

# Cinematic Cairo

Cinematic Cairo

Egyptian Urban Modernity from Reel to Real

Edited by Nezar AlSayyad and Heba Safey Eldeen

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## [ch]Acknowledgments

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678 (٦٧٨) 2010

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'Amaliqat al-bihar (عمالقة البحار – *Sea Titans*) 1960

'Ana horra (أنا حرة – *I Am Free*) 1959

Ard al-ahlam (أرض الأحلام – *Land of Dreams*) 1993

al 'Azima (- العزيمة – *Resolve*) 1939

Bayn al-Qasrayn (بين القصرين – *Palace Walk*) 1964

Cairo 30 القاهرة ٣٠ 1966

Fi shaet Masr al-Gadida (في شقة مصر الجديدة – *In the Heliopolis Flat*) 2007

Hasan wa Morqos (حسن ومرقص – *Hassan and Morqos*) 2008

Hasan wa Morqos wa Cohen (حسن ومرقص وكوهين – *Hassan, Morcos, and Cohen*) 1954

Heen Maysara (حين ميسرة – *Until Better Times*) [2007need date]

Heliopolis هليوبوليس 2010

al-Hob fok haḍabat al-haram (الحب فوق هضبة الهرم – *Love on the Pyramids Plateau*) 1986

Hona al-Qahira (هنا القاهرة – *Here is Cairo*) 1985

'Imarat Ya 'qoubian (عمارة يعقوبيان – *The Yacoubian Building*) 2006

Isma 'il Yasin fi Dimashq (اسماعيل ياسين في دمشق – *Isma 'il Yasin in Damascus*) 1958

Karakoun fi al-shāri (كراكون في الشارع – *Prison Cell on the Street*) 1986

al-Karnak [الكرنك] 1975

Khaltet Fawzeyya (خلطة فوزية – *Fawzeyya's Formula*) 2009

Kharaga walam ya 'od (خرج ولم يعد – *Left and Never Came Back*) 1984

Lao kont ghani (لو كنت غني – *If I were Rich*) 1942

*Lili* (لي لي) 2001

*Mawlana* (مولانا – *Our Sheikh*) 2016

*Meraty modir 'am* (مراتي مدير عام – *My Wife is a General Manager*) 1966;

*Nawwara* (نوارة) 2016

*Qahwat al-Mawardy* (قهوة المورد – *al-Mawardy Coffeehouse*)

*al-Qalb loh ahkam* (القلب له أحكام – *The Heart has its Rules*) 1956

*Qasr al-Shouq* (قصر الشوق – *Palace of Desire*) 1967

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*al-Warda al-bayda'* (الوردة البيضاء – *The White Rose*) 1933

*al-Wesada al-khaleya* (الوسادة الخالية – *The Empty Pillow*) 1957

*Yacout* [Rubies] (ياقوت) 1934

*Youm lel settat* (يوم للسيدات – *A Day for Women*) 2016

*Youm mor, Youm helw* (يوم مر، يوم حلو – *Bitter Day, Sweet Day*) 1988

*Zuqaq al-Midaq* (زقاق المدق – *Midaq Alley*) 1963

[ch]Cinematic Cairo and the Discourse on Egyptian Urban Modernity: A Prologue

*Nezar AlSayyad*

This book is the product of a coincidence. In 2018 on a visit to Cairo, where I was giving a lecture on the subject of one of my recent books, I was introduced to Dr. Heba Safey Eldeen, an Egyptian architect and professor who runs a number of cultural centers and programs in Cairo. We discovered that we share many common interests and Heba then invited me, on a following trip, to give a lecture about my work on cinematic cities at El Hanager Arts Center, an institution that is part of the Ministry of Culture in Egypt. Although the subject of the lecture involved discussions of cities like New York and Paris and did not include Cairo or any other Arab city, the lecture was very well attended, mainly by an audience of young professionals; architects, planners, and photographers who were eager to engage with my research. A few meetings with this group in 2018 resulted in the creation of the “Cinematic Cairo Working Group.” The group met regularly over the course of 2019 in a process which allowed us to flesh out the time periods, themes, and films that capture the transformation of Cairene modernity in Egyptian films. By early summer of 2019, we decided that an edited book should be the output of our collective enterprise. When we proposed the idea of the book to the American University in Cairo Press, the most appropriate publishing outlet for such a work, we were delighted with their immediate interest. *Cinematic Cairo* is the product of this collective thought process.

A bit of personal history may be needed here. I initially began researching the connection between cities and cinema at the end of the twentieth century. Employing my architecture and urban history training, I wrote, produced, and directed a couple of documentary films that dealt with architecture and urban issues, including *At Home with Mother Earth* in 1996 and *Virtual*

*Cairo* in 1998. These visual projects were part history, part contemporary reality, and part narrative fiction. Produced mainly for the general audience of American public television, these films were well received, and their success led me to experiment with using films in the teaching of architecture and urban history courses. In one of my first seminars that I taught on the subject, the premise was an apocalyptic scenario in which cities like New York or Los Angeles were assumed to have perished in a natural or manmade disaster, and the only evidence that survived about them were reels of fiction films of their cities produced by great film makers like Martin Scorsese, Jeffrey Scott, and Woody Allen. I asked my students to reconstruct the imaginaries of these cities assuming that the only evidence we had for them were their images on celluloid. I pondered what kind of history we would write under this condition. My teaching then expanded as I offered a lecture that attempted to narrate the history of a few world cities in Europe and America using film as both the principal form of data and the medium of investigation. And, as I became more involved in the subject, I developed the conviction that the division of spaces into “real” and “reel” is not a useful idea. I started to articulate the notion that reel spaces, because of the power of the cinematic experience, cease to be simply representational spaces as they turn into generative devices that sustain the real city and motor the imagination for alternative possibilities for its growth and critique. This scholarship ultimately resulted in my *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real*. Published more than one-and-a-half decades ago, the book became something of a classic over time, particularly for those interested in the relationship between the city and cinema or between reality and virtuality.

Following the precedent of *Cinematic Urbanism*, this book attempts to chart an urban history of modernity in Cairo over a period of a full century. However, unlike the broad Euro-America focus of the earlier book, *Cinematic Cairo* tackles the modernity of a single city during

the twentieth century, taking into account its unique status not only within Egyptian history but also within the larger regional cultural context of the Arab World. The book is based on our conviction that in the current era of globalization and the ever-expanding communication technologies, an understanding of the city and urban experience can no longer be pursued independent of the impact of virtual media and, more specifically, cinema. Cinematic space is employed both as an analytical tool and as a subject of critique. The city, real and imagined, experienced and perceived, provides both the spatial domain and medium of this project.

In this regard, the book is not a book about Egyptian films as artifacts of material culture, regardless of how important these films may be for our analysis. It is also not a book about the real physical fabric of Cairo as a city. Instead, the films about Cairo employed in our analysis become the raw material for the telling of an imaginative alternate urban history of the city. Although some of our chapters will engage with some physical attributes of the city, their focus remains on understanding the connection between the real and the reel in mapping the transformation of the city to urban modernity. However, our book is not only focused on analyzing Cairo as it appears in the films of different decades, indeed some contributors suggest new ways of viewing the urban condition of the city that emerge from analyzing cinematic space. At some level, our project may thus be appropriately subtitled “A Cinematic Epistemology of Cairo.”

Visitors to Cairo, and even some of its residents, are often fascinated by the city, its people, its buildings, its social life, and its noise. Many however have not been exposed to or have not made the connection to the representations and imaginaries of the city as it appears in film, and are often unaware of how Egyptian films have shaped their perception of Cairo. The Egyptian film industry was one of the oldest film industries in the world and it remained very

vibrant all through the twentieth century. The films it produced were not only forms of entertainment for the Egyptian people, but were also devices that helped create and articulate the image of Cairo of today. Films in general, and Egyptian films in particular, have been a medium that documented, represented, and reflected human interaction in cities in a manner that no other medium was able to capture.

The relationship between the city and cinema is formidable. The images and sounds of the city found in movies are perhaps the only experience that many in the world will ever have of cities they may never visit. Film captures the mentality of a society, disclosing much about its inner as well as outer life. Films influence the way we construct images of the world and, accordingly, in many instances, how we operate within it. The city itself is a social image which has been studied in various disciplines like literature, sociology, geography, anthropology, and many others. The links between the “real” city and “reel” city are indirect and complex, but understanding the city in this new age cannot be viewed independently of its cinematic representation. The philosopher Jean Baudrillard has explained this duality between the real city and the reel city by suggesting that, for an understanding of the city, we have to move out from the screen toward the city. However, we believe that a more comprehensive review of this relationship comes not from starting from one and moving to the other, but in doing both simultaneously.

Architecture and urbanism became a fundamental part of the project of modernity in the twentieth century. In this book, we define modernity as an ever-changing experience of encounter between people of different classes, different subcultures, different religions, and different forms of education and knowledge in the spaces of the city. Modernity as seen in the poignant work of Marshall Berman’s *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* was an important frame of

reference for many of the contributors to this book. We believe that Cairene modernity played out in the spaces of the city and is often formally consolidated in terms of specific urban forms. Cinema, as a medium and a profession, appeared during a time of major change in the world and in Egypt. Its ability to capture images, process them, and then project them to a general public contributed equally to the making of Cairo's modern image. Egyptian cinema has followed the city, and vice versa, synchronizing its narrative and representational techniques with the spirit of the times. It is this parallel and convergent relationship between the spaces of Cairo in cinema and their real counterparts—a double project in and of itself—which this book hopes to employ to construct an urban history of Cairene modernity in a manner that erodes the boundaries between the real and the reel.

As contributors to this volume, we have not ascribed to a single theory of modernity nor a specific or unified method of film analysis. We felt that each time period and each cinematic genre, as well as each of the films selected, may require different methodological choices. However, we produced a book structure that allows us to cover important events and periods in the history of Egypt that have impacted Cairo and its development. We also each agreed to limit our case studies to no more than four films per chapter so that we can maintain our focus on the specific issues that are relevant to selected themes and time periods. This stemmed from our underlying assumption that the city is not only that which appears on the screen, but also the mental city made by the cinematic medium and subsequently experienced in the real spaces of the physical city. We also understand that the portrayal of space in films is always partial and selective, resulting in different receptions by audiences of different cultures, classes, and even genders. Hence, much of the narrative presented in the individual chapters reflects each

contributor's interpretation of these spaces and not necessarily those of a wider Egyptian audience interested in the subject of these films.

The book is comprised of two parts, each around seven chapters long. The first section includes chapters, arranged chronologically, which use films from the 1930 to the end of the twentieth century to illustrate the development of a modern Cairo and its modern subjects. The second section is focused on tracing the transformation of the cinematic city under conditions of neoliberalism, religious fundamentalism, and class and gender tensions from the middle of the twentieth century to the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

Following this introductory prologue, which fleshes out the discourse on Egyptian urban modernity and the connection to cinematic Cairo, we move to the first part which deals with cinematic Cairo from 1930 to the end of the twentieth century. In the first chapter, titled "Bourgeois Cairo, 1930: Cinematic Representations of Modernity of Place in the Middle-class City," Ameer Saad uses the films *al-Warda al-bayda'* (*The White Rose*) (1933), *Yacout* (1934), and *al-'Azima (Resolve)* (1939) to explore the notion of sense of place in bourgeois Cairo in the 1930s. In particular, he studies how the emerging contrast between the modernity of the western part of the city and its more traditional eastern sections affected the bourgeois districts in between. Saad shows how modernity transformed the personality and social standing of the middle-class protagonists, evident from their general behavior and attitude as depicted in the three films. Similar to social status aspirations, conflict was also another facet of modernity experienced in cinematic space, and these conflicts were not just about personal interests, but also about resisting the changes brought by modernity. Those who aspire for evolution and those who reject it were found in both the middle class and the elites. As competition surged, the encounters sparked conflict and individuality, and fueled social fragility replacing traditional

solidarity. The films showed that becoming a modern bourgeois offered salvation for some and afforded middle-class men opportunities for upward social mobility, although this was usually achieved through partnership with upper-class elites.

In Chapter 2, which we titled “Naguib Mahfouz’s Cinematic Cairo: Depictions of Urban Transformation in Twentieth-century Egypt,” Mohammad Salama and I map the transformation of Cairo over the course of the twentieth century as it appears in five important Egyptian films based on the novels of the Nobel Prize-winning author Naguib Mahfouz. After a brief discussion of *Zuqaq al-Midaq (Midaq Alley)* (1963), a film based on Mahfouz’s story of a poor Cairo neighborhood during the Egyptian monarchy, we discuss the novel *al-Qahira al-gadida*, made into a film titled *Cairo 30* (1966) that discusses how the corruption of the regime at the time shaped the social life of the city. We then move to the period between 1919 and the late 1940s, seeking to capture the tradition–modernity dialectic as seen through the lens of films based on Mahfouz’s *Cairo Trilogy: Bayn al-Qasrayn (Palace Walk)* (1964), *Qasr al-Shouq (Palace of Desire)* (1967), and *al-Sukaryya (Sugar Street)* (1969). For us, the three films, which describe the life of a middle-class merchant family in the old city, capture the changing nature of commerce and leisure under colonial rule all the way through the struggle for independence. We conclude with an examination of another Mahfouz’s novel made into an important film, *Tharthara fouq al-Nil (Adrift on the Nile)* (1971) which captures a dejected Cairo mood following Egypt’s defeat in the Six Day War, and depicts the feelings and interactions between a group of people from different classes and different neighborhoods, highlighting the different forms of Cairene modernity of that period.

For Chapter 3, “Bridge as Border and Connector: Class and Social Relations in Cinematic Cairo, 1940s–50s,” Doaa Al Amir and I use the two films *Lao kont ghani (If I Were Rich)* (1942)

and *al-Qalb loh ahkam (The Heart has its Rules)* (1956) to accentuate the transformation of Cairene society to modernity and the impacts of socio-political change on cinematic Cairo at a time of significant national change. The films show how the 1952 army-led revolution precipitated a confrontation between Egypt's socio-economic classes and displaced a calmer community lifestyle, more comfortable with tradition and social hierarchy. We show that the distinction in the portrayal of cinematic Cairo between 1942 and 1956 was likely prompted by the political and social change that occurred in the country as a result of the 1952 revolutionary movement which brought in new conditions of encounter between these classes and created a modernity of aspiration for the masses. But this modernity of aspiration was full of contradictions because it was based on contentment with traditional roles and lifestyles.

Chapter 4 is titled “Cinematic Cairo of the United Arab Republic, 1958–62,” and, in it, Kinda AlSamara analyses three films, the comedy *Isma‘il Yasin fi Dimashq (Isma‘il Yasin in Damascus)*, the politically charged *‘Amaliqat al-bihar (Sea Titans)*, and the romantic film *Sanawat al-hub (Years of Love)* to explore the influence of films in shaping political awareness by contrasting the two periods before and after the unity between Egypt and Syria and the formation of the United Arab Republic. AlSamara suggests that the films show how Cairo and Damascus played an important role during the union and post-union period. Produced as a reflection of a new national spirit, the filmmakers, according to AlSamara, translated the realization of their circumstances—or the facts and events they witnessed—which in turn influenced them in a cinematic language. However, she argues that during the post-union period, the filmmakers attempted to uncover the extent to which reality was often falsified. And, from these films, it becomes clear how the cinematic representation of Cairo in terms of its relative advancement compared to other Arab cities of the time helped create Cairo's hegemonic image

across all forms of art and culture in the Arab world. AlSamara proposes that such cinematic representations of modern Cairo advanced an imaginary picture of modern culture and identifies a specific flow of ideas related to urban sophistication from Cairo to the surrounding Arab countries.

In Chapter 5, “Kafkaesque Modernity: Cairo in the 1980s and the Middle-class Housing Crisis,” Ahmed H. AbdelAzim, uses the films *al-Hob fok hadabat al-haram (Love on the Pyramids Plateau)* and *Karakoun fi al-shari ‘ (Prison Cell on the Street)*, produced in the mid-1980s, to examine the effect of social and economic upheaval as a result of migration to Cairo from the countryside in that time period. It traces the formation of a new social structure and the emergence of a class of nouveaux riches, following the economic restructuring of the Open Door policies of the late 1970s. Poor living conditions forced both its educated professionals and work-skilled laborers to seek a better life in the prospering Gulf states, resulting in a demographic shift and a major housing crisis, particularly for the middle class. AbdelAzim’s analysis of these two movies showcases the agony of the protagonists versus the poor response of the state. In both films, the protagonists fail to find an appropriate residence in the city. In *al-Hob*, the protagonist could not deal with the logic of the city, preferring to spend time in jail rather than live outside the city, and in *Karakoun*, the city pushes the protagonist beyond its boundaries, where he has to reconfigure how to live in the desert. Both films illustrate the necessary urban skills for survival that the protagonists had to adopt during these times, including extreme individuality and what AbdelAzim characterizes as fraudulent cleverness.

We stay with the same time period in Chapter 6, “Escaping Cairo: Bureaucratic Modernity in the Cinematic Portrayal of the City in the 1980s,” in which Tayseer Khairy discusses Cairo’s urban problems in that time period. Employing two films from the realist

genre, *Kharaga walam ya 'od* (*Left and Never Came Back*) and *Hona al-Qahira* (*Here is Cairo*), she explores how living in the big city had become too difficult, stressful, and intolerable. The city, as it is represented in these films, is subject to a warped form of neoliberalism, whereas the daily life of Cairo's residents is devoid of any urban comforts or pleasures. She suggests that the condition of Cairo at that time was a modernity of bureaucracy that drove its citizens towards a mental breakdown. The films show that escape to the countryside and even out of the country altogether became the only viable option to deal with the ever-changing oppressive economic and social conditions of the city.

In Chapter 7, Mariam Marei takes us into the last decade of the twentieth century by focusing on the different conditions that characterized the 1980s and how they changed by the mid-1990s from the special perspective of the "driver." In her "Cairo Beyond the Windshield: From the Modernity of Realism to Surrealistic Postmodernity, 1980s–90s" she uses the films *Sawwa' al-'utubis* (*Bus Driver*) (1982) and *'Afarit al-asfalt* (*Asphalt Devils*) (1996) to show changes not only in Cairene urban attitudes toward their city, but also the accompanying changes in Egyptian cinema. She argues that in the 1980s, films attempted to capture the struggle between traditional ethics and conduct and new forms of behavior emerging as a result of the Open Door policies. But by the 90s, the outcome seems to have been an escapism from an unbearable urban present to an introverted imaginary world which she labels surrealistic postmodernity. Comparing the making of the two films and their connection to urbanism, Marei views *Sawwa' al-'utubis* as a modern film about Cairo as a modern city with all of the encounters and conflicts that occur in urban modernity. However, she suggests that *'Afarit al-asfalt*, on the contrary, is a cinematic narrative that uses postmodern film techniques to illustrate the postmodern condition of Cairo as an increasingly fragmented neoliberal city. It is as if the

modern situation of the city required a modern storytelling form making the real and the reel identical, while its postmodern condition could best be represented in the reel medium using a similarly congruent narrative.

The second part of the book deals with a variety of themes in the transformation of cinematic Cairo. We start this section with the chapter “Transformations in the Cinematic Space of a Cairo Suburb in the Late Twentieth-Century” by Farah Gendy. In this, Gendy outlines how urban modernity in Heliopolis, a major Cairo suburb, has changed over three decades, using the films *Ard al-ahlam (Land of Dreams)* (1993), *Fi Shaet Masr al-Gadida (In the Heliopolis Flat)* (2007), and *Heliopolis* (2010). Following a chronological review of Egypt’s political, economic, and socio-cultural changes in the second half of the twentieth century, the selected films demonstrate the urban change that turned a garden city/oasis in the desert to a congested district that is part of a large metropolis. Through a dissection of the consumption and reproduction of urban space in the three films, Gendy is able to chart the changing perception of the suburb in the eyes of its inhabitants. Her chapter became very timely as, while it was being written, the government began building overpasses and bridges in Heliopolis that changed the character of this significant modern urban setting, possibly leaving films, like the three employed in this analysis, as a historic archive—not only of its built environment, but also of the spirit of its time.

In Chapter 9, “From *Hara* to *‘Imara*: Social Transformations in Cinematic Cairo” Mirette Aziz, exposes the thriving social mobility and economic development in Egypt and reveals the origins of the gap between classes in modern Cairo. Aziz makes the argument using the films *Shari‘ al-hob (Love Street)* (1958) and *‘Imarat Ya‘qoubian (The Yacoubian Building)* (2006). In the two films, both the *hara* and *‘imara* were cinematically dealt with as urban spaces that represented many of the traditional values of Egyptian society and the social transformations of

Cairo over the second half of the twentieth century. The analysis of the two films illustrates the change in cultural meanings and values of Cairo's current urbanism and highlights the contrast between the utopian aspiration of the *hara* and the dystopian reality of the *'imara*. (The *hara* being the traditional old quarter in the city while the *imara* is the modern apartment building) Aspirations to modernity in the *hara* of *Shari' al-Hob* required a temporary departure from it, while the condition of the *'imara* in *'Imarat Ya 'qoubian*, whose modernity was long gone, depicts a fragmented neoliberal city. As such, the building becomes a microcosm of the whole city with the appearance of the informal and illegal activity on its rooftop within the older formal modern structure.

Chapter 10, titled "Cairo's Cinematic Coffeehouses: Modernity, Urbanity, and the Changing Image of an Institution," by Khaled Adham builds on the premise that films are an integral part of the urban environment; therefore, cinematic representations over time reveal much about urban transformations in the city. It argues that, throughout much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, both urban theories and cinematic representations of Cairo have been linked through their reflections on the city's social, political, cultural, and spatial spheres. In the chapter Adham examines a selected group of Egyptian films that describe, portray, or represent the *qahwa*, or the traditional coffeehouse, and traces its transformation in a chronological order, following the historical timeframe of events: colonial era, Social Nationalism, early Egyptian capitalism, and neoliberal Egyptian capitalism. He proposes the *qahwa* as a bridge between the real and the reel, and argues that the cinematic *qahwa*, like its real counterpart, has undergone a process of modernization and globalization which also makes it another microcosm for what the whole city experienced from its colonial times to its current neoliberal state.uu

In Chapter 11, “Gendered Modernity: On the Changing Role of Women in Modern Cinematic Cairo, 1950s–2000s,” Nour Adel Sobhi highlights the issue of gender through the lens of Cairene cinema. She provides a review of the portrayals of women in twentieth-century Egyptian films and shows how cinematic modernity affected women’s lives. She suggests that middle- and upper-middle-class, and even urban poor, women have always faced challenges, but that, by the mid-twentieth century, women were starting to break social taboos, access higher education, work, and raise their incomes. Using four films that highlighted the connections between personal experience and larger social and political structures—*Ana horra (I Am Free)* (1959), *Meraty modir ‘am (My Wife is a General Manager)* (1966), *678* (2010), and *Nawwara* (2015)—Adel shows how, half a century after the first film, women were still struggling in the streets, at their work places, and on the transportation of both the real and the reel city. The four films accentuate the fact that the changing role of women over the last few decades might have given women a sense of freedom disguised behind burdens of responsibilities toward their families and communities. Harassment extended from over protection, to dominance in the home and neighborhood, to verbal and physical abuse, and finally reaching physical sexual harassment. Adel suggests that modernity has not liberated women in either the real or the reel media and that the recurring melodramatic victimization of women as shown in the twenty-first century is a reversal of the trend to showcase empowered woman in mid-twentieth-century films.

In Chapter 12, Hala A. Hassanien examines the changing place of religion in the city in “Religious Tolerance in the Cairo of the Movies 1950s–2000s”. She comments that, through its long history, Cairo provided a home for Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities. However, the 1952 Revolution and the rise of Arab nationalism resulted in the emigration and expulsion of the city’s Jewish community in the 1950s. Then, starting in the 1980s, other political factors

began to create divisions between the city's Muslim majority and Christian minority, which developed into massacres by the turn of the century and in the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution. Using the two films *Hasan wa Morqos wa Cohen (Hasan and Morqos and Cohen)* (1954) and *Hasan wa Morqos (Hasan and Morqos)* (2008), Hassanien tracks these changes by investigating the transformation of these urban communities and concludes by discussing how the attempts by the Egyptian film industry to smooth social discord in cinematic Cairo also document the extent to which fundamentalist attitudes controlled much of social behavior in the real city.

Chapter 13, "The City of a Thousand Minarets and a Million Satellite Dishes: The Dilemma of Islam and Modernity in Cinematic Cairo" by Muhammad Feteha, also contributes to the ongoing debate regarding religion and the city. Since the revolution of 1952, the conflict between the secularists and the Islamists has passed through different stages, with an initial retreat and later expansion and transformation of the role of Islam in the life of the Cairenes. Feteha analyzes three films that depict significant moments in the history of this struggle, *al-Sheikh Hasan (Sheikh Hasan)* (1954), *Lili* (2001), and *Mawlana (Our Sheikh)* (2016). The protagonist of each of these three films is a sheikh, or Muslim cleric, a character which allows us to closely view the changing status of Islam within society in cinematic Cairo through their eyes. The earlier film, *al-Sheikh Hasan*, presents to us the traditional view of the role of the religious preacher in the life of the community at the time of Cairo's exposure to modernity, where the mosque is the space of redemption. *Lili*, at the turn of the century, captures the moral struggle of the sheikh, where conflict exists over what defines morality within the city in light of the conflict between the Islamic ethical tradition and the urban life of modern Cairo. The opening scene of *Mawlana* shows an aerial view of Islamic Cairo in 2016, with a skyline constituted of traditional minarets and modern satellite dishes, an image that perfectly depicts the struggle that the city has

been witnessing between the soul of Islam in Egypt and the dilemmas of modernity in contemporary Cairo.

Finally, in the last chapter in the book, “Women’s Right to the City: Cinematic Representation of Cairene Urban Poverty,” Heba Safey Eldeen and Sherien Soliman examine the poor popular urban quarters of Cairo through cinema. Using three films—*Youm mor, Youm helw* (*Bitter Day, Sweet Day*), *Khaltet Fawzeyya* (*Fawzeyya’s Formula*), and *Youm lel settat* (*A Day for Women*)—that span the three decades of Hosni Mubarak’s rule, they reflect on the reality of working women in the popular urban quarters of the city. Through the films, they investigate women’s right to the city from three major viewpoints: the cinematic representation of women’s roles within the overall social structure of the marginalized Cairene communities; the representation of urban poverty in the areas where women struggle to survive in informal areas; and the representation of gender power relations in the urban spaces of the city. They conclude by demonstrating that women in poor urban areas exhibit traits of wittiness, hospitality, and solidarity that allow them to care for one another in their community. With little or no formal education, they work in or run small businesses that contribute substantially to the micro-economy of their neighborhoods. They suggest that in both the reel medium and in real life, Cairene women defy the socio-physical barriers imposed upon them as they turn deteriorated urban pockets in the city into work places and spaces for leisure and interaction.

I hope that the content of each contribution, the detailed scope of the films used in each chapter, the historical chronology presented in the first part of the book, and the specific themes that we analyze in the second part have all built a substantial image of cinematic Cairo over a whole century, in a manner that allows us to understand the current city, its transformations, its encounters with modernity, and its possible futures—both the real and the cinematic.

[b-head]References

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