POPULAR CINEMA IN EGYPT
Walter Armbrust

Egyptian cinema makes an intriguing point of entry into the study of popular culture. In this two-week segment in the M.St. in Film Aesthetics course students will consider various analyses of what is at stake in "popular cinema," but in a context that will compel them to think one step further—not just of how "popularity" is constructed in European or American cinema, but also how standards for popularity travel across cultures. The films required for this module will contrast works that have been considered popular by various criteria, with films that have in one way or another turned their backs on the quest for popularity in pursuit of other ends. The objective of this segment of the course is to throw light on the category of "popular cinema" from an angle that will be unfamiliar for most students. By doing so we illuminate its contours more effectively than would be the case if we were to examine popular culture in the context of the European and American films typically analyzed in film studies literature.

I will be giving lectures on the history of Egyptian Cinema in St. Antony's College, the Hilda Bess Building, New Room, Wednesdays from 2-4, Weeks 1, and 3-7.

Week One

Screenings:

Recommended:

Session 1: National Cinema

Readings:

**Session 2: Popular Cinema**

*Readings:*


Hall, Stuart. 1981. "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular."

**Week Two**

*Screenings:*


*Alexandria Why* (Iskindiriyya Leh?). 1979. Youssef Chahine

*Recommended:*


**Session 3: Un-popular Cinema**


*Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*. 1999. v. 21 (1) ("Middle Eastern Films Before
Thy Gaze Returns to Thee"; special issue including translation of script of The Mummy)


Session 4: Cultural Intimacy


Further film recommendations:
Excuse Us, We're Doing Fine (Ma'alesh Ihna Binitibahdil). 2005. Sharif Mandur.
A "Cultural" Film (Film Thaqafi). 2001. Muhammad Amin.

Further Readings
(** = key readings)

Popular Culture


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**Nationalism**


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**Egyptian Cinema**

**M.St. in Film Aesthetics Readings**


History of Islam vol. VI (Muslims and Modernity: Culture and Society since 1800). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [should be available by HT 2008]


Introduction to Egyptian Cinema

Reading:  
Additional Readings/Issues (not specifically for MSt in Film Aesthetics)

Singers: Umm Kulthum and Abd al-Wahhab

Shafik, Viola. *Arab Cinema* chapter 2 ("Artistic Roots of Arab Cinema").

In Steven Blum et. al. eds., *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History*. Champagne-Urbana: University of Illinois Press.


**Music:**


CDs and cassette tapes of Umm Kulthum, Abd al-Wahhab, and many others are widely available.

**Films:**


*Widad*. 1936.

*Salama fi Khayr* (Salama is Fine). 1937.

*al-Azima* (Determination). 1939.


*Gharam wa Intiqam* (Love and Revenge). 1944.


**The Problem of Dance**

**Reading:**


Websites: There are hundreds, and the URLs change fairly often. Do a google search on "oriental dance" and/or "belly dance."


The Public Sector (1964-1970)


**Reading:**

*Al-Qahira* 1996. no. 159 (February). (special issue on Shadi Abd al-Salam, director of al-Mumiya; includes script)


Discourse 1999. v. 21 (1) ("Middle Eastern Films Before Thy Gaze Returns to Thee"); special issue including translation of script of al-Mumiya


**Films:**


**Additional:**


The Comedies of Adil Imam


*Ragab foq Safih Sakhin* (Ragab on a Hot Tin Roof). 1979. Ahmad Fuad


