and an ambitious public sector.²⁸ Allegedly, the public sector was supposed to produce quality and engaged films that the private sector, with so much at stake, was not willing to finance,²⁹ assuming that the former was now free from financial constraints and commercial stipulations exerted by private film distributors.³⁰ This, nonetheless, did not really happen as it was shown in the preceding section. Instead of commissioning the production of a limited number of quality films that aimed at generalizing the new socialist principles of the National Charter, the GEICRT, for various considerations discussed in the previous chapter, was obliged to produce a large number of low-budget

²⁷ For more details about this conflict between qualitative and quantitative film policies see Abū Shādī, “al-Qiṭā‘ al-‘āmm al-sīnimā’ī fi miṣr,” 321; and Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*, 31. As for the growing tension between the cultural and informational aspect of the GEICRT, see al-Jamal, *Aflām al-intāj al-mushtarak*, 35. Also see the testimonies about Naguib Mahfouz and Muḥammad Rajā’ī in “al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba,” 80 and 84.

²⁸ According to Iḥsān ‘Abdul Qudūs, the competition between the private and public sectors did not stand on a healthy basis whereby a yearly plan supervised the cooperation and coordination between them. In *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1864, 2 March 1964, 42.

²⁹ In Magdi Wahba’s words, the public sector was to “sponsor a young generation of filmmakers, especially the graduates of the Higher Institute [for the] Cinema, for films which might not find a ready response among the more commercially minded producers of the private sector. In *Cultural Policy*, 33.

³⁰ To name one of these constraints, external film distributors preferred to finance films that featured well-known actors in hopes of garnering commercial success, thus sustaining a long-established star system. Naṣir Ḥusayn, “Ḥarb al-a‘ṣāb dūd al-sīnima al-miṣriyya,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2021, 6 March 1967, 34.

films. Moreover, among the public sector's many responsibilities was providing technical services and financial assistance to the private sector as well, which remained subject to the old profit seeking mentality. As such, the cinema as an industry was saved, but not yet liberated of bygone flaws. Between 1963 and 1966, the GEICRT produced fifty-seven public films and funded an additional thirty-seven private films,³¹ of which only six were deemed artistically valuable by film critics, while the rest were unoriginal replicas of the pre-public sector conventional cinema or which copied American films.³²

Furthermore, in the absence of any sense of collective commitment on the part of the cineastes, incidents of squandering public funds started to surface.³³ Now that advances and funds were secured by the public sector, some cineastes, including actors, directors, and technicians, availed themselves of this opportunity to fill their pockets. The budget of an average public film largely exceeded that of a private one for no apparent reason. The salaries of film professionals contracted by the public sector doubled, if not tripled, as did the number of film stock used in the production of a public film. Besides, the prolonged shooting schedules of public films that, more often

³¹ In an interview with Su'ād Zuhayr, Yūsuf Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, the general director of the General Company for the Distribution, claimed that the number of private films funded by the GEICRT between 1963 and 1965 was thirty-seven films costing around E£ 850000. *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1969, 7 March 1966, 43-45.

³² For a list of these films, see the Appendix at the end of this thesis. The critically acclaimed public films that were produced between 1963 and 1966 were: 'Abdul Raḥmān al-Khamīsī's *The Penalty* (*al-Jazā'*, 1965 – starring Shams al-Bārūdī and Ḥusayn al-Sharbīnī); Khalīl Shawqī's *The Mountain* (*al-Jabal*, 1965 – starring Ṣalāḥ Qābīl and Samīra Aḥmad); Henri Barakāt's *The Sin* (*al-Ḥarām*, 1965 – starring Fātin Ḥamāma and 'Abdullah al-Ghayth); Ḥusayn Kamāl's *The Impossible* (*al-Mustaḥīl*, 1965 – starring Ṣalāḥ Maṣṣūr and Faṭḥīyya Shāhīn); Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf's *Cairo 30* (*al-Qāhira 30*, 1966 – starring Ḥamdī Aḥmad, Su'ād Ḥusnī and Aḥmad Maḥzar); and Faṭīn Wahāb's *My Wife, A General Director* (*Mratī mudīr 'āmm*, 1966 – starring Shādyā and Ṣalāḥ Dhūlfīqār).

³³ For more details about these incidents, see *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1888, 17 August 1964, 44; no. 1969, 7 March 1966, 43-45; and no. 2017, 6 February 1967, 16-17.

than not, were extended deliberately.³⁴ Moreover, when the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance decided in 1964 to replace monetary prizes, given away during film festivals or as incentives granted to artists working in the film industry, with symbolic awards in an effort to reduce expenditures, the cineastes, as was reported in the press, condemned such a decision and openly opposed it.³⁵ This could be, perhaps, viewed as an indication of the cineastes' preoccupation with financial concerns rather than the quality of the films they were supposed to furnish.³⁶ When the chairman of the GEICRT, Ṣalāh 'Āmr, invited filmmakers commissioned by the public sector to his office to openly discuss the production plan of 1965-66 in terms of content, quantity and quality, only twelve of them attended.³⁷ This nonchalance that the cineastes exhibited regarding their presumed role in the intended cultural revolution that Nasser called for, and viewed as a natural byproduct of his political and social revolution,³⁸ is echoed in Rushdī Abāza's explanation for the actors' need for higher salaries:

I have two cars, one that is ordinary and another parked in front of my house for twenty-eight days a month, which I only use when I want to meet with my fans. These all cost money. Every season, I have to buy sixty suits, most of which I wear while filming. We live under extraordinary circumstances that obligate us to live in luxury [...]. I guess if I was to be chauffeured in a Rolls Royce to the Berlin [Film Festival], I would have returned [to Egypt] with the third prize. Cinema is [about] slyness and appearances and we, the Egyptians, are the masters of such things.³⁹

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ As reported by Jamīl al-Bājūrī in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1878, 23 March 1964, 44-5.

³⁶ Ḥasan, *Tārīkh al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya*, 224-25; 'Abdul Wahāb, "The Cinema and Government," 168-70; and Naṣir Ḥusayn, "Mahrajanāt li-shirā' al-kravatāt," *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1871, 20 April 1964.

³⁷ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1938, 2 August 1965, 46-47.

³⁸ Naguib Mahfouz and Sa'd al-Dīn Wahba addressed the lack of commitment on the part of the cineastes in their testimonies in "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 80 and 87.

Nevertheless, Egyptian cineastes were not the only ones deserving of blame for the severity of the situation, that is, the maintenance of this profit-prodigal mentality; bureaucrats working for the GEICRT also had a hand in aggravating it. Although very beneficial to the continuation of Egyptian film industry, the measures taken by the GEICRT between 1963 and 1966 started to backfire before too long. To begin with, the fundamental problem had to do with the complications arising from the massive influx of employees coming from different fields to work at the GEICRT or one of its companies. That there were not enough jobs for all of these employees did not stop the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance from carrying on a wild and random recruiting process. Several newly created posts had no actual function at all, for example, executive producer (*muntij munafidh*) who received a monthly salary without doing any work.⁴⁰ Many of the hired employees, who lacked any sense of forward-looking planning, were appointed in positions that they knew very little about, resulting in the purchase of plots and stories that were not adaptable to the big screen.⁴¹ In principle, there was no rule obligating anyone working in and for the public sector to sever ties with the private sector. However, in some cases, a producer hired by Cairo Company for Film Production for example was not allowed to produce or participate in

³⁹ Rushdī Abāza, proceedings of the *Arba' mu'tamarāt* that were held on 12 and 13 October 1966. See also Ṣalāḥ Ḥāfiẓ, "Hal intaha 'aṣr al-sīnimā'ī al-jāhil," *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2023, 20 March 1967, 30-32.

⁴⁰ Murād, "Ḥiwār ma' Tawfiq Ṣāliḥ," 207.

⁴¹ "al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya fi khaṭar," *al-Hilāl* no. 10, 1 October 1967, 114-116; 'Umar, "Azmat al-sīnima 1," 7; it was reported in *Ruz al-yūsuf* in 1965 that the planning unit in GEICRT started to review the stories purchased by *Filmontage* between 1963 and 1965 only to find that the latter bought 55 stories for which it paid between £E 400 to £E 1000 as advances, and of which only 10 could be adapted to the big screen. No. 1917, 8 March 1965, 44. See also the testimonies of Fahmī 'Alī Ḥasan and 'Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan in "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqṛīr al-nīyyāba," 83 and 85.

any other project funded by another company, be it public or private.⁴² This condition was not fully respected. Ṣubḥī Farḥāt, ‘Abbās Ḥilmī, Ḥilmī Rafla, Ramsīs Naguīb and Maḥmūd Kāmil are only a few names who, though working for Cairo Company, continued to produce films for the private sector.⁴³

Moreover, this inefficient bureaucracy, though condemned repeatedly by Nasser,⁴⁴ was also an automatic aftereffect of the primitive organizational structure of the GEICRT, which generally depended upon complete functional and sectorial divisions (*al-taqṣīm al-naw‘ī*) in managing its companies.⁴⁵ Taking into consideration that Egyptian film industry had suffered from its early beginnings by a lack of coordination between its subsectors, this type of partition only added fuel to the fire. One reason that might explain such a shortsighted decision lies in GEICRT’s over-enthusiasm and the short timeframe within which it was operating, all of which required hasty intervention. Instead of adhering to a socialist model of organization—now that Egypt aspired to become a model for socialist change—it continued to abide by a somehow archaic structure. A socialist common trend of organizing a film sector, as it was reported by some Egyptian critics film critics in the press, entailed the establishment of production units, each of which contained its own studio, a distribution department and a selected number of exhibition houses, all harmonically operating to

⁴² ‘Adlī Fahīm, “Ḥikāyat al-sīnima,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2049, 18 September 1967, 22-25.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Nasser was aware that inefficient bureaucracy was spreading throughout the whole public sector, addressing its impact on the country and the need to eliminate it in his speech during the opening session of *majlis al-umma* in 1965, as reported in *al-Ṭalī‘a* 10 (1965).

⁴⁵ As reported by Nāṣir Ḥusayn, *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1967, 21 February 1966, 44

serve film production.⁴⁶ Unlike such systems, GEICRT's companies worked independently,⁴⁷ each of which aimed at maximizing its own profit, sometimes at the expense of its sister companies, devastatingly affecting the quality of their sole product, Egyptian public films.⁴⁸ Under such circumstances, the business-oriented private sector, the largest beneficiary of this unhealthy competition between the public-sector companies, continued to survive and even expand. The press heavily criticized this situation, cynically observing how Egyptian film industry had become a "big restaurant [where] the private sector eats and the public sector pays."⁴⁹

B. GEICRT Reorganized: Prevailing Over Difficulties

Roughly around the same time, articles, written by journalists, artists, and intellectuals such as Naguib Mahfouz, Louis 'Awad, and Jamāl al-Bājūrī started appearing in the daily *al-Ahrām*, the popular *Ruz al-yūsuf*, and the leftist *al-Ṭalī'a*, denouncing the naïve and deteriorating quality of films, and at the same time calling for a more refined engaged cinema.⁵⁰ These articles covered news about international

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ These companies were *Filmontage*, *Coprofilm*, Cairo Company, the General Company for Studios, and the General Company for Film Exhibition and Distribution. *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1965, 7 February 1966, 40. See also Jamāl al-Laythī's and Sa'd al-Dīn Wahba's interviews in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1967, 21 February 1966, 44-45.

⁴⁸ In his articles, Aḥmad Ḥamrūsh addresses the harmful competition between *Filmontage* and Cairo Company represented by their respective chairmen, Sa'd al-Dīn Wahba and Jamāl al-Laythī. In *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2068, 29 January 1968, 37. See also the testimonies of Samīr Aḥmad 'Askar, a member of a committee formed to reassess the cinema sector, 'Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan, and Sa'd al-Dīn Wahba in "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqīr al-nīyyāba," 80, 86-87.

⁴⁹ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2201, 17 August 1970, 36. For a few examples, see Aḥmad Ḥamrūsh, *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1967, 21 February 1966, 46; and 'Umar Ibrāhīm, "Azmat al-sīnima 2," *al-Ahrām* no. 21029, 24 November 1971, 7.

cinemas, including but not limited to updates about socialist, revolutionary, neo-realist, and new wave cinema.⁵¹ In his article, “Towards a Socialist Cinema,” appearing in *al-Ṭalī‘a*, Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf defined socialist cinema as being:

The cinema of the masses [could only be achieved] if cineastes learn both the language and problems of the masses, [...] it is the cineaste’s responsibility to [...] glorify the people’s actions, to protect the state’s national interests and public policy, to denounce [...] colonialism [...].⁵²

Abū Sayf’s counterpart, Jamāl al-Laythī, also made an effort to raise awareness among the cineastes about the necessity of having a committed socialist cinema, pointing out that “any film which serves a political, humanistic or social cause serves our society.”⁵³ Additionally, voices advocating the separation of culture from national guidance, by extension art and cinema from radio and television, started to appear.⁵⁴ Even ‘Ukāsha had envisioned such a separation before his return to the Ministry.⁵⁵ Also, graduates from the Higher Institute for the Cinema and the Scriptwriting Institute, both pioneering ventures of the public sector, began operations, bringing with them a

⁵⁰ Interview with Naguib Mahfouz, Nāṣir Ḥusayn in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1955, 29 November 1965, 43-44; Jamāl al-Bājūrī, *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1875, May 1964, 48; and Louis ‘Awad, “Kḥiṭab maftūḥ ila wazīr al-thaqāfa,” *al-Ahrām*, 19 November 1965.

⁵¹ For example, a mention of the Chinese cinema, “the true socialist cinema,” appeared in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1962, 17 January 1966; Mufīd al-Jazā’irī wrote about Czechoslovakian cinema in “Tajrubat al-qīṭā‘ al-‘āmm fi al-sīnima al-tshikīyya,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1964, 31 January 1966, 43-44; the renowned French filmmaker Alain Resnais was quoted in an article about the French New Wave in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1982, 6 June 1966, 39; and “Fi al-sīnima ‘indahum mamnū‘ al-dala‘ ammā ‘indanā??,” *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1989, 25 July 1966, 72.

⁵² Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf, “Nahwa fann sīnimā’ī ishtirākī,” *al-Ṭalī‘a* 6 (1965): 93-96.

⁵³ Jamāl al-Laythī, *Ākhir Sā‘a*, 31 August 1966, 38. Also cited in Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*, 205.

⁵⁴ Louis ‘Awad, “Kalima ṣādika ‘an al-mawsam al-masraḥī” and “Kḥiṭab maftūḥ ila wazīr al-thaqāfa,” *al-Ahrām*, 30 April 1965 and 19 November 1965; and *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1948, 11 October 1965, 49.

⁵⁵ ‘Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 713-14.

fresh alternative perception and understanding of the cinema. In this atmosphere, the state deemed it necessary to reassess and modify its film policy, in part to address the above-mentioned cumulative predicaments, as well to respond to this growing demand for better quality and more ideologically conscious cinema.

As a first measure, Nasser issued a decree in late 1965 separating culture from national guidance, followed shortly by two consecutive laws in early 1966.⁵⁶ While the first ordinance aimed at reorganizing the Ministry of National Guidance, placing under its purview radio and television,⁵⁷ the second restructured the Ministry of Culture, giving more emphasis than before to the artistic aspect of the cinema.⁵⁸ Not only did the Ministry of Culture aim to raise the professional and artistic level of film production, but it also sought to cultivate an alternative cinematic taste, introducing Egyptian viewing public to new genres of non-commercial cinema.⁵⁹ Furthermore, in an effort to supervise and maintain the artistic quality of film production, the ministry established the General Directory for Artistic Censorship (*al-Idāra al-‘amma lil-raqāba ‘ala al-muṣanifāt al-fannīyya*) to examine stories and films before purchasing and screening them respectively.⁶⁰ As for the ministry’s administration, Nasser appointed Sulaymān Huzayyin as the interim minister. Under the latter’s supervision, the Secretariat of Propaganda and Thought (*Amānat al-da‘wa wal-fikr*) of the Socialist Union summoned

⁵⁶ *Ruz al-yūsuf* nos. 1948 and 1952, 11 October 1965, 49 and 8 November 1965, 45.

⁵⁷ Presidential decree no. 76 for the year 1966, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 16, 18 January 1966, 61-62.

⁵⁸ Presidential decree no. 449 for the year 1966, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 39, 17 February 1966, 164-65.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

a meeting with the cineastes to address their complaints and suggestions.⁶¹ Attesting to its responsiveness, the state decreed a new law, thoroughly reorganizing the GEICRT. It became known as the General Egyptian Institution for the Cinema (*al-Mu'assassa al-miṣrīyya al- 'amma lil-sīnima*—hereafter GEIC).⁶²

For almost a year, the GEIC remained leaderless as several potential candidates declined chairing an under-financed institution.⁶³ In the meantime, Nasser had succeeded in convincing 'Ukāsha to accept his nomination to become the Minister of Culture, tasking him with the urgent mission of “containing the [artistic and financial] damage suffered by the cinema sector.”⁶⁴ Because Nasser was aware that the state could not afford wasting funds on faltering projects, he instructed 'Ukāsha, as the latter recounted, to temporarily halt production for a two-year period, focusing instead on systemically addressing difficulties within the film industry.⁶⁵ Mindful of the shortcomings of previous film policies, mainly the lack of advanced planning, 'Ukāsha's first and cautious measure was to instigate a series of investigations. To achieve this, he formed a committee of economists from the Central Auditing Agency (*al-Jihāz al-markazī lil-muḥāsabāt*) to inspect the financial state of the institution and suggest conceivable solutions.⁶⁶ As for the technical and artistic standing of the GEIC and its assets, he hired a group of French experts, among whom was the renowned

⁶¹ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1965, 7 February 1966, 39.

⁶² Presidential decree no. 453 for the year 1966, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 42, 21 February 1966, 181-82.

⁶³ As reported by *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 1954, 22 November 1965, 44.

⁶⁴ 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 712.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, 713-14 and 778.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 755.

screenwriter Pierre Cardinale, with the intention of uncovering the real reasons behind the deterioration of Egyptian films.⁶⁷ ‘Ukāsha, however, was sensible enough to realize that any external solution prior to consultation with local cinematic circle would not be well-received by them. For this reason he summoned a cinema conference on the 12th and 13th of October 1966, in which a large number of film professionals participated.⁶⁸ A closer examination of the interventions made at the conference reveals a deep schism in the cineastes’ perception of both the cinema and the presumed role of the public sector. On the one hand, there was a group of professionals, who expressed a sense of responsibility and commitment for a socialist cinema, while on the other hand, another group typified the traditional commercial mindset, opposing a politically and socially committed cinema.⁶⁹

The proceedings of this conference, the reports of the two aforementioned investigative committees, as well as a number of articles published at the time also identified difficulties that were obstructing GEIC’s development,⁷⁰ predictably suggesting a similar set of resolutions, among which was the recommendation for a complete change in the structure of the public companies before the introduction of any other measure.⁷¹ The sectorial fragmentation of the public companies, the lack of

⁶⁷ Ḥafīz, “Hal intaha ‘aṣr al-sīnimā’ī,” 30-32; ‘Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 757 - 760; and Ukāsha, “al-Qiṭā‘ al-‘āmm,” 3.

⁶⁸ The cinema conference was part of a broader one, addressing the problems of 4 different sectors: the cinema, the theatre, the book, and fine arts. For its proceedings, see *Arba‘ mu’tamarāt* (Cairo: Dār al-kitāb, 1967).

⁶⁹ Ḥāshim al-Naḥās, “al-Jānib al-ākhar fī mu’tamar al-sīnimā’īyyīn... laysat ḥambaka wa-lākinaha fann wa risāla,” *al-Kawākib*, 25 October 1966, 30-33.

⁷⁰ For an example of articles addressing this crisis, see Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf, “Mustaqbal al-film al-‘arabī wal-mustawa al-fannī... wal-tadhawuq al-jamāhīrī,” *al-Ṭalī‘a* 8 (1966): 99-103.

advanced planning, the employment of unqualified personnel, the shortage of qualified employees, the implications of the socio-political transformations that Egypt was witnessing in general, and the commercially minded private sector were found to be the real triggers for the artistic and financial crisis of the cinema sector. ‘Ukāsha’s straightforward response was: “I cannot do miracles but I will do my utmost to [incorporate these suggestions].”⁷² For a while, at least, this promise reignited the cineastes’ hopes for a more effective GEIC. ‘Ukāsha, indeed, kept his word. Two months after the conference, Decree 48 was issued on 20 December 1966, restructuring the GEIC by merging its six companies into two entities; Cairo Company for Film Production (*Sharikat al-qāhira lil-sīnima*) under the supervision of the economist ‘Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan,⁷³ and the Cairo Company for Film Distribution and Exhibition (*Sharikat al-qāhira li dūr al-‘arḍ wal-tawzī‘*), operating under the purview of the financial expert Yūsuf Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.⁷⁴ ‘Ukāsha’s decision to appoint economic specialists as general directors of public film companies falls in line with Nasser’s directions to prevent the film public sector from further financial loss. The artistic level of Egyptian cinema, nevertheless, was still at the front of ‘Ukāsha’s mind, as was manifested, first, by the appointment of Naguib Mahfouz, probably one of Egypt’s most influential literary figures at the time, as the president of the GEIC, as well as the allocation of one third of the entire Ministry’s budget to the GEIC.⁷⁵

⁷¹ For a full list of these suggestions, see al-Naḥās, “al-Jānib al-ākhar fi mu’tamar al-sīnimā’īyyīn, 30-33.

⁷² For an excerpt of Ukāsha’s speech at the end of the conference, see *Arba‘ mu’tamarāt*.

⁷³ ‘Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 761.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

The three appointees instantly introduced what was referred to as the downsizing policy (*siyyāsat al-inkimāsh*) by contrast to the over-ambitious policy of the preceding administration, carefully examining stories prior to their purchase, diligently following up on previous productions instigated before their tenures, and, most importantly, cutting the wages of employees and film professionals as well as reducing unnecessary expenses, which, of course, provoked a cineastes' uproar.⁷⁶ Not surprisingly, 80 percent of the GEIC's allocated budget was spent on paying up previous debts and loans owed to several creditors and departments.⁷⁷ In so doing, GEIC's new administration became aware of possible liquidity consequences that might hamper the institution's future operations. Subsequently it suggested to 'Ukāsha the necessity for finding other funding sources, if only to secure the employees' salaries and social insurances.⁷⁸ 'Ukāsha, in turn, informed Nasser about this situation appealing for immediate help, to which the latter obliged by calling upon the Minister of Finance to secure a new loan for the GEIC.⁷⁹

Artistic, technical and administrative improvements also accompanied this downsizing policy. Within a one-year period beginning in late 1966, the Ministry of Culture introduced several reforms in hopes of raising the artistic level of Egyptian

⁷⁵ *ibid*; also see Wahba, *Cultural Policy*, 32.

⁷⁶ "al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya fi khaṭar," *al-Hilāl* no. 10, 1 October 1967, 116-117; 'Umar, "Azmat al-sīnima 1" and "Azmat al-sīnima 3," respectively in *al-Ahrām* nos. 21028, 23 October 1971, 7 and 21030, 25 October 1971, 7. See also 'Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan's testimony in "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 85.

⁷⁷ This information was taken from two reports, one prepared by 'Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan and another by Naguib Mahfouz, as cited in 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 761-62 and "al-Qiṭā' al-'āmm al-sīnima'ī," 17.

⁷⁸ *ibid*.

⁷⁹ *ibid*.

cinema. In an effort to inform peasants, through films, about the new socialist experience that Egypt was undergoing, the Directory of Mass Culture (*Idārat al-thaqāfa al-jamāhirīyya*) was created with Sa‘d Kāmil as its director, with the intention of spreading the mass culture to the less privileged provinces and small villages.⁸⁰ Moreover, in an attempt to introduce unconventional film genres, the National Centre for Documentary and Short Films (*al-Markaz al-waṭanī lil-aflām al-wathā’iqīyya wal-qaṣīra*) was established as an autonomous unit in the GEIC to be run by the artist Ḥasan Fuād.⁸¹ In light of these developments, it is possible to conclude that greater emphasis was given to the quality and content of films than ever before. Interestingly, the public sector continued to financially support the private sector, but not without introducing a set of stipulations. Any producer going beyond either the fixed production schedule or the number of assigned film stock had to personally pay for extra costs.⁸² “We are not asking for much,” ‘Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan addressed the cineastes, “but to produce good films that are compatible with the state’s discourse,”⁸³ that is the socialist direction; hence, summarizing, in a few words, GEIC’s primary objective. Additionally, by commissioning Ḥusayn Kamāl, a graduate of the Higher Institute for the Cinema, to launch GEIC’s production plan for 1967, this new administration displayed a genuine interest in opening the doors to a new generation of skilled and talented filmmakers,

⁸⁰ Aḥmad Kāmil Mursī and Magdi Wahba, *Mu‘jam al-fann al-sīnimā’ī* (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-miṣrīyya al-‘amma lil-kitāb, 1973), 71; and ‘Abdul Wahāb, “The Cinema and Government,” 168-70.

⁸¹ ‘Ukāsha, “al-Qiṭā ‘ al-‘āmm al-sīnimā’ī,” 18; Sayyid Sa‘īd, “Waḳfa... wa naḳra lil-takhaluf qabla an nakḥṭu lil-amām,” in *awrāq fi mushkilat*, 46-7.

⁸² As reported by Nāṣir Ḥusayn in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2025, 3 April 1967, 44.

⁸³ Interview with ‘Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan as reported by Ḥilmī Hilāl, *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2022, 13 March 1967, 30-31.

probably with the undeclared intention of cleansing the cinematic scene from traditionally minded professionals.⁸⁴

The least that could be said about these developments is that they reflect the government's resolve to improve the cinema sector, not only financially but artistically as well, all the while operating under difficult circumstances. Clearly, the priority given to art-related concerns delineates a significant change in the cultural policy of the state, most likely revealing a new, more comprehensive perception of the cinema on the part of both the cineastes and the government. As a result, some critics dubbed this period, largely influenced by the downsizing policy, a time of great administrative achievement.⁸⁵

C. On the Heels of the *Naksa*.

On 5 July 1967, Israel launched a series of massive airstrikes against Egyptian airfields, taking the Egyptians and the Arab World by surprise. Consequently, this attack led to the outbreak of the Six-Day War between Israel on one side and Egypt, Jordan and Syria on the other. Not only did this war inflict heavy losses on Egypt, it also resulted in open encroachment on Egyptian sovereignty, materialized in the Israeli occupation of the Sinai. "It was this defeat," according to the film critic Qussai Samak, "that brought back the national question in its most immediate aspects to the center of Egypt's preoccupations."⁸⁶ An invisible, undeclared need to compensate for and

⁸⁴ Nāṣir Ḥusayn in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2025, 3 April 1967, 44. See also Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf's and 'Abdul Rāziq Ḥasan's testimonies in "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 85 - 86.

⁸⁵ Nāṣir Ḥusayn in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2255, 30 August 1971, 36-37.

⁸⁶ Samak, "The Arab Cinema," 32.

respond to this military defeat by means of some sort of a cultural resistance, that denounced the enemy and exalted the nation, was evident in the state's post-1967 film policy. For the first time in the history of Egyptian cinema, ideological concerns were prioritized over economic imperatives. After the defeat, the Ministry of Culture called upon the administration of the cinema sector to explicitly abide by the government's new stance⁸⁷ that aimed at:

A conscious mass mobilization that could prepare the masses for a long and hard struggle through a number of films, which valorize bravery, patience, sanctification of duty, [...].⁸⁸

As such, the state officially banned the importation of British and American film, both as a political statement against these states' blatant support of Israel as well as a cultural rejection of the type of commercial cinema they projected.⁸⁹ To find a replacement to these films, the GEIC turned its eyes towards new "friendly" governments in hopes of importing films that revolved around the idea of "the masses [being] the true hero in national struggles."⁹⁰ Nevertheless, without providing an alternative cinema, the ban alone could not possibly end the existing politically puerile cinema. In September 1967, and in an effort to encourage a more committed cinema, 'Ukāsha dispatched a delegation to several socialist countries such as Yugoslavia, Poland and the Soviet Union to learn more about their cinemas, with a view to

⁸⁷ This stance is extensively explained in Nasser's declaration to the nation on 30 March 1968. http://nasser.bibalex.org/Data/GR09_1/Speeches/1968/680330_bayanat.htm (last accessed on 11 April 2017).

⁸⁸ 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakarātī*, 764.

⁸⁹ Of course, this ban did not last for too long. See *Bulletin du Centre interarabe du cinéma et de la télévision* no. 22, 30 June 1967, 7.

⁹⁰ Ḥilmī Hilāl and Nāṣir Ḥusayn, "Sayṭarat al-sharikāt al-amrikīyya mā zālat qa'ima," *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2040, 17 July 1967, 28-29.

transferring such knowledge and expertise to Egypt.⁹¹ Among the techniques learned was the “Pocket Film” (*Sīnima al-jayb*), which entailed the use of small cameras and natural sources of light to visually document reality as is, creating in the process short art and experimental films,⁹² a concept that completely contradicted the practice of commercial cinema. Also, European and Soviet film weeks were held in Cairo and Alexandria. The *Cinéma d’auteur*⁹³ was also another type of cinema that Roberto Rossellini, the Italian neo-realist filmmaker, helped to spread among Egyptian filmmakers after accepting ‘Ukāsha’s invitation to host a film workshop in Egypt.⁹⁴

This urge to take a cultural stand vis-à-vis the national crisis was not restricted to state institutions. The impact of the defeat on the Egyptians in general, and the artists in particular worked as a wake-up call for film professionals to revolutionize and ultimately politicize their cinema. A growing demand for “a different type of cinema, a new cinematic language, a new mentality, a new vision” started spreading among the cineastes.⁹⁵ Devastated by the defeat, the students at the Higher Institute for the Cinema used their skills and resources provided by the institute to produce short films about civic engagement and citizenship.⁹⁶ This initiative caught the eye of the GEIC’s

⁹¹ Nāṣir Ḥusayn in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2050, 25 September 1967, 31-32.

⁹² *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2059, 27 November 1967, 32.

⁹³ It appeared in Ḥilmī Hilāl’s article in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2059, 27 November 1967, 33. Also see Farīd Būghadīr, “Banurāma sīnima al-maghrib al-‘arabī,” in *al-Sīnima al-‘arabīyya min al-khalīj ila al-muhīt* (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-miṣrīyya al-‘amma lil-kitāb), 51. The notion of *Cinéma d’auteur* first appeared in France in the 1950s, influenced by the theories of Louis Delluc, Alexandre Astruc and André Bazin, and is referenced to filmmakers with a distinguishable style or thematic preoccupation. To read more about it, see Başak Göksel Demiray, “Authorship in Cinema: Author & Reader,” *CINEJ Cinema Journal* 4/1 (2014).

⁹⁴ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2059, 27 November 1967, 33.

⁹⁵ Murād, “Ḥiwār ma‘ Tawfīq Ṣāliḥ,” 212.

administration, which clearly started conceiving films as a political weapon, compelling the National Centre for Documentary and Short Films to sponsor them.⁹⁷ In one of his speeches after the defeat, Nasser addressed his people urging them to resist, “now that the military aggression is over, a [cultural] attack will transpire [against] the people, [against] every citizen of this country.”⁹⁸ Memorable mobilizing slogans such as “a camera in one hand and a weapon in another” started appearing in the press, ultimately recognizing cinema as a principle resistance weapon.⁹⁹ In such an atmosphere, cinema became “the eye of truth [...] which could [...] record the cruelty of defeat and the glory of victory.”¹⁰⁰

Another response to the defeat was the launch of several publications calling for new and avant-garde cultural movements, like *Gallery 68*, a journal focusing on literature and visual arts.¹⁰¹ Under the direction of Rajā’ al-Naqāsh, *al-Kawākib* dedicated an entire sector entitled, “Angry Magazine” (*al-Majalla al-ghādiba*), to the New Cinema Collective (*Jamā’at al-sīnima al-jadīda*). The latter was a film society created by a group of young filmmakers, among whom were graduates of the Higher Institute for the Cinema,¹⁰² itself the creation of the public sector. ‘Alī Abū Shādī,

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Muḥammad Khalafullah in *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2038, 3 July 1967, 31-2

⁹⁸ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2042, 31 July 1967, 37.

⁹⁹ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2036, 19 June 1967, 24.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Aḥmad Rifʿat, “On the Importance of Post-1967 Alternative Cinematic Adventures in Egypt,” *al-Arabiyya*, 15 September 2016, <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/09/15/feature/culture/on-the-importance-of-post-1967-alternative-cinematic-adventures-in-egypt/> (accessed on 10 March 2017).

Samīr Farīd, Aḥmad Mutwalī, ‘Ādil Munīr, Muḥammad Rādī, Ra’fat al-Mīhī, and Ashraf Fahmī were among this society’s members.¹⁰³ Like its counterparts in Latin America and France, this society published a manifesto in which it basically attacked the deep-rooted commercial mentality that prevailed in Egyptian cinema, labeling it “the opiate of the Arab masses.”¹⁰⁴ Greatly influenced by realist and revolutionary cinemas, this society called for an alternative cinema that “would record and study the movement of Egyptian society” tracking the developing social and political relations.¹⁰⁵ Finding in this society’s manifesto the type of cinema that it aspired to, the GEIC collaborated with its members on two quality films. The first film was ‘Alī ‘Abdul Khāliq’s *A Song along the Passage* (*Ughniyya ‘ala al-mammar*, 1972), which addressed the trauma and struggle of Egyptian soldiers stuck in a strategic checkpoint during the Six-Day War. The *Shadows on the Other Side* (*ẓilāl ‘ala al-jānib al-ākhar*, 1974), the second collaboration with the society, was directed by Ghālib Sha‘th, a Palestinian filmmaker who started his career in Egypt after finishing his studies in Vienna.¹⁰⁶

Together with the previous downsizing policy, these cultural transformations that Egypt experienced on the heels of the *Naksa* facilitated the emergence of a politically critical, national cinema, marked by the artistic “improvement in the

¹⁰² Chapter 2 mentions the establishment of this institute in light of its significance and novelty, page 23.

¹⁰³ al-Qalyūbī, “al-Sīnima al-miṣrīyya,” 70-71; and Amīr al-‘Umarī, “Ghālib Sha‘th baṭal al-ẓilāl wal-jānib al-ākhar,” *al-‘Arab*, 11 October 2015, <http://www.alarab.co.uk/pdf/2015/10/11-10/p16.pdf> (accessed on February 12, 2017).

¹⁰⁴ Samak, “The Arab Cinema,” 33; and Sharaffudīn, *al-Siyyāsa wal-sīnima*, 122.

¹⁰⁵ Samak, “The Arab Cinema,” 33

¹⁰⁶ al-‘Umarī, “Ghālib Sha‘th.”

intellectual caliber of [its] films.”¹⁰⁷ Looking back at the prevailing cinematic spirit after the *Naksa*, director Khayrī Bishāra pointed out that “we wanted to change the course of [Egyptian cinema].”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, this period witnessed the production of some of the most influential and highly acclaimed films in the history of Egyptian cinema. In addition to visually depicting the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the makers of these films attempted to uncover what they assumed as the real reasons for the *Naksa*, suggesting factors other than the “imperialist conspiracy” and “fate.”¹⁰⁹ Some of them considered the defeat as an artistic and emotional stimulus, directly addressing it, decrying it, speaking back to it, and analyzing it, others preoccupied themselves with allegoric criticism of the regime and the demise of its national project.¹¹⁰ Not only did these films grapple with socio-political and existentialist issues, but also their filmic language reflected on the one hand a refined sense of cinematic maturity and on the

¹⁰⁷ Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*, 209.

¹⁰⁸ An excerpt from a video interview with Khayrī Bishāra done by al-Jazeera, entitled “Khayrī Bishāra... al-waqi‘īyya al-jadīda fī al-sīnima al-miṣrīyya.”

¹⁰⁹ In the words of Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf, “there was a defeat because many [...] exploited the people in the name of socialism while they do not have anything to do with it [...]. The question is: reform of revolution? [...] when everything is corrupt we do not need renovation [...] we need change and a radical one.” In Samak, “The Politics of Egyptian Cinema,” 15.

¹¹⁰ A question might be posed here, “how come a police state allowed the screening of such political films?” In their attempt at answering it, many critics argue that “by screening such films, the state was actually being clever, expressing a high level of political shrewdness,” in Salwa ‘Alī Ibrāhīm al-Jayyār, *al-Sīnima wal-siyyāsa, nash’at al-fīlm al-siyyāsī wa-mu‘alajatihi li aham al-qadaya al-siyyāsīyya* (Cairo: al-Maktab al-‘arabī lil-ma‘ārif, 2000), 15-23. While others designate this period “a period of ‘thaw’ in which government censors allowed a greater degree of more explicit political criticism of the regime,” in Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*, 31. To name a few examples, Youssef Chahine’s *The Land* (*al-ard*, 1970), *The Choice* (*al-Ikhtiyār*, 1971), and *The Sparrow* (*al-Uṣfūr*, 1972); Kamāl al-Shaykh’s *The Man Who Lost His Shadow* (*al-Rajul al-ladhī faqada ḡilahu*, 1968), *Miramar* (1969), and *Dusk and Dawn* (*Ghurūb wa-shurūq*, 1970); Ḥusayn Kamāl’s *A Little Bit of Fear* (*Shay’ min al-khawf*, 1969); Tawfīq Ṣālīḥ’s *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* (*Yawmiyāt nā’ib fī al-aryāf*, 1969); Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf’s *Dawn of Islam* (*Fajr al-islām*, 1971); Shu‘bān Ibrāhīm’s *My Wife and the Dog* (*Zawjati wal-kalb*, 1971); and last but definitely not least, Shādī ‘Abdul Salām’s *The Mummy* (*al-Mūmmyā’*, 1969).

other, a recognizable change in the cinema's discourse, both of which would not have transpired without the contribution of the public sector.

D. The Dissolution of GEIC

While the GEIC was embarking on a mission to revolutionize the cinema sector, its financial debts to the Ministry of Finance and the Industrial Bank were substantially rising. During a cabinet session in April 1968, the Minister of Finance announced his intention to cut down his ministry's funding to the GEIC, for the latter, he argued, had become a financial burden on the state.¹¹¹ In reaction to this, 'Ukāsha posed the traditional rhetorical question, "is culture a commercial commodity subject to the law of supply and demand?"¹¹² Not expecting an answer, he went on to note:

It is neither possible nor logical for cultural institutions to serve two masters simultaneously and with equal devotion. It is either the quality [of films] or their box office revenues.¹¹³

One month later, in May 1968, the government inaugurated an evaluation process of the entire cinema sector, with a view to liquidating its financially failing divisions. Subsequently, the writer 'Abdul Ḥamīd Jawdat al-Sahhār was appointed as the chairman of the GEIC, announcing right away his intention of limiting the public sector's operations to co-productions and high-budget films solely.¹¹⁴ Around the same time, the Minister of Finance, taking into consideration the recommendations of the evaluation committee, suggested the consolidation of Cairo Company for Film

¹¹¹ 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 770-71.

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ruz al-yūsuf* no. 2090, 1 July 1968, 38-9; *Bulletin d'information du centre interarabe du cinema et de la television* no. 44, 1 August 1968, 9.

Production and Cairo Company for Film Distribution and Exhibition into one entity in an attempt to centralize GEIC's administration and reduce its financial expenses.¹¹⁵

This suggestion was taken seriously by 'Ukāsha, but not without making a fuss about other problems that the state needed to address immediately to help GEIC overcome particular difficulties, such as, for example, the high taxes imposed on the film stock, the shortage of exhibition houses, the political tension with neighboring countries.¹¹⁶

On 30 March 1970, Decree 511 was issued merging all the public-sector film companies into one body—the General Egyptian Institution for the Cinema, GEIC.¹¹⁷

Regardless of this continuous reshuffling of the cinema sector, GEIC's aims remained unchanged throughout its existence; sustaining the national film industry, either by producing quality films or providing services to the private sector. By mid 1970, it had become clear that the Egyptian state was willing to continue its financial support for the public sector as a concession to the latter's past and potential cultural achievements.

On 28 September 1970, Gamal 'Abdul Nasser died of a heart attack, leaving Egypt in a state of shock and in the hands of his vice-president Anwar al-Sadat. On 15 May 1971, al-Sadat launched the Corrective Movement, basically targeting the Nasserist legacy, which included the public sector. As a precursor to his open door policy (*al-infītāh*), al-Sadat instigated sequential waves of privatization, inevitably affecting the cinema sector.¹¹⁸ On 7 November 1971, the GEIC was dissolved, only to be replaced with the General Organization for the Cinema, Theatre and Music (*al-*

¹¹⁵ 'Ukāsha, *Mudhakirātī*, 770-771.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ al-Jayyār, *al-Sīnima wal-siyyāsa*, 31-32; and Sharaffuldīn, *al-Siyyāsa wal-sīnima fī miṣr*, 42.

Hay'a al-'amma lil-sīnima wal masrah wal-musīqa).¹¹⁹ By Decree 2827 of 1971, the public sector was ordered to close down its film production operations, focusing instead on providing film services and facilities to the private sector. In so doing, the public-sector film production prematurely expired, paradoxically at the same time as its own films, produced during and after the downsizing period, were garnering critical acclaim and spawning a second Golden Age of Egyptian cinema!

¹¹⁹ Presidential decree no. 2827 for the year 1971, *al-Jarīda al-rasmīyya al-miṣrīyya* 46, 22 November 1971, 690-691; and Armbrust, "Cinema and Television," 641.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

On 23 January 1972 a member of the Egyptian Parliament drew his colleagues' attention to the heavy financial loss incurred by the now dissolved public-sector film production unit, calling upon the authorities to begin immediate investigations.¹ This deputy's brief intervention in a somewhat ordinary parliamentary session turned into a decade-long trial,² with the seeming intention of redeeming debts and convicting the responsible party.³ Nine years later and on 22 December 1981 the Public Prosecution Office (*al-Nīyyāba al-āmma*) in Egypt finally reached a verdict on the basis of the following: given the fact that the public film sector came into being to rescue an imperiled industry; given that the cinema sector was conceived in times of political turbulence; given that supreme state authorities directed film production to serve the revolutionary regime and its status abroad, the employees of the public sector were deemed not guilty of negligence, as they were operating under extraordinary and extremely difficult circumstances, and in line with general state policy.⁴

¹ "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 78.

² Having its own juridical personality made the public sector susceptible to lawsuits. See chapter 3, page 45.

³ "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 78.

⁴ For a complete copy of court's justification for the verdict, see "al-Naṣ al-kāmil li taqrīr al-nīyyāba," 78-91.

This verdict of innocence is absent in much of the existing literature. Even those who refer to it, solely harp about the problems that the public sector faced, which they deemed a complete failure. Although these problems were lengthily discussed, this thesis aims at underlining the state's and its public sector resolve to accomplish its mission of reviving an ailing film industry, notwithstanding its inherited or rising predicaments. Prevailing over these difficulties was the first achievement of this sector. The financial and technical support provided by the public film sector to film professionals, working in both the public and private sectors, ensured the continuance of Egyptian film industry.

The second achievement of the public sector in Egyptian cinema was setting the scene for a new generation of skilled and talented filmmakers. Within an eight-year period, the public sector commissioned 60 directors, who in turn produced 158 films, almost amounting to 30 percent of all Egyptian film production between 1963 and 1971.⁵ Among these directors were 26 new names,⁶ some of whom were graduates of the Higher Institute for the Cinema, itself another achievement that is still in operation. Although the public sector ceased its film production in 1971, it still exists up to the present as a service sector, under the purview of the General Organization for the Cultural Palaces (*al-Hay'a al-'amma li quṣur al-thaqāfa*). The current organization still aims at fulfilling similar objectives as its predecessors; publishing specialized books and journals dealing with the cinema; holding film festivals and film weeks; supervising Cinema clubs and societies; and encouraging the production of documentary and educational films.

⁵ Abū Shādī, "al-Qiṭā' al-'āmm al-sīnimā'ī fi miṣr," 322-23.

⁶ *ibid.*

The fourth accomplishment of the public film sector but one of greater importance was paving the way for the rise of an alternative cinema, owing to the nourishing environment that this sector helped to create, either through the establishment of the said Higher Institute, exposure to international cinematic movements, or its decade-long endeavors to reform the film industry. Even more, the operation of the public sector perpetuated a still existing dilemma of whether films could or should be used for ideological persuasion. The emergence of a new cinematic perception that recognized cinema as a tool for cultural resistance and artistic expression non-seeking profit attests to the public sector's positive influence. To be sure, the rise of a non-commercial genre in Egyptian filmmaking would have been more difficult, if not impossible, without the sustenance that the public sector provided.

Now that this thesis has opened up a more balanced understanding of the public sector, perhaps it would be possible to arrive at a better appreciation and assessment of its overall role. A critical study concerned with the analysis of the artistic and creative aspects of the films produced by the public sector, without being influenced, if not tainted, by the preconceived notions surrounding the said sector that this thesis attempted to contest, now becomes conceivable.

Aside from an analysis dedicated only to a thorough examination of film aesthetics and languages, another research topic can revolve around the under-examined, perhaps unintended, roles of these films. Instead of dismissing them as artistically insignificant, films produced by the public sector can be analyzed as products of Egyptian history. Though works of fiction, these films can still be regarded as cultural artifacts that communicate ideas, stories, perceptions, and dilemmas that prevailed in a specific time period. Not only do they visually represent the socio-

political, economic and cultural realities that transpired in Nasser's Egypt, but, more importantly, they reflect the visions of their makers—how, both as artists and citizens, they perceived the Nasserist experiment. One of the questions that such a study might endeavor to answer would be whether these films could be considered as a medium for understanding the past; in other words, could they be viewed as a vehicle for legitimate historical analysis?

Another serious academic research that appears tenable in light of this thesis is a comparative study between the public sector in Egyptian cinema and its counterparts in other countries such as Algeria, Syria, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Hungary and China, which were actively increasing the role of public film production in popular mobilization against colonial rule and, following independence, achieving a more just and equitable social and political realities. Such an analysis can delve into the similarities and differences between these sectors, perhaps with a view to better comprehend the particularities of the Egyptian public film sector in terms of theoretical justifications, modes of operation, historical context, as well as cultural and artistic production. Only then, the vanguard-pioneering role of the public sector in Egyptian cinema might be understood.

APPENDIX

A List of Films Produced by the Public Sector in Egyptian Cinema¹

	Film	Director	Year
1	Wa-Islāmāh	Andrew Marton	1961
2	al-Nāṣir Ṣalāh al-Dīn	Youssef Chahine	1963
3	Ḥadatha fi Miṣr		1963
4	al-Qāhira fi al-Layl	Muḥammad Sālim	1963
5	Muntaha al-Faraḥ	Muḥammad Sālim	1963
6	al-Aydī al-Nā'ima	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1963
7	Bayna al-Qaṣrayn	Ḥasan al-Imām	1964
8	Zawj fi Ijāza	Muḥammad 'Abdul Jawād	1964
9	al-Murāhiqān	Sayf al-Dīn Shawkat	1964
10	Hārib min al-Zawāj	Ḥasan al-Ṣayfī	1964
11	Min Ajl Ḥanafī	Ḥasan al-Ṣayfī	1964
12	Thaman al-Ḥurrīyya	Nūr al-Damardāsh	1964
13	I'tirāfāt Zawj	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb	1964
14	al-Ibn al-Mafqūd	Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥasan	1964
15	Nahr al-Ḥayāt	Ḥasan Riḍa	1964
16	al-'Ā'ila al-Karīma	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb	1964
17	al-Ṭarīq	Ḥusām al-Dīn Muṣṭafa	1964
18	al-Risāla al-Akhīra	Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥasan	1964
19	al-Rajul al-Majhūl	Muḥammad 'Abdul Jawād	1965
20	al-'Alamayn	Abdul 'Alīm Khaṭāb	1965
21	Hiyya wal-Rijāl	Ḥasan al-Imām	1965
22	al-'Aql wal-Māl	Abbās Kamīl	1965
23	al-Ḥarām	Henri Barakāt	1965
24	al-Jabal	Khalīl Shawqī	1965
25	Ṭarīd al-Firdaws	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb	1965
26	Ayām Dā'i'a	Bahā' al-Dīn Sharaf	1965
27	Ḥub lil-Jamī'	Abdul Raḥmān Sharīf	1965
28	al-Rijāl lā Yatazawajūn al-Jamīlāt	Aḥmad Farūq	1965
29	Armala wa Thalāth Banāt	Jalāl al-Sharqāwī	1965
30	al-Jazā'	Abdul Raḥmān al-Khamīsī	1965
31	Sukūn al-'Āṣifa	Aḥmad Ḍiyā' al-Dīn	1965
32	al-Mustahīl	Ḥusayn Kamāl	1965
33	al-I'tirāf	Sa'd 'Arafa	1965
34	al-'Inab al-Murr	Farūq 'Ajrama	1965
35	Aghla Min Ḥayātī	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1965
36	al-Thalātha Yuḥibūnaha	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1965
37	al-Khā'ina	Kamāl al-Shaykh	1965

¹ Abū Shādī, *al-Sīnima wal-siyyāsa*, 91-98; and Qasim Maḥmūd, ed., *Dalīl al-aflām fi al-qarn al-'ishrīn: fi miṣr wal-'ālam al-'arabī* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2002).

	Film	Director	Year
38	Hārib min al-Ayyām	Ḥusām al-Dīn Muṣṭafa	1965
39	al-Mamālīk	Āṭif Sālim	1965
40	Ibn Kliyūbatra		1965
41	Thalāthat Luṣūṣ	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb + Kamāl al-Shaykh + Ḥasan al-Imām	1965
42	Mrātī Mudīr 'Āmm	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb	1966
43	Thawrat al-Yaman	Āṭif Sālim	1966
44	Wadā'an Ayuha al-Layl	Ḥasan Riḍa	1966
45	Sayyid Darwīsh	Aḥmad Badrakhān	1966
46	al-Ḥayāt Ḥilwa	Ḥilmī Ḥalīm	1966
47	Ṣaghīra 'ala al-Ḥub	Niyāzī Muṣṭafa	1966
48	Shayyāṭīn al-Layl	Niyāzī Muṣṭafa	1966
49	Adū al-Mar'a	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1966
50	al-Murāhiqa al-Ṣaghīra	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1966
51	Laylat al-Zifāf	Henri Barakāt	1966
52	al-Qāhira 30	Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf	1966
53	Khān al-Khalīlī	Āṭif Sālim	1966
54	Fāris Banī Ḥamdān	Niyāzī Muṣṭafa	1966
55	Kunūz	Ḥilmī Rafla	1966
56	Shay' fi Ḥayāti	Henri Barakāt	1966
57	Zawja min Bārīz	Āṭif Sālim	1966
58	Ibtisāmāt Abū al-Haul		1966
59	Qāhir al-Aṭlantīs		1966
60	Fāris al-Ṣahrā'		1966
61	Akhṭar Rajul fi al-'Ālam	Niyāzī Muṣṭafa	1967
62	al-Sammān wal-Kharīf	Ḥusām al-Dīn Muṣṭafa	1967
63	Mu'askar al-Banāt	Khalīl Shawqī	1967
64	al-Dakhīl	Nūr al-Damardāsh	1967
65	Iḍrāb al-Shahātīn	Ḥasan al-Imām	1967
66	al-Layālī al-Ṭawīla	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1967
67	al-Qubla al-Akhīra	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1967
68	Ma'būdat al-Jamāhīr	Ḥilmī Rafla	1967
69	al-Khurūj min al-Janna	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1967
70	al-Mukharibūn	Kamāl al-Shaykh	1967
71	Indama Nuḥib	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb	1967
72	Ijāzat Ṣayf	Sa'd 'Arafa	1967
73	Jaffat al-Amṭār	Sayyid 'Issa	1967
74	Jarīma fi al-Ḥay al-Hādī'	Ḥusām al-Dīn Muṣṭafa	1967
75	al-Niṣf al-'Ākhar	Aḥmad Badrakhān	1967
76	al-Zawja al-Thānīyya	Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf	1967
77	Gharām fi al-Karnak	Alī Riḍa	1967
78	al-'Ayb	Jalāl al-Sharqāwī	1967
79	Nūra	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1967
80	Qaşr al-Shawq	Ḥasan al-Imām	1967

	Film	Director	Year
81	Afrāh	Aḥmad Badrakhān	1968
82	3 Qiṣaṣ	Ibrāhīm al-Ṣahin	1968
83	Ayām al-Ḥub	Ḥasan Riḍa + Muḥammad Nabīh+ Ḥilmī Ḥalīm	1968
84	Ḥawwā' 'ala al-Ṭarīq	Ḥusayn Ḥilmī al-Muhandis	1968
85	Mrātī Majnūna	Ḥilmī Ḥalīm	1968
86	al-Būstajī	Ḥusayn Kamāl	1968
87	al-Mutamaridūn	Tawfīq Ṣāliḥ	1968
88	al-Qaḍīyya 68	Ṣalāh Abū Sayf	1968
89	Jazirat al-'Ushāq	Ḥasan Riḍa	1968
90	Arḍ al-Nifāq	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb	1968
91	al-Rajul al-Ladhī Faqada zīlahu	Kamāl al-Shaykh	1968
92	Qindīl Um Hāshim	Kamāl 'Aṭīyya	1968
93	Ana al-Duktūr	Abbās Kāmīl	1968
94	al-Sīrk	Āṭif Sālim	1968
95	Kayfa Tasriq Milyūnāran?	Najdī Hāfīz	1968
96	Kayfa Tasriq Qunbula Dharīyya?		1968
97	Abū al-Haul al-Zujājī		1968
98	Shay' min al-Khawf	Ḥusayn Kamāl	1969
99	Ḥikāya min Baladna	Ḥilmī Ḥalīm	1969
100	Yawmiyāt Nāyib fī al-Aryāf	Tawfīq Ṣāliḥ	1969
101	al-Nās li Juwa	Jalāl al-Sharqāwī	1969
102	Luṣūṣ Lākin zurafā'	Ibrāhīm Luṭfī	1969
103	Abwāb al-Layl	Ḥasan Riḍa	1969
104	al-Sayyid al-Bulṭī	Tawfīq Ṣāliḥ	1969
105	al-Ḥilwa 'Azīza	Ḥasan al-Imām	1969
106	Zawja Ghayyūra Jiddan	Ḥilmī Rafla	1969
107	Akadhīb Hawwā'	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb	1969
108	Miramar	Kamāl al-Shaykh	1969
109	Wujūh lil Ḥub	Midḥat Bakīr + Najī Riyād+ Mamdūh Shukrī	1969
110	Nādyā	Aḥmad Badrakhān	1970
111	Aṣ'ab Zawāj	Muḥammad Nabīh	1970
112	al-'Arḍ	Youssef Chahine	1970
113	Ashyā' lā Tushtara	Aḥmad Diyā' al-Dīn	1970
114	Ghurūb wa Shurūq	Kamāl al-Shaykh	1970
115	Ḥarāmī al-Waraqā	Alī Riḍa	1970
116	Anā wa Zawjatī wal Sikritira	Maḥmūd Dhūlfiqār	1970
117	Awhām al-Ḥub	Mamdūh Shukrī	1970
118	Sūq al-Ḥarīm	Yusūf Marzūq	1970
119	Dalāl al-Miṣrīyya	Ḥasan al-Imām	1970
120	Nār al-Shawq	Muḥammad Sālim	1970

	Film	Director	Year
121	al-Sarrāb	Anwar al-Shinnāwī	1970
122	Fajr al-Islām	Ṣalāh Abū Sayf	1971
123	Malikat al-Layl	Ḥasan Ramzī	1971
124	al-Ikhtīyyār	Youssef Chahine	1971
125	Maw'ad ma' al-Ḥabīb	Ḥilmī Rafla	1971
126	I'tirāfāt Zawj	Sa'd 'Arafa	1971
127	Mudhakirāt al-'Ānisa Manāl	Abbās Kāmil	1971
128	al-Ba'd Ya'tsh Maratayn	Kamāl 'Aṭiyya	1971
129	Riḥla Ladhīdha	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb	1971
130	Lu'ba Kul Yawm	Khalīl Shawqī	1971
131	Hādithat Sharaf	Shafīq Shāmīyya	1971
132	Zawjaṭī wal-Kalb	Sa'īd Marzūq	1971
133	Nahnu al-Rijāl Tayyībūn	Ibrāhīm Luṭṭī	1971
134	al-Aḍwā'	Ḥusayn Ḥilmī	1972
135	al-Nās wal-Nīl	Youssef Chahine	1972
136	Bint Badī'a	Ḥasan al-Imām	1972
137	Ughnīyya 'Ala al-Mamar	Alī 'Abdul Khāliq	1972
138	Ṣuwar Mamnū'a	Muḥammad 'Abdul 'Azīz + Ashraf Fahmī + Madkūr Thābit	1972
139	Laylat Ḥub Akhīra	Ḥilmī Rafla	1972
140	al-Ḥājiz	Muḥammad Rādī	1972
141	Bayt min Rimāl	Sa'd 'Arafa	1972
142	al-Shaymā'	Ḥusām al-Dīn Muṣṭafa	1972
143	Ḥikāyat Bint Ismaha Marmar	Henri Barakāt	1972
144	Waqr al-Ashrār	Ḥasan al-Ṣayfī	1972
145	Aḍwā' al-Madīna	Faṭīn 'Abdul Wahāb	1972
146	Layl wa-Quḍbān	Ashraf Fahmī	1972
147	Da'wa lil Ḥayāt	Midḥat Bakīr	1972
148	al-Shahāt	Ḥusām al-Dīn Muṣṭafa	1972
149	Zamān Ya Ḥub	Āṭif Sālim	1973
150	Zuhūr Barrīyya	Yusūf Fransīs	1973
151	al-Sullum al-Khalfī	Āṭif Sālim	1973
152	al-Rajul al-Akhar	Muḥammad Basyūnī	1973
153	al-Shawāri' al-Khalfīyya	Kamāl 'Aṭiyya	1974
154	Armala fi Laylat al-Zifāf	al-Sayyid Badīr	1974
155	al-Mummyā'	Shādī 'Abdul Salām	1975
156	al-zīlāl fi al-Jānīb al-'Ākhar	Ghālīb Sha'th	1975
157	al-Talāqī	Ṣubḥī Shafīq	1977
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