

## A REVIEW OF "WOMAN'S IMAGE IN THE EGYPTIAN CINEMA" (1)

Woman and the cinema are two topics that have been frequently brought to light by sociology students and researchers during the last few years. The first, because of the increasing efforts made on an international level to secure her fuller participation in national development. The second, because of its growing importance as a means of entertainment, particularly among the masses.

If the cinema is one of the major sources of contact with the masses, the question of its authenticity and of its impact on them will readily arise. How faithful are motion pictures in reflecting the actual image and needs of Egyptian society? What effect, if any, do these pictures have on the spectators' thinking and behavior?

In answering the second question, sociologists, psychologists and criminologists are not of the same opinion, some of them deny the existence of any relationship between people's conduct and the films they see. Another group emphasizes the effect of moving pictures on people's minds, using the following arguments:

- 1 - Movies influence the spectators' knowledge and behavior, regardless of their informative value.
- 2 - The spectators are induced to imitate the heroes or sympathise with them.
- 3 - They are affected by them in their opinions, tastes, tendencies and general outlook.

The third group of researchers adopt a middle course. They affirm the influence of the cinema on the individual's behavior but do not consider it the main cause of delinquency, though it might suggest the most up-to-date methods of crime.

We may conclude from the above points that the cinema, as an outlet for emotions, does affect the spectator. Under certain social and particular circumstances, it may be a secondary factor in inducing or encouraging misbehavior.

This conclusion carries us back to the first question raised: What has been the goal of the Egyptian cinema in handling social problems? How far has it succeeded in projecting a real image of society and especially of the Egyptian woman?

The study made by Muna S. Al-Hadeedy covers 410 films projected between 1962 and 1972, containing 460 women characters whose roles were distributed as follows:

	No of characters	Per- centage
No clear function	108	23
House-Keeper	102	22
Worker	94	20.5
Student	47	10.5
Artiste (Public entertainer)	44	9.5
Rural Woman	25	5.4
Delinquent	25	5.4
Other function	10	3.2
Total		100

It is clear from this table that the Egyptian film does not give a realistic image of the Egyptian woman's work, since it relegates to the role of dummies, or insignificant characters, 23% of the whole, i.e. 108 out of 460. These superfluous characters represent woman as frivolous, entirely given to selfish, pleasure-seeking activities, devoid of any responsibility toward her family or her environment.

While the percentage of 22 allotted to housekeepers is nearer to reality, there is still the objection that 68% of them are childless, thus eliminating the problems that confront the mother in bringing up her children and the difficulties to which the Egyptian family is generally exposed.

Divorced women are allotted 4% out of 22, in spite of the fact that divorce is one of the serious problems that the Egyptian woman has to face. Moreover, the problem is not presented in a positive, instructive manner. The divorcee is generally represented as a negative character, incapable of facing life by herself, with no other choice but delinquency as a solution to her problem.

Giving 20.5% to the working woman may involve some exaggeration which Muna Hadeedi attributes to certain technical and social factors. In the first place, the presence of the working woman allows her more opportunity for contact with the other sex, hence more chance for developing the action of the story. In the second place, woman's work outside the home has created a number of problems that the cinema has tried to explore but in an inadequate and not profound manner.

The student or unmarried woman is a popular character for film producers because she offers wide opportunities for the creation of emotional plots. But the cinema has often presented girl students in immoral situations, showing the university campus as the playground of moral degradation instead of an intellectual center. There are at least 6 films of this kind, projected between 1962 and 1971.

(1) Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by Muna S. Al-Hadeedy, School of Information, Cairo University, 1977.

The remaining 3.2% films represent woman in traditional occupations like teaching, secretarial work, etc. In a few instances, she appears in very recent roles like engineering and film production.

Though the rural sector occupies a central position in Egyptian life, only 5.4% of the total has been allotted to it while the "artiste" or public entertainer has been given 9.5%. Film producers are evidently prompted by commercial interests when they give so much prominence to the artiste, who gives them opportunity to display the glamorous life of night clubs and cabarets. In general, it is the common dancer and singer not the genuine, brilliant actress who is put in the light.

Films dealing with the rural woman's life, in spite of their limited number, often carry a social or political message. Most of them are adaptations of novels by committed Egyptian authors like Toufiq Al-Hakeem, Yusuf Idrees, Tharwat Abaza, Yahya Haqqi, and Abdel-Rahman Shirqawi.

The rural woman occupies an equal rank with the delinquent woman: 5.4% though the former has much more importance in real life. It often happens that woman is presented as a mischievous character or a greedy creature who is ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of wealth. An example is the film: "Ash-Shaitan Imra'a" (Satan Is a Woman), 1971. In many cases, a delinquent woman is presented in a way that arouses the spectator's sympathy, when she is compelled to do wrong in order to secure the expenses of a sick mother or father, as for, example in the film entitled: "Asrar Ul-Banat" (The Girls' Secrets), 1969, and in the film: "Al-Qahira 30", (Cairo' 30), in which the young girl struggles to defend her guilty parents. Among other causes for a woman's delinquency, the Egyptian cinema points out frustration in love, where a woman is presented as a weak creature who is easily led into evil because she has lost her beloved or been betrayed by him.

The above have been the principal features of woman's image in the Egyptian movies during eleven years, 1962-1972. The author of this study, Muna S El-Hadeedi, has prepared a criterion by which we may judge a successful or unsuccessful presentation of characters. According to her, women characters may be presented under three images:

- 1 - One of complete conformity with logical behaviour and principles approved by society.
- 2 - One of complete opposition to reality, as when the character reacts in a violent and absurd manner, uses illogical means to solve her problem, otherwise she remains passive and insensible to what goes on around her.
- 3 - One that follows a middle course between the first and the second image, showing the mobility of the character between illogical and logical conduct, presenting a more true-to-life or round personality.

Judged by the above criterion, the Egyptian cinema has presented 233 women characters, i.e. 50.6% of the whole, with illogical or unrealistic behavior. Those whose behavior seems logical or realistic reach 23.7%, i.e. 109 out of 406 characters, while those in between count 25.7% or 118.

These proportions prove that the image of woman in the Egyptian films, except in very few cases, remains traditional, emphasizing woman's negativism and incapacity to face difficulty or to solve her problems in an appropriate manner. In most cases, she has been presented as a physically attractive creature who lacks intellectual ability and social consciousness.

Giving a more realistic image of woman in films, in children's textbooks and in other mass media, was one of the chief concerns of the Woman's International Year Conferences held in Mexico and elsewhere in 1975.

Condensed by Najla Husni  
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## From: IYC (International Year of the Child)

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"In a world in which an average working man is made to pay in taxes the equivalent of two weeks' salary for armaments, the future of children is under a dark cloud of confusion, penury, malnutrition and the ever-present menace of total annihilation". p. 7;

"It is now estimated that 250,000 children are going blind in both eyes, as shown by recent studies conducted

in Indonesia, with extrapolation to other countries where the problem is even more severe. Blindness in children is linked with vitamin A deficiency".

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ghamil of Saudi Arabia, president of the "M.E. Committee for the Blind," said a cooperative regional programme for prevention of blindness has been launched."

## LEBANESE WOMEN IN THE MUNICIPAL COUNCILS

The minister of the Interior in Lebanon, Dr. Salah Selman, addressed to the Administrator and other administrative officials in North Lebanon a note asking them to deliver him lists of names of competent persons, qualified to serve as members of municipal councils in towns and villages where they do not exist. The note made it clear that the new municipal councils should include women among their members.

("Le Réveil", 25 March, 1979)