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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: Zoom In! Zoom Out! Egyptian Film Production: Innovative Solutions for Structural Problems.

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/s: Chihab El Khachab, Mohamed Atwa, Adly Thoma

CHAIR: Heba El Karrar

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Moderator: Radamis Zaky

Panel Description: This panel is a conversation between academia, innovative industries and community initiatives that are trying to provide different solutions to the various and complex problems that the current cinema industry face in Egypt. Egyptian cinema industry is the oldest cinema industry in the region. However, the industry is currently facing different challenges. The panel objective is to provide a scholarly analysis to the current status of the Egyptian cinema industry and to have a conversation on the different innovative solutions for overcoming these challenges.

Paper title: Support Personnel and the ‘Crisis’ of Egyptian Film Production- Chihab El Khachab (University of Oxford)

This paper starts with the observation that the Egyptian film industry has been said to be ‘in crisis’ since its very beginnings. The trope of ‘crisis’, I argue, acts as a catalyst for Egyptian filmmakers to discuss the industry’s working conditions. Indeed, making a commercial film involves an extensive and hierarchical division of labour. While creative workers such as the director, the cinematographer, or the art director enjoy more status and decision-making power on set, most workers involved in making the film product are support personnel – assistant-directors, cameramen, gaffers, grips, production assistants, and boom operators.

There is now a sizeable literature on “below-the-line” workers in media production, mostly in Euro-American settings (Caldwell 2008, Mayer 2011) and in South and East Asia (Ganti 2012, Wilkinson-Weber 2014, Martin 2016). This literature has been instrumental in highlighting the hidden labour behind the scenes on commercial film sets, but little has been written on this issue in a Middle Eastern context. Based on extensive fieldwork in Cairo between 2013 and 2015, I expand on this literature by discussing the historical conditions under which an unequal, if largely functional, Egyptian film industry remains ‘in crisis.’ This talk will attempt to explain why support personnel receive little attention in existing scholarship, while describing the important contributions that they make to the film industry in Egypt.

References

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- Mayer, Vicki. (2011). *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy*. Durham: Duke University Press
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Random Not Radom: Recycle & Upcycle The Cinema Industry Waste Material in Egypt.- Mohamed Atwa (Random Content)

The film industry is one of the most Nobel industries in all time yet for decades (at least in our region); we cannot consider it as a responsible one when it comes to environmental care and sustainability. Long shooting hours and its emissions, the materials used, how sets gets uninstalled and other conditions are all key factors contributing in a very challenging “environmental friendly” industry

In Cairo, for more than 50 years loads of materials were piled up in the cinema studios storage until they reached an unusable condition – in other words, they became waste materials taking so much space.

Coming from a strong belief that cinema with its magic can give back more to the human race and can support the world move towards a more sustainable planet evolved the idea of “NOT THE END”; to recycle & upcycle the cinema industry waste material and turn it into pieces of art that reflects the beauty within the industry and shed more light on such an important cause. Thirteen designers were asked to collaborate with the initiative creators; they went to El-Ahram & El-Nahass studios (one of the oldest studios in Cairo) scouted, picked the materials, put their own interpretations to it and the outcome was ten outstanding art pieces that got displayed at “NOT THE END” exhibition in Elgouna film festival 2021.

This initiative was created and produced by “Random content” – founded in 2019 a local medium sized agency that has a strong belief in change and appreciates the impact of what content can offer to a more sustainable community.

Expanding the Horizon: Creating new opportunities for the Egyptian Cinema Industry through Innovative Solutions and International Collaborations- Adly Thoma (Gemini Africa).

Gemini Africa adopts a vision of collaboration superseding competition through creating a fast-growing partnership network of local, regional and international key players with each partner taking part in various programs following the target audience and the relevant business sectors availing unprecedented opportunities to the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Following the company strong belief in the importance of partnerships, Gemini Africa works constantly on adding both sector agnostic strategic partnerships in addition to the sector specific ones as well.

It is worthy to note that despite economic challenges that the whole world has faced during 2020 and 2021, when it comes to success and proven track record, the company was able to establish great on-ground impact by:

- Expanding the company’s partnership network to reach more almost 100 key players in diverse fields including strategic, governmental, UN, African, and international partners.

- Reaching out and connecting with 3000+ startups to provide them with the needed support to maintain financial sustainability and operational continuity following their stage and readiness.

As part of the Gemini Africa's quest to offer unique and innovative solutions to uprising entrepreneurs by focusing on untapping business opportunities and creating new channels between the ecosystem and the business world, the company was able to identify the apparent gap between the ecosystem and the filmmaking industry.

Consequently, Gemini Africa pioneered by launching a new entrepreneurial track under the name of CinemaTech to bridge this huge gap and open the door to a whole realm of opportunities between both worlds. CinemaTech is a track to find new technologies created by startups that facilitate the making and viewing of films/series and connects these talented entrepreneurs with the filmmaking industry. By stepping into the blue waters of CinemaTech, not only will Gemini Africa shine the light unto the region's undiscovered entrepreneurs and startups but it will also enable the Egyptian and Arab filmmakers to compete and lead globally. The CinemaTech track will be the umbrella for supporting all entrepreneurs and creatives offering ideas related to any of the different performing arts categories not just filmmaking.

Ever since its kick off, CinemaTech created a big buzz and attracted a lot of attention from both the filmmaking industry and the entrepreneurial ecosystem with partners approaching Gemini Africa to dedicate certain activities at events just to talk about the track.

The company officially holds the intellectual property rights for both: the creation of the CinemaTech track in addition to all pitching events that are related to the track.

Theorizing Representation of Women and Youth in Lebanese Cinema: The beginnings and beyond – Dina Salha (University of Ottawa)

In this presentation, and based on a critical socio-historical examination of the Lebanese film industry, the author argues that Lebanese women inhabit contradictory spaces in Lebanese Cinema and that the representations of Lebanese youth are inherited by the mutually contributing conditions to the representation of gender and sexuality.

The concept of representation is used here to refer to 3 aspects:

- 1) Image and symbolization on the screen;
- 2) Access and participation behind the scenes as filmmakers and directors;
- 3) Representation as "speaking for oneself and experiences" and the participation in the public and political sphere.

While some argue that, historically, the majority of the mainstream Lebanese cinema is dominated by patriarchal cinematography and representations (Khatib, 2006,2008, 2012; Balaa, 2019; Sayegh; Soboh; Fortier; 2021), recent studies by Northwestern University (2016), commissioned by the Doha Film Institute in Qatar, found that there is an increase in the participation of women and young directors in the field which may be significant to the diversification of exhibited representations (for example: 26% of independent Arab filmmakers are women; In Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon, 25% of all new directors are women). Though women's roles have become more active in recent movies (such as in the films of the pioneer Jocelyn Saab and later the films of Nadine Labaki), and portrayals of Lebanese youth have been more inclusive and divergent, there seems to be a hybrid representation between the conservative and traditional roles (i.e: lost, sexualized, and nationally constructed) and the more participatory, contributory, and open roles in private and public life; it is as if Lebanese women and youth (and maybe by extension Arab women and youth) are continuously managing the shifting identity crises on a multitude of levels.

Based on the social history of the Lebanese cinema, this study argues that the aforementioned patterns of these representations are the product of the intersectionality of - as well as the resistance to:

- 1) The ideologies of colonialism and its bi-products (sectarianism, war, acculturation, religio-ethnicities, socially constructed gender binaries, hyper-hetrosexuality and masculinities),
 - 2) Patriarchy (hyper masculinities and hegemonic femininities constructed through the lens of religio-ethno nationalisms),
 - 3) And the machine of capitalism and the industrialization of filmmaking.
- Conclusively, the examination at hand considers and identifies some of the Lebanese films' challenges and opportunities to distribution and access to broader audiences.

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Dr Chihab El Khachab- University of Oxford

Dr. Chihab El Khachab is Associate Professor in Visual Anthropology at the University of Oxford. His research examines working practices in the Egyptian film industry, with attention to labor dynamics, production operations, and the use of new media technologies.

Mohamed Atwa- Round Content

Mohamed Atwa is a creative director and founder of Random Content which was established in 2019, a medium sized creative agency focusing on creating strategic communication for local and global brands. He is highly passionate about creating creative platforms that connects art scene with commercial and industrial scene. he gained over the years a good reputation in this element. With more than 12 years experience in advertising and music industry, working with big corporates, multinational agencies, and artists he has gained a good experience in dealing with commercial needs while creating value for people in every piece of work. In 2021 he has founded Not The End as the first platform specialized in designing sustainable platforms for industries and corporates, connecting both the design scene and the industrial commercial scene.

Adly Thoma- Gemini Africa

Adly Thoma is the Chairman & CEO of Gemini Africa an investment company and a subsidiary of Orascom group. The company plays a very active role in the development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem by being a one stop hub providing a multitude of essential services for startups and talented youth.

Alongside Thoma's innovative entrepreneurial activities, he created a new entrepreneurial track, CinemaTech, aiming to introduce entrepreneurship into the filmmaking industry for the first time worldwide. Adly holds the intellectual property rights for founding this new track as an on-ground proof of his pioneering thinking.

Thoma as well, is a Worldwide Project Management Consultant for 85 countries – Schlumberger International – USA and an advisor for various Egyptian enterprises and corporations. He sits on the boards of multiple business, entrepreneurial and social organizations including Al Mawwan for e-building technology, Hall of Talents a filmmaking support platform, Vesstoss for green transport, Hekaytee Podcast, Banati foundation and the Peace & Prosperity foundation. This is in addition to being a leader of modernization & digital transformation, a member of think tanks and innovations committees at distinct bodies including The American Chamber of Commerce, the Arab Council of Social Responsibility and the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies and many more.

Adly has an extensive experience in education, teaching and development. He is a professor of practice at the University of Agora - USA, an adjunct faculty at the Dubai school of government in cooperation with Harvard Kennedy School, a lecturer for the mini-MBA program at the state university of New York (OSWEGO), post graduate instructor and consultant within Egypt, the Middle East, Africa, Europe & the Far East at multiple recognized institutions including the American University in Cairo (AUC), Ain Shams and Cairo universities.

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