CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

### ARTICLE

# On the Heels of 1967: Chahine, Cinema, and Emotional Response(s) to the Defeat

Tamara Maatouk 🆔

Graduate Center, City University of New York, New York, NY, USA
Email: tmaatouk@gradcenter.cuny.edu

## Abstract

Many scholars have addressed the 1967 war in their studies, exploring its origins and aftermath, mostly in the context of diplomacy, the military, or regional and Cold War politics. Studies dealing with the war's repercussions on social, intellectual, and cultural life in Egypt are substantial as well. Yet the scholarship dedicated primarily to the study of emotions on the heels of the war remains scarce and disproportionate to the magnitude of the defeat. By juxtaposing films such as *al-Ard* (The Land, 1970), *al-Ikhtiyar* (The Choice, 1971), and *al-ʿUsfur* (The Sparrow, 1974), all directed by Egyptian film-maker Youssef Chahine, with contemporaneous essays, films, songs, interviews, and the press, I examine the different emotional responses of Chahine and, by extension and association, Egyptian cineasts and critics on the heels of the defeat, tracing their change between June 1967 and October 1973, when Egypt retaliated by launching an attack on Israeli positions in the Sinai Peninsula, and their possible connection to the existing understandings of the defeat at the time.

**Keywords:** 1967 war; Youssef Chahine; cinema; defeat; emotions

"What a black day! We lost, and we did not even know it," Shaykh Ahmad breaks down in tears as he listens to the televised speech of President Gamal Abdel Nasser revealing Egypt's defeat in June 1967 and announcing his resignation. Devastated, Yusuf, the journalist, remains silent with teary eyes, uttering one sentence only: "We think revolution. We write revolution. But we do not do revolution." The shock on people's faces fills the eerie silence that engulfs shots of Egypt's abandoned streets, empty balconies, and Nasser's housing projects. Even Johnny, the drunken British sympathizer, stares at the television in disbelief. The young police officer Raʾuf covers his face with his hand in anguish, but shortly afterward, he and his love interest Fatima, take to the streets, joining the growing crowd aroused by Bahiyya's resilience and call of perseverance. "No! We shall fight again!" Bahiyya angrily shouts, confident that they will not give up. Caught off guard by the delirious masses, the security official retreats into the building fearfully.[1]

With these images and words, Youssef Chahine ends his film *al-ʿUsfur* (The Sparrow, 1974), in which he recreates a historic moment in Egypt's memory.[2] This process of reimagining and reconstructing the emotional responses of Egyptians to shocking news of the defeat, first in words and then in images, did not materialize until at least three years after June 1967. From contemporaneous press, we know that the idea of the film was presented to

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[1] Youssef Chahine, dir., *al-ʿUsfur* (Cairo: Misr International Films, 1974), DVD, 1:34:24–1:42:00. Some of these shots did not exist in an early version of the script, handwritten by Chahine in a school notebook, such as Yusuf's line and the shot of the security commander; La Cinémathèque française, Paris, CHAHINE1-B1, Ensemble de notes pour al-Asfour (Le Moineau), Senaristique/Documentations II/III, Scenes 54–95.

[2] The date refers to the year in which the film was commercially released.

the censorship committee in September 1970, that the script was finalized a year later, in 1971, that filming concluded sometime in July 1972, and that it was banned for two years before its commercial release in 1974 following the 1973 October War.[3] During these six years, from 1967 to 1973, Egypt witnessed major historical events—a war of attrition, student demonstrations, labor protests, publicized tribunals, Nasser's death, the "corrective revolution," and more—all impacting the public's perception of the reasons for and the meaning of the defeat in one way or another. Chahine, like most artists and intellectuals of the time, was not immune to these tremors. In addition to representing the emotional responses of Egyptians to the sudden revelation of the scale of the defeat, al-ʿUsfur expresses Chahine's understanding of the causes of the defeat, blatantly accusing the government of being responsible for it. This perception of the defeat, however, is missing in his two previous films, al-ʿArd (The Land, 1970) and al-Ikhtiyar (The Choice, 1971), in which he also addresses the defeat but attributes it to other factors, to the exclusion of any visual expression of anger or hopeful ending is also missing in his two previous films. In this article, I examine the different emotional responses of Chahine and, by extension and association, Egyptian cineasts and critics on the heels of the defeat, tracing their change between June 1967 and October 1973, when Egypt retaliated by launching an attack on Israeli positions in the Sinai Peninsula, and the possible connection of these emotional responses to the existing understandings of the defeat at the time.[4]

## Writing the Emotional History of the Defeat

Many scholars have addressed the 1967 war in their studies, exploring the origins and the aftermath of the war, mostly in the context of diplomacy, the military, or regional and Cold War politics.[5] Recent work, however, has been devoted to a revisionist history of the war that employs a variety of Egyptian sources to focus, among other things, on the relationship between Nasser and Field Marshal ʿAbd al-Hakim ʿAmr, and the institutions they represented (the ruling party and the army respectively), as a lens through which to reexamine the events leading up to the war, the war encounter itself, and its immediate consequences.[6] Studies with an emphasis on the war's repercussions on the social, intellectual, and cultural life in the Arab world, particularly Egypt, are substantial as well. From the polarization of thought as a reaction to the war to the many ways it was expressed in popular culture, these scholarly contributions have enriched the historiography of the 1967 war and complicated its narratives.[7] Yet the scholarship dedicated primarily to the

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[3] Egyptian Catholic Center for Cinema, Cairo (hereafter ECCC), al-ʿUsfur, file no. 1598.

[4] The term cineast here refers to any person involved in the process of filmmaking.

[5] For years, the Egyptian perspective of the war was accessible only through memoirs or historical fiction authored by military men, such as: ʿIssam Darraz, Dubat Yunyu Yatakalamun: Kayfa Shahada Junud Misr Hazimat 67 (Cairo: al-Manar al-Jadid, 1989); Muhammad Fawzi, Harb al-Thalath Sanawat 1967/1970 (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabi, 1990); and Muhammad al-Jawadi, Mudhakirat Qada al-ʿAskariyya al-Misriya 67: al-Tariq ila al-Naksa (Cairo: Dar al-Khayyal, 2000). Another important account, written not by a military man but by a journalist and Nasser's closest confidant, is Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal's Harb al-Thalathin Sana: al-Infijar 1967 (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1990).

[6] Mamduh Anis Fathi, Mina al-Thawra ila al-Naksa: Muqadimat Harb Huzayran/Yunyu 1967 (Abu Dhabi: Markaz al-Imarat li-l-Dirassat wa-l-Buhuth al-Istratijiyya, 2003). Khaled Fahmy's new project is "an attempt at a coherent, if tense, revisionist narrative" of the war; he has written short articles and also given a series of public lectures on "The Egyptian Army in the 1967 War" (6 May 2020, https://khaledfahmy.org/en/2020/05/10/the-egyptian-army-in-the-1967-war). See also Hazem Kandil, Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt (London: Verso, 2012); Zeinab Abul-Maged, Militarizing the Nation: The Army, Business, and Revolution in Egypt (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

[7] For the intellectual response, see, for example, Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabiʿ, Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History (London: Pluto Press, 2004); Suzanne Elizabeth Kassab, Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); and Sune Haugbolle, "The New Arab Left and 1967," British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 44, no. 4 (2017). For the impact on culture and society, particularly film, see Walter Armbrust, Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge

study of emotions on the heels of the war remains scarce and disproportionate to the magnitude of the defeat, the consequences of which, in the words of historian Sherene Seikaly, "continue to constitute of the present."[8]

In *al-Mamarr* (The Passage, dir. Sherif Arafa, 2019), for example, an Egyptian feature film that dramatizes the events between June 1967 and October 1973, with a particular focus on the War of Attrition, the memory of the defeat is still intertwined with a sense of loss, shock, and disappointment, as is evident in the first twenty minutes of the film, which briefly depict the military mobilization on both sides, the attack on Egyptian airfields, the withdrawal of Egyptian troops (against the will of some officers), and the reaction of the main characters—notably, the scene in which Colonel Nur, loses his temper after being subjected to humiliation and ridicule by fellow Egyptians. Like Chahine's films, *al-Mamarr* is grappling to make sense of what happened, but it perceives the defeat differently. The defeat is treated teleologically as an event that had to happen, both in reality and on film, for the victory of 1973 to occur. As such, emotions such as loss and shock take second place to a desire for retaliation, which becomes a plot device that moves the narrative forward.

In fact, *al-Mamarr* may serve as an excellent example of how emotions have been treated in scholarly studies. We know from existing literature that emotions or emotional states, such as disillusionment, despair, and shock, were commonplace in the cultural and intellectual scene on the heels of the defeat, and some scholars have argued that these states played a role in creating a productive force that was translated into a proliferation of cultural products, polarization of thought, radicalization of action and critique, alienation of youth, and prevalence of religious miracles.[9] However, little attention has been given to why there were various emotional responses to the defeat, why it was these responses specifically, and what impact the discussion, or recognition, of the origins of the defeat has had on these responses. In this article, I argue that emotional responses to the defeat were not only factors of change—as most of the existing scholarship has implied—but also were indicators of change, mainly in the apprehension of the meaning of the defeat. As such, the emotional response to the defeat was neither singular nor static, but was multifaceted and continuously shifting, for such responses were, and still are, influenced, conditioned, and informed by several internal and external dynamics, be they socioeconomic, political, intellectual, cultural, or military. In this article, I will only focus on the responses of Chahine and his circle—a particular group of cultural producers—between 5 June 1967 and 6 October 1973, when the defeat started being viewed through the lens of a victory.

Emotions are regarded in this present article not as unconscious sensations but as the outcome of a cognitive appraisal of an eliciting situation.[10] According to historian Barbara

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University Press, 1996); Durriya Sharaf al-Din, *al-Siyasa wa-l-Sinima fi Misr, 1961–1981* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Misriyya al-ʿAmma li-l-Kitab, 2002); Joel Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama: Popular Film and Civic Identity in Nasser's Egypt* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2002); Viola Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2006); and Dalia Said Mostafa, *The Egyptian Military in Popular Culture: Context and Critique* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[8] Sherene Seikaly, "Introduction," *JadMag* 6, no. 1 (2018): 6. It is worth noting here that although many of the works mentioned above do touch upon the general mood in post-1967 Egypt in their studies, emotions, or more specifically the emotional response of Egyptians, is often brought up in passing but not as the main object of inquiry. One of the exceptions is Sharif Yunis, *al-Zahif al-Muqadas: Mudhaharat al-Tanahi wa-Tashakul ʿIbadat Nasser* (Cairo: Dar Mirit, 2005).

[9] See, for example, Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Abu-Rabiʿ, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies*; Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique*; and Mériam N. Belli, *An Incurable Past: Nasser's Egypt Then and Now* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2013).

[10] This is known as the intentionalist approach to the study of emotions, which argues that "the relation an emotion bears to its object is not an accidental or contingent attribute but an essential feature," as opposed to the nonintentionalist approach, which believes that "the discharge of the emotions occurs independently of the subject's cognition or apprehension of the meaning of the triggering stimuli"; Jonaz Knatz and Nuala Caomhánach, "The Ascent of Affect: Emotions Research and the History of Emotions—Interview with Ruth Leys," Part 2, *Journal of*

Rosenwein, emotions are closely tied to values and assessments; they cannot be studied out of context, for they depend "on the narratives that people use to make sense of themselves and their world, and on the accepted or idiosyncratic modes of expression that are employed to communicate them."[11] In integrating the history of emotions into the histories of the 1967 war, particularly the cultural and intellectual histories, I hope to emphasize certain connections and relations between emotions and the situations that elicited them—not the defeat per se, but the different perceptions of the defeat, along with its causes and meanings—that would otherwise have remained unexplored.

Moreover, I draw on two distinct theoretical propositions put forward by the history of emotions and film studies. The first challenges the "methodological subordination of visuals to language in the negotiation of meaning."[12] The second argues that a character's "expressions of emotion . . . are semiotic discursive constructs designed by filmmakers."[13] Both, however, suggest that a combination of visuals, music, sounds, narrative events, and popular references may represent a particular emotion without it being explicitly named or mentioned in the film. As such, I contend that films were the medium in and through which Chahine not only expressed his reaction to the defeat but also tried to make sense of and give meaning to what happened and recreate what he felt.

Youssef Chahine's films have garnered a lot of critical and academic attention from many scholars across disciplines and languages, and he, along with Salah Abu Sayf, remains the most studied Egyptian filmmaker to date.[14] Although I build on many of these studies and borrow from their insights, my focus in this paper is not his life and career, his film language and style, his ideological and philosophical concerns, his success and reputation in and outside of Egypt, his national and transnational project, or the representation of history, society, and culture in his films at large. I center my argument on the expression of emotions in *al-Ard*, *al-Ikhtiyar*, and *al-ʿUsfur* , tracing their changes and connections to what was happening behind the scenes, be it the general film scene or the wider cultural and intellectual scenes. Although some would argue that Chahine's films are the least representative of Egyptian society in its entirety, they, like any other film, remain "an integrative site for a wide range of discourses, as a nodal point of intersecting voices."[15] Films are products of a collaborative and multilayered process, which makes them an apt source for exploring the "emotional communities" in which they were produced and screened.[16] This circle or community, whose members often share similar interests and goals at a certain period, may include film administrators, producers, directors, writers, actors, editors, music composers, and critics, who engaged with Chahine's films or worked on them. By juxtaposing

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*the History of Ideas* (blog), 20 April 2020, https://jhiblog.org/2020/04/20/the-ascent-of-affect-emotions-research-and-the-history-of-emotions-interview-with-ruth-leys-part-ii.

[11] Jan Plamper, "The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns," *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (2010): 259.

[12] Imke Rajamani, "Pictures, Emotions, Conceptual Change: Anger in Popular Cinema," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7, no. 2 (2012): 52.

[13] Dezheng Feng and Kay L. O'Halloran, "The Multimodal Representation of Emotion in Film: Integrating Cognitive and Semiotic Approaches," *Semiotica* 197 (2013): 81.

[14] See, for example, Muhammad al-Sawi, *Sinima Youssef Chahine: Rihla Idyulujiyya* (Alexandria: Dar al-Matbuʿat al-Jadida, 1990); Maureen Kiernan, "Cultural Hegemony and National Film Language: Youssef Chahine," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 15 (1995): 130–52; Ibrahim Fawal, *Youssef Chahine* (London: British Film Institute, 2001); Walid Shmayt, *Youssef Chahine: Hayat li-l-Sinima* (Beirut: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 2001); Ibrahim al-ʿAris, *Youssef Chahine: Nazrat Tufl wa-Qabdat al-Mutamarid* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2009); Mustafa Muharram, *Youssef Chahine: Aflam al-Sira al-Dhatiyya* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Misriyya al-ʿAmma li-l-Kitab, 2009); Malek Khouri, *The Arab National Project in Youssef Chahine's Cinema* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010).

[15] Anton Kaes, "German Cultural History and the Study of Film: Ten Theses and a Postscript," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 56–57.

[16] "Emotional communities" was coined by historian Barbara H. Rosenwein to mean "social groups that adhere to the same valuations of emotions and how they should be expressed"; Plamper, "History of Emotions," 253.

these three films with contemporaneous essays, films, songs, interviews, and the press, I expand the focus from Chahine to the artistic and intellectual circle to which he belonged.

Even though other Egyptian directors did address the defeat in their work, the advantage of focusing on Chahine's films is twofold: first, these three films were critically acclaimed and, in the case of the first two, widely viewed.[17] Second, Chahine remains the only director to produce three feature films in response to the defeat between June 1967 and October 1973. It is, therefore, important that we study these three films as a compound work. Individually, *al-Ard, al-Ikhtiyar,* and *al-ʿUsfur* speak to their immediate presents, each with a specific "space of experience" and "horizons of expectation."[18] Combined they embody a "crisis of time" in Egyptian history.[19] Writing in January 1974, a few months after the October War, film critic ʿAbd al-Munʿim Saʿd remarked, "On the morning of that immortal day [6 October 1973], and after six years of darkness—since the setback of June [1967], history had ceased to move, everything had come to a halt . . . history has restarted its path through victory."[20] As a trilogy then, these three films constitute an ideal case study in which patterns, continuities, and changes in the emotional response of a particular emotional community, comprised of an artist and his creative collaborators in conversation with fellow artists, critics, and intellectuals, during a period that falls between a defeat and a victory, can be traced.[21]

## *Al-Ard* (The Land, 1970)

In January 1970, ʿAbd al-Hamid Juda al-Sahar, head of the public film sector in Egypt, received a letter with all the highly favorable foreign reviews of the recently screened Egyptian film in Paris, *al-Ard*.[22] The sender was none other than the director himself, and the reviews were indeed flattering.[23] The film went on to represent Egypt at the 1970

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[17] *Al-Ard* premiered in Cinema Rivoli in Cairo on 26 January 1970, remained in theaters for seven weeks, and attracted a total of 144,100 viewers in its first round, ranking fourth in revenue among fifty-one films screened in the 1969/70 season, preceded by *Miramar, Nadya,* and *Nahnu La Nazraʿ al-Shuk; Aflam al-Mawsam al-Sinimaʾi 1969/70* (Cairo: al-Muʾasasa al-Misriyya al-ʿAmma, Idarat al-Buhuth, 1970). *Al-Ikhtiyar* premiered in Cinema Rivoli in Cairo on 15 March 1971 and ranked fifth in revenues and number of viewers among forty-six films released in the 1970/71 season; ʿAbd al-Munʿim Saʿd, *al-Sinima al-Misriyya fi Mawsim 1970/71* (Cairo: Matabiʿ al-Ahram al-Tijariyya, 1971), 245. *Al-ʿUsfur* was screened briefly in 1972 only to be banned for two years until its release on 26 August 1974 in Cinema Ramsis. In a 1974 referendum organized by Jamʿiyat al-Film (the Film Society, established in Cairo in 1960), *al-ʿUsfur* was voted best Egyptian film for that year by the society's members, most of whom were critics; *Weekly Bulletin of Jamʿiyat al-Film* 113, 15 February 1975.

[18] According to Reinhart Koselleck, "On the one hand, every human community has a space of experience out of which one acts, in which past things are present or can be remembered, and on the other, one always acts with reference to specific horizons of expectation"; "Time and History," in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Presner, Kerstin Behnke, and Jobst Welge (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 111.

[19] A "crisis of time" is defined by François Hartog as a period when "time seems to have come to a halt, to have lost its bearings"; *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 106.

[20] ʿAbd al-Munʿim Saʿd, *al-Sinima al-Misriyya fi Mawsim 1974* (Cairo: Matabiʿ al-Ahram al-Tijariyya, 1974), 5.

[21] Some consider *al-Ikhtiyar* the first part of this trilogy, making *ʿAwdat Ibn al-Dal* (The Return of the Prodigal Son, 1976) its final installment. Some even refer to all four films as the tetralogy of the defeat. This article, however, considers the trilogy to be *al-Ard, al-Ikhtiyar,* and *al-ʿUsfur* for two reasons: first, *ʿAwdat Ibn al-Dal* was produced after the 1973 October War, that is, outside this "crisis of time" that the defeat seems to have engendered; and second, Chahine himself refers to *al-ʿUsfur* as the culmination of a phase that started in the wake of the defeat. See ECCC, *al-ʿUsfur*, file no. 1598, Mary Ghadban, "*al-ʿUsfur* . . . Qadiyyat Atthar al-Ahdath al-Tarikhiyya fi Misr," 2 November 1972.

[22] "Li-l-Fann Faqat" section, *Ruz al-Yusuf* 2172, 26 January 1970, 40.

[23] Some of the reviews were reproduced in "Hommage à Youssef Chahine à la cinémathèque française et projection de 'La terre,' a l'UNESCO," *Bulletin du centre interarabe du cinéma et de la télévision* 68, 31 January 1970, 2–4. On 9 March 1970, the film was screened again in Paris, and Chahine was honored two days later at La Cinémathèque française; National Center for Cinema, Cinematic Cultural Center, Cairo, file *al-Ard*, "Film al-Ard li-Youssef Chahine Kama Yarah Nuqad Bariz," *Alif Layla wa-Layla*, 12 March 1970.

Cannes Film Festival. Although it remained the object of critical acclaim, its director Youssef Chahine returned to his country sans Palme d'Or.[24] On the home front, it did not take long for *al-Ard* to become a box office hit. The film was well received by critics and journalists, who commended Chahine for promoting a sense of "collective heroism" in a film that itself was the product of "collective experience." As reflected in some local film reviews, the critics and journalists were able to decipher its message as well.[25]

Set in rural Egypt in the 1930s, *al-Ard* narrates the class struggle between peasants and their pasha. Infuriated by the government's decision to reduce the already inadequate irrigation period from ten to five days, the peasants decide to sign a petition objecting to the new orders. When their peaceful efforts prove futile, however, they resort to mutiny, each diverting the water to their land. The shortage of water soon inflames a feud between the peasants, of which the pasha takes full advantage. He eventually carries out his scheme to confiscate the land, on which he plans to build a private railroad that leads to his new palace. The film ends with the torture, or even the implied death, of the main protagonist, Abu Swaylim, a brave peasant who performed heroic deeds against the British in his youth.

*Al-Ard* is a filmic adaptation of a 1953 socialist-realist serial of the same title (published as a novel afterward).[26] It was performed and broadcast as a serial on the radio in 1960 and then as a television play two years later, in 1962, both of which were received well by critics.[27] The success of this serial in all of its adaptations and its message may have played a huge role in convincing the Egyptian public film sector to include it in its 1967–68 plan to fund the production of committed films and raise the standard of Egypt's cinematic production.[28] Hasan Fuʾad, a leftist intellectual and artist, was commissioned to write the screenplay (both the scenario and the dialogue) for the film.[29] In 1967, Chahine, who defined himself as "leaning towards the left," was approached by the public sector to direct the film.[30] Throughout the preproduction period, the writer and director worked together, along with ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi, to turn the 600-page novel into a 200-page script, constantly changing the storyline.[31] The result of this collaboration was, according to some critics, a "neorealist fresco" that "draws on a Marxist dialectic" to depict "a situation with its stratified social classes, and in which the most well-to-do crushes the peasants."[32]

In *al-Ard*, Chahine follows in the footsteps of many Egyptians before him who perceived and used the peasant as a national signifier to construct a sense of a unified nation, for, as

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[24] "The UAR at the 23rd Cannes Festival: The Festival Critics and Shahin's 'The Earth,'" *Bulletin du centre interarabe du cinéma et de la télévision* 74/75, 1 July 1970, 12–13. The black comedy war film *MASH* by Robert Altman won the Palme d'Or that year.

[25] ʿAdli Fahim, "al-Butula Jamaʿiyya wa-l-Tajruba Jamaʿiyya Aydan," *Ruz al-Yusuf* 2174, 9 February 1970, 36; Jalal al-Ghazali, "al-Ard Mihwaruhu al-Insan wa-Nasijuhu al-Insan," *al-Sinima* 9 (1969): 35–39; Fathi Faraj, "Shakhsiyat al-Fellah fi al-Sinima al-Misriyya," *al-Taliʿa* 6 (1974): 166.

[26] ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi, *al-Ard* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1953); *Egyptian Earth*, trans. Desmond Stewart (London: Saqi Books, 2005).

[27] "Tamthiliyyat al-Shahr al-Musalsila: al-Ard," *al-Idhaʿa wa-l-Talvizyun* 1316, 4 June 1960, 40. ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi participated in turning the novel into a play, assisted by the writer Amina al-Sawi, and it was directed by Saʿd Ardash; ʿAbd al-Qadir Hamida, "Masrah al-Talvizyun Yuqadim al-Ard," *al-Idhaʿa wa-l-Talvizyun* 1414, 12 April 1962, 10–13.

[28] *Nahwa Intilaq Thaqafi fi Funun al-Masrah wa-l-Musiqa wa-l-Sinima wa-l-Kitab wa-l-Funun al-Jamila: Khutta li-l-ʿAmal al-Thaqafi, ʿAmm 1967/68* (Cairo: al-Muʾasasa al-Misriyya al- ʿAmma li-l-Taʾlif wa-l-Nashr, 1967), 113.

[29] Samar Hadi, "Hasan Fuʾad, min al-Rasim ʿala al-Judran ila *al-Ard*," *al-Film* 15 (2018): 30.

[30] J. P. Peroncel-Hugoz, "Une Interview exclusive de Youssef Chahine," *La Nouvelle revue du Caire* 1 (1975): 208.

[31] "Youssef Chahine, entretien avec Guy Braucourt," *Revue du cinéma* 238 (1970), as cited in *Youssef Chahine dans tous ses états: Rétrospective en 12 films* (Paris: Tamasa, 2018). This was not the only task that they carried out together. It was reported that Chahine did not make any casting decision without consultation with Hasan Fuʾad. Hadi, "Hasan Fuʾad," 30.

[32] Claude-Marie Tremois, as cited in "La Terre," *CinémAction no. 33,* Youssef Chahine l'Alexandrin (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1985), 113 and Christian Bosseno, "'Battling Jo,' un humaniste fou de cinéma," CinémAction no. 33,  8.

anthropologist Ted Swedenberg notes, "peasants seem to be particularly suitable for making claims about the distinctness of national identity."[33] The opening sequence, a close-up shot of Abu Swaylim's hands gently caressing the soil, establishes both the subject matter and the theme of the film. Chahine seems to hint that his film is not about land or a peasant, but about the strong connection between them, each being the extension of the other. "[The peasant's] state, in fact, his very existence," Susannah Downs argues, "is linked to that of the land."[34] This connection is further developed in the ending sequence, which illustrates Abu Swaylim's refusal to give up his land in yet another close-up shot, but this time of his bleeding hands clutching the soil tightly as his body is forcefully and violently dragged behind soldiers on horses.[35] This disturbing, tragic ending—a powerful montage of close-up shots of his brutally beaten face, hands bleeding and then holding on to the soil—evokes a palpable sense of resistance and sacrifice on the part of the peasant.[36] All of which is echoed in the lyrics of the film's original song that accompanies this sequence:

> If the land is thirsty, we shall water it with our blood
> We must fill it with good
> The land of our ancestors and the reason for our existence
> We will keep our promise
> We will sacrifice our lives to give life to our land.[37]

In making this movie, Chahine might have been reflecting on and incorporating some of the post-1967 prevailing sentiments, some propagated by the state, others by cineasts and the press. Shortly after the war ended, Minister of Culture Tharwat ʿUkasha had called upon cineasts to produce films 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."[38] Under ʿUkasha's directions, the public film sector produced a series of short films, known as '*aflam al-maʿraka* (films of the battle), to uplift people's morale, a step that was embraced by cineasts. In one editorial, the prominent director Ahmad Badrakhan stressed, "The role of art in battle is no less important than that of lethal weapons, for it is art that mobilizes national sentiments."[39] In the press, moreover, hundreds of editorials that were written right after the defeat, like the opening note in the July 1967 issue of the leftist journal *al-Taliʿa* (The Vanguard) entitled "The Revolution Continues . . . the Battle Is Still Raging . . . and Victory Is Our Ally," which argued that Israel won because of its "deceptive and dirty" means while highlighting the Egyptians' willingness to continue their struggle and sacrifice until victory was achieved.[40] Here, the defeat of both Abu Swaylim and Egypt, at the hands of the pasha and Israel respectively, seems unavoidable when taking consideration the "barbarian advances," but the consolation for the former, "the defeated," as Schivelbusch describes, "is their faith in their cultural

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[33] Ted Swedenburg, "The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier," *Anthropological Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1990): 18. See also Ridda al-Tayyar, *al-Fellah fi al-Sinima al-ʿArabiyya* (Beirut: al-Muʾasasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 1980); and Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880–1985* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2004).

[34] Susannah Downs, "Egyptian Earth between the Pen and the Camera: Youssef Chahine's Adaptation of ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi's al-Ard," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 15 (1995): 160.

[35] Youssef Chahine, dir., *al-Ard* (Cairo: al-Muʾasasa al-Misriyya al-ʿAmma li-l-Sinima, 1970), *Netflix*, https://www.netflix.com/title/81252548, 2:08:45.

[36] *Al-Ard* was edited by Rashida ʿAbd al- Salam, who collaborated with Chahine on several of his films, including *al-Ikhtiyar* and *al-ʿUsfur*. In an interview with ʿAbd al-Salam, she talks about how she used to edit the first draft of the film on her own, leaving certain scenes to discuss with the director. On her professional relationship with Youssef Chahine, she recalls the mutual trust they had in each other's vision and talent. ʿAdil Munir, *Rashida ʿAbd al- Salam: Sabiha fi Bahr al-Zaman* (Cairo: Wizarat al-Thaqafa, Sanduq al-Tanmiyya al-Thaqafiyya, n.d.), 11–17.

[37] Poet Nabila Qandil wrote the lyrics, and her husband, ʿAli Ismaʿil, composed the music.

[38] Tharwat ʿUkasha, *Mudhakirati fi al-Siyasa wa-l-Thaqafa* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1990), 764.

[39] Ahmad Badrakhan in *Majallat al-Sinima* 7 (1967): 2.

[40] "Al-Thawra Qaʾima . . . al-Maʿraka Mustamira . . . wa-l-Nasr Halifuna," *al-Taliʿa* 7 (1967): 4–8.

and moral superiority over the newly empowered who have ousted them," which fuels their determination, bravery, and desire to fight back.[41] These sentiments were evident enough that critic Samir Farid called them one of the reasons Zionists reputedly tried to block *al-Ard* from being screened at the Cannes Film Festival.[42]

An examination of and comparison between the novel and its cinematic adaptation reveal that Chahine and his scriptwriter Fuʾad introduced new scenes. One specific scene is the close-up shot of the officer's hand shaving Abu Swaylim's mustache after imprisoning him for defying orders.[43] Because a mustache is a symbol of manhood in Arab culture, as many scholars have noted in their analysis of this scene, its forceful removal depicts an act of emasculation intended to cause humiliation and shame. In the following scenes, the once-proud protagonist is transformed into a tearful, silent character who, when not idly touching his now absent mustache, covers his face behind his scarf, keeps to himself, and withdraws from others—all of which are symptoms of a traumatic experience.[44] The odd yet symbolic one-minute silent shots of an almost deserted village after the prison scene would become a recurring motif in Chahine's cinematic language when addressing the defeat (a more extended silent sequence showing deserted streets and buildings appears in *al-ʿUsfur* as well, just a few seconds before Nasser's televised concession speech). A similar interpretation of the defeat can be found in a note written by the editor in chief of the popular Egyptian journal *Ruz al-Yusuf* on June 10, 1968, exactly a year after the defeat and around the time al-Sharqawi, Fuʾad, and Chahine were working on *al-Ard*'s script:

> This week last year . . . we seemed to have lost everything . . . even hope for life . . . we came to face something like confusion . . . we died of pain and sorrow as we looked toward our lost land . . . an outcome that not even the most pessimistic of us did expect . . . a trauma that strikes the sanest mind with shock . . . and a defeat that wounds the pride.[45]

When Abu Swaylim's friend, Shaykh Hassuna, tries to comfort him by telling him that they have been in jail before, for both the land and the 1919 revolution, Abu Swaylim sorrowfully replies, "What about dignity (*karama*)? What is left when that is lost?"[46]

A more critical look at *al-Ard*, however, offers us another possible explanation for the defeat than one caused at the hands of a brutal, wrongful enemy, one that projects pre-defeat sentiments onto the defeat. Having lived mostly in Lebanon since 1964, where he made films such as *Bayyaʿ al-Khawatim* (The Ring Seller, 1965), Chahine decided to return to Egypt after the 1967 war. "I was born again after the defeat through the pain it caused me and my hope to overcome it," Chahine notes, "*al-Ard* is a conscious expression of that."[47] In an interview with Farid, Chahine explains that he left Egypt a few years before the defeat because his own experience with the public film sector made him realize that "the socialism he dreamed of . . . turned into bureaucracy and authoritarianism, and how

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[41] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma Mourning, and Recovery*, trans. Jefferson Chase (London: Picador, 2004), 17.

[42] National Center for Cinema, Cinematic Cultural Center, Cairo, file *al-Ard*, Samir Farid, "*al-Ard*: Hal Tuhawil al-Sahyuniyya Manʿahu fi 'Cannes'?"

[43] Chahine, *al-Ard*, 1:06:51.

[44] Ibid., 1:10:41.

[45] Ahmad Hamrush, "Hata la Yatakarar al-Faragh," *Ruz al-Yusuf* 2087, 10 June 1968, 4.

[46] Chahine, *al-Ard*, 1:15:56.

[47] Samir Farid, "Hiwar maʿ Youssef Chahine: Urid an Atahadas ʿan Haqiqati wa-Haqiqat Zamani," *al-Hilal* 11, 1 November 1976, 95. Chahine made similar comments in other interviews as well, in which he states that *al-Ard* marked a turning point in his cinematic career, emphasizing that all the films he made after *al-Ard* were somehow affected by the defeat. See Claude Michel Cuny, "Entretien avec Youssef Chahine," *Cinéma* 180 (1973): 96–99; and Michel Fargeon, "Interview: Youssef Chahine," *UNESCO Courier* 9 (1997): 47–49. For more on his reasons for leaving Egypt, see Iris Nazmi, "Youssef Chahine: Harabtu Khawfan min al-Qitaʿ al-ʿAmm," *Akhir Saʿa*, 1659, 10 August 1966, 38–39.

the bureaucrat became the king of his time."[48] This disappointment, or shaken belief, in the revolutionary regime and the efficacy of its administration can be sensed in other films produced before the defeat, such as *al-Mukharibun* (Saboteurs, dir. Kamal al-Shaykh, 1967), *al-ʿAyb* (Shame, dir. Jalal al-Sharqawi, 1967), and *al-Mutamaridun* (The Rebels, dir. Tawfiq Salih, 1968). In *al-Ard*, this feeling is represented in two scenes, the ending sequence being one of them, a scene that remained a point of contestation among Chahine, Fuʾad, and al-Sharqawi. Fuʾad insisted on an end in which the young teenager with whom both the film and the novel start (a boy who is pursuing his education in the city returns to his village for the summer) leaves the village and abandons his ancestor's land for good.[49] Chahine, however, chose to conclude his film with an open end: the implied death of the protagonist Abu Swaylim. Both endings depict a sense of cynicism that did not appear in the original novel (in which the boy leaves the village with a promise to return and not forget it), but Chahine's may reflect uncertainty about Egypt's future. Al-Sharqawi, writing just after the 1952 revolution, was hopeful about Egypt's future, insinuating that the revolution would end the peasants' struggle and oppression. Deeming it necessary to face the reality of the defeat and its consequences, Chahine wanted to depict "the world more realistically," and a society that was still struggling, in which peasants continued to suffer despite the regime's land reform and redistribution project.[50]

The second scene takes place after Abu Swaylim's imprisonment. Through the words of Abu Swaylim, who was addressing his friends Shaykhs Hassuna (the intellectual cleric) and Yusuf (the national capitalist) along with other villagers following their failure to find a solution to the irrigation problem, Chahine expressed his disillusionment with the socialist regime, the nationalists, and the religious clerics:

> During the 1919 Revolution, we fought alongside Saʿd [Zaghlul] Pasha. . . . They beat us. They locked us up. Many of us died. But we were men, and we stood our ground like men. . . . Those were the good old days. We were chivalrous, kind-hearted men. We were the pride of the country. Its honor and its glory. And here we are now, talking, complaining, and wailing like women. . . . Our days are empty words. Our nights are empty words. Our silence is empty words. Our lives are made of words over words.[51]

According to Youssef Chahine's biographer, Ibrahim Fawal, it is in this scene, and this monologue precisely, that Chahine wanted to delineate his conviction "that [the] spirit of patriotism and duty has dissipated. Nothing is left of it but the memory."[52] In this regard, the defeat, Chahine seems to argue, was not only caused by a brutal enemy but started within Egypt—with a failed regime and a fractured society. *Al-Ard*, therefore, is a product of its time in the sense that, although it regards the defeat as a wound to national pride caused by an unjust enemy, it also highlights the resilience of some Egyptians, their loyalty to their land, and their willingness to die for it. At the same time, it also reflects, to some extent, their disillusionment with the regime—an emotion that would only intensify in the following months and years.

## *Al-Ikhtiyar* (The Choice, 1971)

"If *al-Ard* is the epitome of Youssef Chahine's realism . . . his film *al-Ikhtiyar* is the beginning of a new phase in his artistic life . . . a phase that is free of traditional, linear narrative, in which the story does not unfold in a logical sequence." This came from film critic

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[48] Farid, "Hiwar maʿ Youssef Chahine," 95.

[49] Hadi, "Hasan Fuʾad," 31.

[50] Farid, "Hiwar maʿ Youssef Chahine," 95; "Interview with Yusuf Shahin," *Bulletin du centre interarabe du cinéma et de la télévision* 87/88, 1 February 1971, 15.

[51] Chahine, *al-Ard*, 1:30:30.

[52] Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 77.

ʿAbd al-Wahab al-Sharqawi in 1976, almost five years after the initial release of *al-Ikhtiyar*.[53] On the surface, *al-Ikhtiyar* is about an opportunistic writer who murders his identical twin out of jealousy. Sayyid is a well-respected intellectual who married into money, is always eager to rub elbows with cabinet members, and lives in a sterile and lifeless apartment, a metaphor for his personality. Mahmud, on the other hand, is a free-spirited sailor who exudes warmth, positivity, and irrepressible energy, from whom his brother regularly draws inspiration. When Sayyid reads in the newspaper that a body was recently found with a sketched face that looks exactly like him, he believes it is his brother. Sayyid soon becomes the investigators' prime suspect, but much to their chagrin, Mahmud reappears, and the case is permanently closed. Despite their efforts, the investigators fail to bring the twins together under one roof (throughout the film, Mahmud and Sayyid are never seen together), leading to the suspicion that one is impersonating the other. Sayyid/ Mahmud eventually loses his sanity, and the film ends as he is being put in a straitjacket and taken away in an ambulance.[54]

Although *al-Ikhtiyar* won the Golden Tanit at the Carthage Film Festival in 1971 and did relatively well at the box office, critics were conflicted about it.[55] It remains a problematic film that people continue to read differently and may need to watch more than once to understand. The regional *Bulletin du centre interarabe du cinéma et de la télévision* (Beirut) reported that some local critics had "accused [Chahine] of making a film which sacrificed too much to aesthetic considerations."[56] And although some Egyptian critics and film enthusiasts interpreted the film the way its director intended it to be understood, many viewers did not.[57] In his review, critic Saʿd al-Din Tawfiq reports to the reader that, during the premiere of the film in Cinema Rivoli in Cairo, some theatergoers were confused, interrupting the film with their shouts, "We do not understand a thing!"[58] To be sure, it is from Chahine's interviews that we know with some certainty that he made *al-Ikhtiyar* in response to the defeat. "When the film was made," Chahine clarifies, "it was necessary, both politically and socially, to tell the story in this manner . . . we were exhausted and very confused, and the film had to be similarly constructed."[59] In another interview, he reiterates, "The film deals with a troubled, undecided state of mind; such a subject can only be illustrated by shocking or confusing images."[60] Chahine's words, an eclectic style of editing, the camera angles and movement, the choice of music, the nonlinear narrative, and the twisted story line that does not provide the viewer with a clear ending reflect the state of doubt, confusion, and uncertainty that intensified after the defeat.

If "*al-Ard* was about a man who said 'no,'" Chahine explains, "*al-Ikhtiyar* [was] about a man who said 'yes'" and abandoned his commitment to his true self, and by extension, his society.[61] To a question about the sociopolitical aspect of *al-Ikhtiyar*, Chahine replies:

[53] ʿAbd al-Wahab al-Sharqawi, "Youssef Chahine wa-Sinima ʿArabiyya Waʿiyya Adrakat Sanat al-Rushd," *Doha* 11, 1 November 1976, 125.

[54] Youssef Chahine, dir., *al-Ikhtiyar* (Cairo: al-Muʾasasa al-Misriyya al-ʿAmma li-l-Sinima, 1971).

[55] Nasir Husayn, "Khalas . . . al-Jumhur mush ʿAyiz kida," *Ruz al-Yusuf* 2243, 7 June 1971, 42–43; al-Sharqawi, "Youssef Chahine wa-Sinima," 125.

[56] "Interview with Yusuf Shahin," 13–14. See also Darwish Birjawi, "Youssef Chahine fi al-Ikhtiyar Yaʿrud ʿAdalatihi wa-Yafrid ʿala al-Mutafarij an Yufakir fi ma Yamur Amamahu min Taʿqid," *Adwaʾ wa-Zilal*, 16 January 1971, 14.

[57] Hashim al-Nahas, "al-Ikhtiyar," *Nashrat Nadi al-Sinima bi-l-Qahira* 4, no. 12 (1970/71): 3–10; "Min Hadith li-Youssef Chahine maʿ Sami al-Salamuni," *al-Funun* 1, no. 2 (1971): 163; ʿAbd al-Munʿim Saʿd, *al-Sinima al-Misriyya fi Mawsam 1972* (Cairo: Matabiʿ al-Ahram al-Tijariyya, 1972), 61.

[58] ECCC, *al-Ikhtiyar*, file no. 1450, Saʿd-al-Din Tawfiq, "Man Huwa al-Ladhi Yaʿtabir Mahmud Mathalan Aʿla?"

[59] Chahine, as cited in Khouri, *Arab National Project*, 82.

[60] "Interview with Yusuf Shahin," 14.

[61] Samir Nassri, *Muhawarat Samir Nassri maʿ Youssef Chahine* (Cairo: Samir Farid, 1997), 16. This statement also is emphasized in the press book of the film: "There comes a time in one's life that they have to say no, but what happens if they don't say it?"; ECCC, *al-Ikhtiyar*, file no. 1450.

In this film, I wished to sound the alarm. *Al-Ikhtiyar* is a direct attack on the static condition of Arab intellectuals today, which may even be described as passivity. This applies especially to the intellectuals of my country, Egypt. I accuse them of having failed in their social and political task by their silence, by the concessions that they have made during the past few years to their own comfort and well-being. They have become bourgeois and self-satisfied, whereas they should be at the head of the revolutionary movement.[62]

This alarm, as critics noted, was visually expressed in the very final shot of the film—the close-up shot of the siren light of the ambulance.[63] In light of Chahine's explanations and the film's symbolic expressions (the opening credit scene being one of them), it becomes clear that the plot of *al-Ikhtiyar* revolves around a deeply conflicted but opportunistic intellectual who is repressing his more honest and committed self to achieve the luxurious lifestyle that his power-seeking, material self has always dreamed of. As film critic Qussai Samak eloquently puts it, *al-Ikhtiyar* is about an impotent "intellectual who is conscious of the ailments of his society, and yet is a part of the establishment that perpetuates them."[64]

The production of *al-Ikhtiyar* started in November 1969 when Egypt was still recovering from student and workers upheavals and in the midst of an exasperating, inconclusive war of attrition—a period of tension and instability. When Chahine approached Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz with a script for a film (they had previously collaborated on two films—*Jamila* (1958), and *al-Nasir Salah al-Din* (Saladin the Victorious, 1963)—Mahfouz noticed the similarities between the proposed plot and one of his novels.[65] It was no coincidence that these two men had the same idea in mind: the conditions and experiences prevailing in Egypt at the time were the cause. Mahfouz had recently collaborated with scenarist Yusuf Francis to turn Ihsan ʿAbd al-Qudus's *Biʾr al-Hirman* into a film (Well of Deprivation, dir. Kamal al-Shaykh, 1969), whose protagonist, like Sayyid in *al-Ikhtiyar*, suffers from schizophrenia. *Nadya* (dir. Ahmad Badrakhan, 1969) is yet another protagonist who is impersonating another character, this time her sister. What is common among these three protagonists is that they are confused, insecure, anxious, and repressing their other self. Although all three belong to the same class, the new bourgeoisie, Sayyid is the only intellectual among them. He also is the only protagonist who does not have a happy ending, for, unlike the other two, he refuses to confront himself and his reality.

In fact, Sayyid's character resembles to a great extent "the clever personality" that Syrian philosopher Sadiq Jalal al-Azm highlights in his book *Self-Criticism after the Defeat* (first published in 1968). Coined by the Egyptian social scientist Hammid ʿAmmar, "*al-shakhsiya al-fahlawiyya*," or the clever personality, is defined as nothing but "an abstraction and pattern . . . that describe individuals in a specific social environment."[66] Among the properties of this personality is the "constant search for the shortest and fastest route to realize particular goals and aims," with a certain tendency toward "hiding defects and maintaining an appearance in front of others."[67] Referencing one of Nasser's speeches, in which he stresses the need to "admit the failings around us," al-Azm argues that Nasser was, in fact, aware that this clever personality was "as widespread in the ranks of the military forces as it is in traditional Arab society."[68] It seems that Chahine too was trying to highlight in

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[62] "Interview with Yusuf Shahin," 13.

[63] ECCC, *al-Ikhtiyar*, file no. 1450, Samir Farid, "al-Ikhtiyar wa-l-Bahth ʿan Ashkal Jadida," 25 March 1971; Tawfiq, "Man Huwa al-Ladhi Yaʿtabir Mahmud Mathalan Aʿla?"

[64] Qussai Samak, "The Politics of Egyptian Cinema," *MERIP Reports* 56 (1977): 14. See also Roy Armes, "Youssef Chahine and the Egyptian Cinema," *Framework* 14 (1981): 14.

[65] Nader Habib, Pierre Loza, and Engy El-Naggar, "A Master and His Mantle," *al-Ahram Weekly Online* 810, 31 August 2006, https://www.masress.com/en/ahramweekly/12486.

[66] Sadik al-Azm, *Self-Criticism after the Defeat* (London: Saqi Books, 2011), 72.

[67] Ibid., 72, 74.

[68] Ibid., 74.

*al-Ikhtiyar,* particularly through Sayyid's character, the failure of some Egyptian intellectuals "to acknowledge their sickness [in the aftermath of the defeat] and instead deny the fact of the illness in their behavior, expressions, delusions, and hallucinations because they are unable to bear the reality of the situation."[69]

At the time when Chahine was writing *al-Ikhtiyar*, a massive wave of criticism and self-criticism was sweeping not only Egypt, but the entire Arab world. Most of the editorials in the Egyptian press were still discussing the deeper dimension of the defeat, delineating how the defeat was the "by-product of many errors that have been accumulating in the Arab world, politically, economically, socially, and intellectually."[70] In the same vein, Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, then editor in chief of *al-Ahram*, writes, " a new era of political work is dawning in Egypt, an era that requires a great deal of focus, even if it is in the form of criticism."[71] This criticism was not restricted to the political sphere, but reached all aspects of society. The so-called crisis of intellectuals that received on and off attention from the press from the early 1960s onward reached an all-time high in the wake of the defeat. Popular culture too was not spared. "Between 1967 and 1970, the biggest conflict in the history of Egyptian cinema erupted," Samir Farid writes, "as several film associations emerged thanks to the committed and revolutionary young filmmakers and critics, who fought a huge battle against the public [film] sector, along with its corrupt management, pitting the new cinema against the prevailing one."[72] Another example was the 1968 song "*al-Hamdu li-Allah Khabatana Tahta Battatina*" (Thank God He Hit Us under Our Armpits) composed by Shaykh Imam, with lyrics by the poet Ahmad Fuʾad Najm, which immediately became a hit and was very popular among students. In the song, the duo blatantly criticized Nasser and his regime, which, not surprisingly, culminated in their arrest.[73]

As a film director, Chahine was not alone in articulating criticism through cinematic production. According to critic and former chief of censorship and minister of information, Durriya Sharaf al-Din, the post-1967 authorities, anticipating a latent revolution, "showed a glimmer of green light," allowing a bit of criticism in artistic creations, including film production.[74] Kamal al-Shaykh's *Miramar* (1968), Salah Abu Sayf's *al-Qadiyya 68* (Case 68, 1968), Husayn Kamal's *Shayʾ Min al-Khawf* (A Bit of Fear, 1969), and *Tharthara Fawq al-Nil* (Adrift on the Nile, 1971) are four examples of highly critical Egyptian films, categorized by Sharaf al-Din as "green light cinema," that were produced around the same time Chahine was working on *al-Ikhtiyar*.[75] As historian Joel Gordon writes, "each film, however different from the others, spoke directly to issues of corruption, authoritarian rule, opportunism, and social decay—a revolution betrayed by its servants."[76] Chahine seems to imply through *al-Ikhtiyar* that among the factors that aggravated the situation in the wake of the defeat were the greed and expediency of some intellectuals, and that the journey to recovery must start from deep within to find one's true identity.

Unlike the protagonist in *al-Ard* who did not cause his own defeat—that is to say, it was caused by an external enemy—Sayyid is complicit in his own undoing. Chahine does not spare himself from these accusations, for he identifies himself with Sayyid in many instances

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[69] Ibid., 2.

[70] Lutfi al-Khuli, "Yunyu 1967–Yunyu 1968," *al-Taliʿa* 6 (1968): 4.

[71] Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, "al-Maʿna al-Haqiqi li-kul ma Takashaf baʿd al-Naksa," *al-Ahram*, 8 November 1968.

[72] Samir Farid, "67–76 . . . Malamih Asasiyya," *Jamʿiyyat al-Film* 23, 17 June 1976, 12.

[73] "Sheikh Imam: A Profile from the Archives," *Jadaliyya*, 22 July 2014, http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/30860/Sheikh-Imam-A-Profile-from-the-Archives.

[74] Sharaf al-Din, *al-Siyasa wa-l-Sinima fi Misr*, ch. 3.

[75] Sharaf al-Din does not mention *al-Ikhtiyar* in her study of "green light cinema." I speculate that this is because Chahine, as far as we know, did not encounter any issues with censorship when filming or screening *al-Ikhtiyar*, unlike the other films she discusses. To read more about the intersection of politics and films produced during this period, see Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*, ch. 6; and Sharaf al-Din, *al-Siyasa wa-l-Sinima fi Misr*.

[76] Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama*, 211.

in the film. It was reported that Chahine even wanted to play the role himself, but the production company (the public film sector) did not approve.[77] In one scene, an official in the Ministry of Culture expresses his appreciation of Sayyid's artistic work, asking him about the source of his fictional characters, "What about Qinawi? [. . .] and Hanuma? Where do you come up with these people?"[78] Anyone familiar with Chahine's cinema would recognize Qinawi and Hanuma as the main characters in his 1958 film *Bab al-Hadid* (Cairo Station), in which Qinawi was not only played by Chahine himself, but, like Sayyid, also was led off in a straitjacket at the end of the film.[79] And just like Sayyid, both Chahine and the cowriter of *al-Ikhtiyar*, Mahfouz, along with many intellectuals and artists, were at one point affiliated with the public film sector, a state body that operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture.[80] It is this self-reflexivity that makes it plausible to claim that Chahine, through *al-Ikhtiyar* and Sayyid's character, was expressing feelings of guilt about the defeat. "I have personally run away from problems," Chahine admitted to critic Yusuf Sharif Rizq Allah, "but not anymore."[81]

From a study by historian Salah ʿIsa published in 1986, we know that Chahine was not alone in this journey of self-blame; "every intellectual set up a court for himself through his work, in which the feeling of humiliation and betrayal intensified, along with a need for bravery to confront oneself."[82] Chahine, indeed, does not stop at self-criticism and self-blame; he goes further by suggesting solutions. Not surprisingly, every one of his intended clarifications is proffered by none other than Mahmud, the only character who stays true to himself. To a question about freedom, he answers, "To be free is to be a slave to truth and truth only."[83] When he is asked, "What is the truth, O' Mahmud?" he confidently responds, "It is being faithful to one's self, first and foremost."[84] What Chahine seems to insinuate through these words is asserted in playwright Saadallah Wannous's 1968 play, *Haflat Samar min Ajl 5 Huzayran* (An Entertainment Evening for June 5): "While this attack showed clearly the brutality and dangers of imperialism, it showed even more clearly our need to see ourselves, to look into our mirrors and ask: Who are we? And why?"[85]

## Al-ʿUsfur (The Sparrow, 1974)

Whereas *al-Ard* interprets the defeat as the result of both external and (to a lesser extent) internal factors, and *al-Ikhtiyar* condemns the opportunism and "irresponsibility of the intellectuals after the defeat," *al-ʿUsfur* openly accuses the government of being responsible for the defeat, simply by not fulfilling its promises of development and transparency.[86] *Al-ʿUsfur* is a collective product that is composed of different audiovisual media (radio and TV broadcasts, documentary footage, and newspapers), seeking to reconstruct a certain moment in time—the 1967 war—and not just reflect it. In this regard, it is very different from the two previous films. *Al-ʿUsfur* culminates in a powerful reenactment of the popular demonstrations that took place on June 9 and 10, shortly after Nasser's televised resignation. Clearly, the story that this film recounts is not that of the military leaders or intelligence

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[77] ECCC, *al-Ikhtiyar*, file no. 1450.

[78] Chahine, *al-Ikhtiyar*, 00:06:30.

[79] Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 93.

[80] In his article "How State Intellectuals Responded to 1967: Silence, Propaganda, and Conspiracy," Ismail Fayed refers to this type of intellectuals as "state intellectuals"; Mada, accessed on 13 May 2019, https://madamasr.com/en/2017/06/05/feature/culture/how-state-intellectuals-responded-to-1967-silence-propaganda-and-conspiracy.

[81] Yusuf Sharif Rizk Allah, "Kayfa Ikhtar Youssef Chahine Hadha al-Ikhtiyar?" *Ruz al-Yusuf* 2235, 1 May 1971, 45.

[82] Salah ʿIssa, *Muthaqafun wa-ʿAskar* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1986), 504.

[83] Chahine, *al-Ikhtiyar*, 00:42:15.

[84] Ibid., 00:41:36.

[85] Wannous, as cited in Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique*, 90–91.

[86] Peroncel-Hugoz, "Une Interview," 211.

figureheads, but that of the ordinary Egyptians, which compelled film critic Frantz Gévaudan to praise Chahine for making "a film for and about the masses."[87]

Around the same time Chahine was cowriting the script with Egyptian intellectual Lutfi al-Khuli in 1971, members of the Egyptian press were still preoccupied with identifying the roots of the defeat. In his famous editorial *Bi-saraha* (Honestly), published every Friday in *al-Ahram* newspaper, Haykal asks, "So, how were we defeated in 1967? Why were we defeated? What was defeated in us? And how can we remedy this situation? And when?"[88] As is depicted in its opening message, *al-ʿUsfur* embodies Chahine's attempt at answering these queries:

> All these sincere and courageous people, these sparrows that I love, did not hesitate to flock into the streets in June 1967 to express their readiness to take on the new challenge . . . To all these people, today we try, through *al-ʿUsfur,* to illuminate [a] few of the national and international elements which they, without their knowledge, became victims to.[89]

By the time Chahine started filming *al-ʿUsfur* in 1971, the public film sector, the producer of his two previous films, had been shut down, forcing him to look for an alternative sponsor, which he found in the Office national pour le commerce et l'industrie cinématographique in Algeria.[90] Unlike *al-Ard* and *al-Ikhtiyar, al-ʿUsfur* was produced after Nasser's death in September 1970 and Anwar al-Sadat's *al-thawra al-tashihiyya* (corrective revolution) in May 1971, which instigated the gradual collapse of Nasser's legacy, including the public sector. Already from the late 1960s onward, losses of the public sector in different industries were much mentioned in the press, and subsequent efforts were made by the government under Nasser to rectify previous errors. Accusations ranged from lack of advanced planning on the part of the government to blatant corruption among those in charge of the sector. In *al-ʿUsfur*, Chahine, who had a turbulent relationship with the public film sector—mainly due to his work on *al-Nas wa-l-Nil* (People of the Nile, 1972), an Egyptian-Soviet docufiction production—weighs in on this matter through the words of one of his protagonists, the journalist, who incidentally is named Yusuf: "Take the factory, for example, it has been on the cusp [of opening] for six years. And this cusp seems endless, lost between this pharaoh and that pharaoh, who, in turn, are also lost between thirty million other so-and-sos like you and me. But the pharaohs stole the factory . . . without leaving a single machine behind."[91] In a later scene, one that takes place during the June 1967 war, Yusuf wanted his editor in chief to publish a piece on these neglected public sector projects, to which the latter responded: "We are under aggression, and you want us to write about machines and a ruined factory?" Yusuf's next line, "With this, we create causes of war," poses more questions than answers; is he talking about the state's negligence of its projects or the intellectuals who turned a blind eye? In *al-ʿUsfur*, both are to blame.[92]

*Al-ʿUsfur* encompasses three interconnected subplots: "the theatrical preparation for the pathetic debacle of the war and the subsequent shock waves it sent among the people; a conspiracy of a large-scale theft from a public sector company planned by some big wigs in the government; and the security forces chasing a dangerous outlaw in the

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[87] Frantz Gévaudan, "Le Moineau," *Cinéma* 193 (1974): 111.

[88] Muhamad Hasanayn Haykal, "5 Sanawat wa 5 Yunyu," *al-Ahram*, 2 June 1972.

[89] The original opening message is in French, but a translated version is available in Khouri, *Arab National Project,* 100.

[90] Cuny, "Entretien avec Youssef Chahine," 96.

[91] Chahine, *al-ʿUsfur*, 00:19:36. Another scene finds Shaykh Ahmad and Raʾuf reaching the area where the factory should have been built six years before only to find a deserted place, unfinished warehouses, and torn banners full of promises (00:47:08).

[92] Ibid., 01:29:46; Amir al-ʿUmari, "al-ʿUsfur: Muhawalat Tahlil al-Shakhsiyat," *Cairo Cinema Club* 7, no. 12 (1974): 26–30.

countryside."[93] The narrative revolves around four main protagonists: 1) Yusuf, an optimist journalist following the case of Abu Khidr,an outlaw accused of theft, feels betrayed by his father who happens to be a "lawful thief"—a term referring to corrupt statesmen; 2) Raʾuf, a young officer who is in charge of finding and arresting Abu Khidr, not only discovers that the man who has raised him was not his biological father, but that he is corrupt as well; 3) Shaykh Ahmad, whose brother was murdered by Abu Khidr, decides to take matters into his hands when the state fails to provide him justice; and 4) Bahiyya, a compassionate, strong working-class woman whom Chahine, through his protagonists, refers to as *Umm al-Dunyya* (mother of the world, a reference to Egypt), who is admired and cherished by all, and whose house becomes a refuge of sorts.[94] All four protagonists are victims of deception, but they, as every character in the film, are chosen "to show the very subtle mechanism of internal corruption that infiltrates all the social strata of the society."[95]

*Al-ʿUsfur* was banned shortly after its release, primarily because of its direct political message, as "it sheds light on leadership errors . . . which [the censorship advisory committee unanimously agreed] might reflect badly on Egypt's image, not only among its citizens, but among Arabs and the international community as well."[96] Another censor deemed the screening of a film about the defeat when Egypt was witnessing a corrective revolution redundant.[97] According to actor Sayf ʿAbd al-Ruhman, who played Raʾuf in the film, Minister of Culture Yusuf al-Sibaʿi reputedly lost his temper upon watching *al-ʿUsfur* and immediately asked for the film negatives, for he thought the film was targeting his brother and accusing him of being one of the corrupt officers Chahine blamed for the defeat.[98] Luckily, the negatives were with Chahine in Paris, and because the film was a joint production with an Algerian company it represented Algeria, not Egypt, in international competitions and screenings. Although banned in Egypt, *al-ʿUsfur* was favorably received in Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia, and "the Algerian newspaper *El Moudjahid* described it as 'the first Arab film which politically goes some way towards analyzing a situation and determining the objective cause of that situation.'"[99] The film went on to be part of the Directors' Fortnight at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival, garnering international acclaim. However, by emphasizing internal factors of the defeat rather than the role played by the external enemy and its imperialist allies, Chahine and his film attracted heavy criticism from some Arab critics, who accused him of treason and called for his execution, as reported by journalist Raʾuf Tawfiq.[100]

In 1974, after the October War, the Egyptian government lifted the two-year ban on *al-ʿUsfur*, "since the October battle has successfully put an end to the setback . . . and since the psychological atmosphere of the audience has changed with this victory, there is no fear of [it evoking a sense] of bitterness among viewers."[101] In its second release, the film flopped at the box office. To a question about the impact of the ban on him, Chahine replied:

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[93] Samak, "Politics of Egyptian Cinema," 14.

[94] Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, 93.

[95] Chahine, cited in Samak, "Politics of Egyptian Cinema," 14.

[96] Mahmud ʿAli, *Maʾat ʿAmm min al-Raqaba ʿala al-Sinima al-Misriyya* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿla li-l-Thaqafa, 2008), 304.

[97] Ibid., 303.

[98] Sayf ʿAbd al-Ruhman's interview in "Kharij al-Nas: Film al-ʿUsfur . . . Harb Fanniyya Dudd al-Fasad," al-Jazeera, 3 June 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X81k2y80_X0. ʿAbd al-Ruhman claims that al-Sibaʿi saw some resemblance between his brother Ismaʿil, then security director of Cairo, and the character of the corrupt security officer played by Salah Mansur. See also Yousry Nasrallah, "Faire des films à la première personne," *Cahiers du cinéma* 637 (2008): 82–83.

[99] Armes, "Youssef Chahine," 14.

[100] Raʾuf Tawfiq, "Aham Hadath Fanni fi al-Qahira: al-ʿUsfur," *Sabah al-Khayr*, 12 September 1974, 54.

[101] ʿAli, *Maʾat ʿAmm min al-Raqaba*, 304–5.

My experience in al-ʿUsfur has taught me that films, however long they remain banned, will be released one day. I am proud to be able to show al-ʿUsfur after the October War, although [the fact that it was shown after the war and not before] has weakened its impact and muted its message.[102]

Although the message of al-ʿUsfur was very clear, one can only ponder the impact that Chahine was seeking. The reason for its weakened impact, however, may be attributed to the fact that, when it was finally released, Egyptians saw al-ʿUsfur through the gaze of victory, no longer that of defeat. The October War seemed to have mended, perhaps only temporarily, some of the wounds caused by the defeat, and more importantly it had managed to mitigate feelings of frustration, betrayal, and anger—all of which were evident in al-ʿUsfur—although anger seems to be the emotion that Chahine wanted to evoke in his audience.

On top of its explicit political stance, the film visually portrays the different emotional reactions that Egyptians experienced when the Voice of the Arabs (Sawt al-ʿArab radio service) falsely declared victory, and then the moment they knew Egypt had lost the war. Like the culmination it was meant to be, "the culmination of the post-1967 era," al-ʿUsfur highlights some stages through which the Egyptians, including Chahine, attempted to come to terms with the defeat—shock, grief, and anger, the last of which had not appeared in al-Ard or al-Ikhtiyar.[103] Chahine's acceptance of the defeat—a particular type of defeat—becomes very evident in this film, as is his anger toward the state for failing its people. "The defeat was not that of the masses," Chahine argues, "but of the government."[104] Chahine, however, refuses to surrender, just like the female protagonist in his film, Bahiyya, who swears she will never give up. After listening to Nasser's televised concession, she runs out into the streets, screaming: "No! I, Bahiyya, am saying no! We shall fight again!" According to Chahine, this scene describes "a major turning point in [his] life," for it embodies a critical moment in Egyptian history, the demonstrations of June 9 and 10.[105] Those people took to the streets, according to Chahine, with one purpose in mind: to declare that the defeat was not of the revolution, but of those who were in charge of it. What is striking in al-ʿUsfur, moreover, is that hope is the sentiment that follows anger—a sort of hope coupled with vengeance, a hope that is embodied by the masses' readiness to fight until victory is achieved. These sentiments also are echoed in the lyrics of the film's song, another collaboration between Shaykh Imam and Ahmad Fuʾad Najm:

Egypt is you, O' captivating Bahiyya
Age turns gray, yet you remain young
It is leaving and you are coming
Endless nights have come and gone
But your endurance remains the same
And your smile is still the same.[106]

Chahine was not alone in expressing a call for action or articulating hope for rising again.[107] Around the time he was writing and filming al-ʿUsfur, Egypt was undergoing what Schivelbusch would have described as a levée en masse (mass mobilization). Periodicals and state media were brimming with articles, reports, and slogans intended to

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[102] Farid, "Hiwar maʿ Youssef Chahine," 99.

[103] Ibid., 95.

[104] Shmayt, Youssef Chahine, 149.

[105] Fargeon, "Interview: Youssef Chahine," 49.

[106] The gender discourse in Chahine's films deserves a study of its own. Scholars like Viola Shafik have addressed it in their studies, exploring the representations of Egypt as a woman in some of his films, along with the connection between the defeat and the raped nation allegory. See, for example, Shafik, Popular Egyptian Cinema, 97–100.

[107] Even the censorship advisory committee appreciated the film for its mobilizing effect; ʿAli, Maʾat ʿAmm min al-Raqaba, 305.

rebuild the trust between civilian society and the military and to belittle the enemy—a strategy which, according to Schivelbusch's analysis of the culture of defeat, aimed at "replacing the troops' exhausted morale with the still vital spirit of the nation itself."[108] The imminent possibility of retaliating against Israel—of avenging the losses of 1967—generated hope among Egyptians. Even the title of the film was chosen specifically to express the people's desire for freedom, beautifully visualized by the shot of the sparrow leaving its cage, flying over the masses as they chant, "Long live Egypt!"[109] These feelings are not only portrayed and propagated in *al-ʿUsfur*, but they also were transpiring behind the scenes. In an interview with *al-Jazeera*, Egyptian director ʿAli Badrakhan, who was the assistant director of *al-ʿUsfur,* remembers:

> When we were filming the scene of the demonstrations, I had the task of shouting "we shall fight, we shall fight" to prompt the background actors who were playing the part of protestors. I was shouting, and the extras were chanting after me "we shall fight." People in their houses heard us, opened their windows, and started cheering and chanting with us, "We shall fight! We shall fight!" They then joined us in the street and the demonstration transformed into a real one.[110]

## Conclusion

Cinema has been treated in this article as a medium inextricably bound up with the social, political, and intellectual transformations of post-1967 Egypt. As such, Youssef Chahine's films (*al-Ard*, *al-Ikhtiyar*, and *al-ʿUsfur*), commonly referred to as the "trilogy of the defeat," are viewed as an historical window through which an analytical assessment of the emotional state of a particular emotional community in the wake of the defeat can be achieved. In making these films, Chahine was trying to answer the same question that many Egyptian artists, intellectuals, and ordinary people had been asking since the end of the 1967 war: "Why have we been defeated and what steps must be taken to remedy the situation?"[111] Through his films (especially *al-ʿUsfur*), Chahine was reassessing a past moment to understand his present, but what he ended up doing, in fact, was also the opposite. His understanding of the defeat was affected by his present, and by the many factors that transpired between June 1967 and October 1973, from the 1968 demonstrations to the corrective revolution in 1971, passing through the war of attrition, Nasser's death, and a series of crises affecting all aspects of society, including the very medium he used, the cinema. This meant that the interpretation of the defeat kept changing.

   I have tried to show too the interconnection of the perception of the defeat and the emotional response to it. Aside from shock, loss, and grief, which were emotions that existed throughout these six years irrespective of the assumed causes of the defeat, other sentiments were contingent on how the defeat was interpreted and understood. Humiliation and shame appeared when the defeat was perceived as being caused by a brutal, immoral enemy, or by ineptness and corruption on the home front; the emergence of guilt was linked to an understanding of the defeat as being the outcome of one's actions or passivity; disillusionment and anger were triggered by other sentiments such as betrayal, deception, and acceptance that the defeat was caused by the empty promises of a corrupt regime; and a growing need for vengeance evoked hope and euphoria.

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[108] Schivelbusch, *Culture of Defeat*, 11. For examples of these articles, see, Muhammad ʿAbd al-Hamid, "Malamih al-Taghyir fi Qiwatina al-Musalaha," *al-Nasr* 388 (1971): 4–5; ʿAbd al-Hakim ʿUbayd, "Qiwatuna al-Bahriyya: wa-Limaza Tatajanab Bahriyyat al-ʿAdu Muwajahatiha," *al-Nasr* 388 (1971): 6–7; and Sayyid Salami, "ʿIndama Tatahawal al-Ajsam al-Bashariyya ila Sawarikh Tahta al-Maʾ," *al-Nasr* 398 (1972): 6–7.

[109] ECCC, *al-ʿUsfur*, file no. 1598, clippings from 5 July 1972; Chahine, *al-ʿUsfur*, 01:40:02.

[110] ʿAli Badrakhan's interview in "Kharij al-Nas: Film al-ʿUsfur . . . Harb Fanniyya Dudd al-Fasad," *al-Jazeera*, 3 June 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X81k2y80_X0.

[111] Abu-Rabiʿ, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies*, 59.

To a question about *al-ʿUsfur*, following its screening at Cannes, Chahine remarked, "the reaction of the Egyptian people on the heels of the defeat was extremely positive."[112] But would he have thought or said the same when working on *al-Ard* or *al-Ikhtiyar*? Chahine could only think or say that in 1973, because by then the "crisis of time" engendered by the defeat was nearing its end. The conditions of possibility in summer 1973—instigated by mass media campaigns that constantly glorified the strength of Egyptian military and readiness for war, which, incidentally, resembled to a great extent the campaigns on the eve of the 1967 war—differed from those of earlier years following the defeat, and Chahine's "horizons of expectation" changed accordingly. Unlike *al-Ard* and *al-Ikhtiyar*, *al-ʿUsfur*'s ending is positive and hopeful, for victory seemed to be expected, if not the next day, then the day after.

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[112] ECCC, *al-ʿUsfur*, file no. 1598, Samir Farid, "*al-ʿUsfur* Intissar al-Film al-Misri fi Nusf Shahr al-Mukhrijin," 12 June 1973.