Cinetek series

Al-Muhajir / L'Émigré

The Emigrant

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I was born in Alexandria and inevitably, I don't know frontiers, I am very cosmopolitan. The sign of a radiant period in history is the possibility of fusing ideas, without brutal and stupid violence, without hypocritical talk.¹ (Youssef Chahine)

'The 'great' film directors of the West, would have been mere footnotes in history, had it not been for the economic power of their countries.'² (Teshome H Gabriel)

'We should be able to argue our position on aesthetic grounds...And we should look seriously at 'hidden' areas of world cinema too - Bombay and Mexico City and Cairo.'³ (Peter Wollen)

Introduction

Al-Muhajir (L’Émigré, 1994) narrates a version of one of the oldest and best-known stories in the world. The opening title of Youssef (Jo) Chahine’s epic film reads: "Like Joseph, Jacob’s son in the Bible, Ram, exposed to the hostility of nature, and the brutality of his tribe, leaves his country to go to Egypt, in search of knowledge. This film is the story of his quest...". Initially released in Egypt in September 1994, L’Émigré attracted a significant amount of positive critical and popular attention: for example, film critic Samir Farid referred to the tradition of Egyptian cultural diversity which Chahine repeatedly invokes...
when he argued that, although its director was from a Christian background, *L'Émigre* was closer to the Koranic version of Joseph’s story. For Farid, this demonstrated both Chahine’s and Egypt’s special genius.  

Unfortunately, not all responses were as generous as Farid’s. *L'Émigre*’s exhibition was blocked at the end of December because of a court case instigated by Islamic fundamentalists protesting against its representation of the prophet Joseph. Chahine is not the only Egyptian public figure to be drawn into such struggles in the 1990s. Celebrated novelist Naguib Mahfouz, who collaborated with Chahine on the screenplays for some of his earlier films such as *al-ikhityar* (The Choice, 1970), and Cairo University academic Nasr Hamid Abu Zeid are just two of the prominent artists and intellectuals involved in similar public confrontations during the 1990s. Chahine launched a well-publicised appeal against the *L'Émigre* ruling, and eventually succeeded in having the ban repealed. His next film, *al-Masir* (Destiny, 1997), was a historical epic centred around the medieval Arab philosopher Averroës. In addition to celebrating an important historical moment, *Destiny* pointedly allegorised Chahine’s own recent tribulations. Averroës argues eloquently for the importance, within philosophical discourse, of dialogue and reason, as well as revelation. Despite this, his ideas and books, as well as those who translate them, are condemned by politicised religious extremists in both France and Andalucia.

Given *L'Émigre*’s troubled history in Egypt, it is ironic that, in Britain and North America, the “logic” of the market-place, dictating the increasingly narrow range of foreign films in circulation, has effectively achieved the same result as the court case. In France, *L'Émigre* did receive a limited theatrical release and the benefit of serious critical attention in journals such as *Cahiers du Cinéma*. In recent years, Chahine’s reputation has risen considerably in Europe. In 1996, a complete retrospective of his work was staged at the Locarno Film Festival, and in 1997 he received an award for lifetime achievement at the Cannes Film Festival. Polls of Arab cinéastes also regularly place Chahine as the most significant Arab filmmaker. Yet, despite the narrative and other pleasures to be derived from a film such as *L'Émigre*, Chahine’s œuvre and particularly his recent work are relatively unknown within English-speaking contexts. The work of this experienced, innovative, politically engaged filmmaker deserves to be enjoyed more widely and studied more closely because there is much to be learned from it. *L'Émigre* is a good place to start. It is a film which refuses to recognise frontiers, sets itself firmly against the marginalisation of others, and yet which has itself been sidelined, locally and globally, by some of the negative processes of exclusion which it opposes.

### Synopsis

**Tonay.** Wolves attack Ram’s family’s sheep. Ram is lashed by his brothers for his supposed negligence. Ram’s father Adam returns and chastises them. Ram tells Adam of his desire to study farming in Egypt in order to end the family’s nomadic vulnerability to the elements. Basma, the wife of one of the brothers, stokes suspicions that Ram is an evil sorcerer.

Ram and his brothers travel across the desert to a port. The other brothers overpower Ram and leave him on a ship bound for Egypt. On arrival, he is sold as a slave into the service of military commander-in-chief Amihar. Ram impresses his masters with his literacy and storytelling skills. In the streets, there are stirrings of revolt against the pharaoh Amenophis. Searching for knowledge, Ram finds his way into the temple sanctuary and earns Amihar’s respect. Ram consoles fellow-worker Hati over the loss of her mother. More unrest on the streets. Ram has an audience with Amihar and Simihit, the High Priestess of Amon. Ram argues against the mummification which is part of the reigning cult of Amon and available only to the elite. He declares his faith in the one God, whilst respecting other beliefs.

In a dream, Simihit accuses Amon of being god of nothing but drought and death. Ram learns that Simihit’s husband Amihar is a eunuch. Hati expresses her determination to have Ram as her partner. Ram and Hati attend a secret ceremony worshipping Aton the sun god, the popular rival to Amon. It is presided over by Simihit and the pharaoh’s son. Simihit
fantasises about Ram.

Ram and agricultural expert Ozir leave to irrigate and farm an arid border area given to Ram by Amihar. Hati arrives. Eventually, they are successful and they celebrate. Meanwhile, in Egypt famine spreads and the unrest worsens. Ram returns and spends time with Simihit. He learns that she is also a foreigner in Egypt. Simihit accelerates the replacement of the Amon cult by the Aton cult.

The pharaoh Amenophis' statue is toppled as the revolt becomes more serious. The pharaoh orders that the fields of Aton's supporters be burned. Amihar's troops keep the rebellion at bay. Amihar explains to Ram that he sees his role in terms of holding the line between the pharaoh's guards and the rebels. Ram and Simihit meet and nearly make love.

Amihar confronts Ram who protests his and Simihit's innocence. Amihar arrests the pharaoh Amenophis, expressing disgust for the starvation which his policy has exacerbated. Hati voices sympathy for Simihit's predicament. Ram tells Simihit of his love for her. Simihit publicly declares her desire and Ram's innocence.

The famine intensifies. Ram convinces Amihar that, rather than protect the borders and conscript peasants, the army should be redirected to agricultural work for several years to beat the famine. Some years later, Ram's starving brothers arrive. He hosts them to a meal and, after criticising their brutish and ignorant customs, they reconcile. Ram says goodbye to his Egyptian friends. Ram returns to Tonay with Hati and his brothers to greet his joyful father.

L'Émigré as part of Chahine's œuvre

L'Émigré draws together several strands of Chahine's long career in Egyptian cinema. Chahine has suggested in interviews that he nurtured the idea for this film since the 1950s, the decade in which he began his career. Over the 50 years between his directorial debut Baba Amin (Daddy Amin, 1950) and his most recent Skout...Hansawar (Silence... We Are Shooting, 2001), Chahine has directed 33 feature films, and several shorts and documentaries. During this half-century, Chahine, always eclectic and versatile, has moved between, and combined, a variety of different genres and approaches to filmmaking. Notable earlier productions include Bab al-Hadid (Cairo Station, 1958), a melodrama of obsessive desire, set amongst marginalised poor traders and porters in Cairo railway station. This attracted international attention and comparisons with European neorealist filmmaking. Later came al-Nasir Salah al-Din (Saladin, 1963), an Eastmancolor CinemaScope historical epic celebrating the legendary opponent of the Crusaders. Al-Usfur (The Sparrow, 1973) was a contemporary social drama which attempted to analyse the state of the nation on the eve of Egypt's defeat in the 1967 Six Day War. Al-Iṣkandariyya...Leh? (Alexandria... Why?, 1978) staked out another new direction. This film is a semi-autobiographical reconstruction of aspects of Chahine's own youthful experiences in the culturally and religiously polyglot city of Alexandria during the Second World War.

Surveying the development of Chahine's career in a 1987 profile, Roy Armes concluded that it demonstrated how "it is possible for the Third World film maker to deal with social and political issues intelligently within the formal narrative structures of a cinema directed toward a mass audience and to combine this commercial concern with a totally personal style". The judgment is incisive. All of Chahine's later films weave together aspects of popular Egyptian and non-Egyptian genres, auteurist preoccupations, and social and political concerns. L'Émigré is a prime example of a film within Chahine's œuvre which deftly balances these elements. Yet, Armes' conclusion understates the extent to which Chahine is an exceptional figure, "one of the last great non-governmental institutions still existing in the Arab world", according to regular collaborator Yousry Nasrallah. Chahine's long career within Egyptian cinema and his international recognition place him in a unique position. He is able to operate as elder statesman, the most prominent auteur, enfant terrible, and one of the most politically daring of Arab filmmakers.

In terms of production, distribution and exhibition arrangements, Chahine's company Misr International Films and
his partnership with French co-producer Humbert Balsan enabled him to follow a distinctive path in the 1980s and 1990s. After a series of films co-produced with Algeria in the 1970s, Chahine's films since the mid-1980s have been Egyptian/French co-productions. Consequently, they have attained a relatively high profile in France. They do not always receive wide distribution within Egypt but Misr International operates a few cinemas offering half price tickets for students, an audience with whom Chahine is particularly keen to build a rapport. During the mid-1980s they produced a distinctive trend within contemporary Egyptian cinema, which has been towards wholesale privatisation of an industry nationalised during the 1960s. There has also been an increasing orientation towards making films funded by, or designed for, export to Arab Gulf markets such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. This orientation has, to a certain extent, been determined by political developments which have blocked off other markets. These include the Lebanese Civil War, a Syrian boycott of Egyptian film production after Egypt's peace treaty with Israel, and the closure of the Iraqi market after the 1991 Gulf War. The rise of video and satellite television as exhibition outlets and sources of production finance has also been most rapid in the wealthier Arab Gulf states. Despite some rearguard interventions by the Egyptian government in recent years, the influence of the Arab Gulf states continues to loom large over the contemporary Egyptian film industry.

Christophe Ayad voices a common complaint when he states that the Gulf "petro-monarchies" have "been quick to impose a very strict moral code which marks a definite regression in relation to the golden age of Egyptian cinema". Chahine concurs with this analysis. Al-iskandariyya...Kaman wa Kaman (Alexandria Again and Forever, 1989) is the third in a trilogy of semi-autobiographical films inaugurated by Alexandria... Why? In this film, Chahine plays an alternately exuberant and harassed film director, Yahia. Yahia's beloved favourite actor Amr breaks away from his stage role to direct a mediocre television soap opera, funded by Gulf petrodollars. Scenes have to be reshot if there is even the slightest hint that characters might be drinking alcohol. The frustrated, free-spirited director played by Chahine fulminates against such a waste of Amr's talent.

Chahine's preference in the 1980s and 1990s for Egyptian/French co-productions has exposed him to similarly bitter recriminations from some Egyptian critics. They have attacked him for cooperating with a Western, former imperialist power, and for drifting away from the mainstream of contemporary Egyptian cinema. Whilst this is a vexed question, one crucial indicator of Chahine's concern to stay close to Egyptian and Arab audiences is his casting of well-known Egyptian stars in all his later films. The director who introduced Omar Sharif to the world in Sira'fil-Wadi (The Blazing Sun, 1954) continues to work with key players within the Egyptian star system. These include such luminaries as Youssra/Simihit in L'Émigré, and Nour al-Cherif, who plays the medieval Andalucian philosopher Averroës in Chahine's subsequent film, Destiny.

Although he distances himself from extreme nationalism, Chahine has always insisted that he is first and foremost an Egyptian, Alexandrian filmmaker. His semi-autobiographical work can be, and has been, classified alongside that of confessional European auteurs such as Federico Fellini. At the same time, Chahine's films are very much part of Egyptian cinema. A useful starting-point for analysing his œuvre in the 1980s and particularly the 1990s is in terms of the way in which he has mobilised the production resources and prominent media profile which his unique position has made available to him. This mobilisation often follows a courageous strategy which, as Raymond Baker puts it, seeks "to disrupt the controlling discourses, to open up political spaces for argument and dissent in administered public arenas".
Alexandria Again and Forever and the controversial short al-Qahira munawara bi-Ahliha (Cairo Illuminated by Its People, 1991) (also known in French as Le Caire... Raconté par Chahine [Cairo... As Told by Youssef Chahine]), Chahine has played characters in Cairo Station, al-Yawm al-Sadis (The Sixth Day, 1986) and several of his other films. This recognisability helps to market his films, and to highlight and focus debates around them, and potentially makes even his semi-autobiographical work part of a wider public history.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Chahine's career alternated primarily between the production of self-reflexive, semi-autobiographical films and historical epics. Hadutha masriyya (An Egyptian Story, 1982) was a sequel to Alexandria... Why!, featuring the semi-autobiographical Yahia character. Al-Wada' ya Bonaparte (Adieu Bonaparte, 1984) was the first of the late historical epics, set around the time of the French invasion of Egypt. Alexandria Again and Forever completed his semi-autobiographical trilogy by returning to the Yahia character, now played for the first time by Chahine himself. The historical/religious epics L'Émigre and Destiny followed. The two main modes Chahine has worked in during this period inform each other, rather than existing in entirely separate spheres.

Ever the engaging interviewee, Chahine explained in Férid Boughedir's documentary on contemporary Arab cinema, Caméra Arabe (1987), what ties these two modes together: "You must first confront yourself before confronting other people or a whole country or the whole Arab nation... As you look back at yourself... you gradually move forward... if you can’t communicate with yourself, how can you communicate with others?" Thus, in Alexandria Again and Forever, the feature preceding L'Émigre, Chahine's character Yahia is obsessed by the legendary military and political leader and founder of Alexandria, Alexander the Great. In a mock-epic style musical number which anticipates some of the mise en scène in L'Émigre, Chahine fantasises Amr in the role of Alexander, ruler of all he surveys. However, he witnesses him presiding over numerous stupid and brutal acts of oppression. The number concludes with a despondent Yahia/Chahine ruminating over his disillusionment, and acknowledging his propensity to self-delusion.

This self-questioning continued in Cairo Illuminated by Its People, a short docudrama commissioned by French Television. Like L'Émigre, it quickly attracted controversy. Cairo Illuminated by Its People was banned in Egypt for representing student protests against Egyptian involvement in the Gulf War, and for broaching debates about Islamic fundamentalism. Chahine's agenda in this film is made clear through his voice-over. Rather than supply conventional touristic images of Cairo, or a representation which frames the city solely in terms of its social problems, he announces: "I love Cairo... It's the people I love... their kindness, their sense of humour". This declaration is accompanied by a camera movement revealing Chahine sitting in his high-rise flat. The director acknowledges that, inevitably, he is somewhat removed from the crowded intimacy represented elsewhere in Cairo Illuminated by Its People as the typical way of inhabiting space within Egypt's capital. Indeed, at one point in the film, a high-rise owner attempts to sell a similar flat to the viewer precisely because it can remove its owner from other people in the city. As Nur Elmessiri puts it, "Chahine does not hide the fact that, in spite of his empathy and love, he is enmeshed in the status quo".

Continual self-questioning has not prevented Chahine's work from moving forward. The problem with heroes, addressed in Alexandria Again and Forever, carries through into L'Émigre and Destiny. In these films, characters seeking knowledge, rather than military and political figures, are the central protagonists. The acknowledged privileges, in terms of access to production resources, which come with being Egypt's foremost film director, are utilised in L'Émigre to contribute positively to ongoing debates about key issues of the 1990s. These include political Islam, the definition of Egyptian culture, and Egypt's role within the Middle East. In an interview given during the L'Émigre trial, in which he talked about the popularity and political significance of the film, Chahine stated: "I exercise my role to declare that a silent, marvellous and democratic [Egyptian] majority exists and that it has not been acknowledged."
Narrative structure and style

The length and diversity of Chahine's career, spanning various genres and historical contexts, preclude any easy stylistic pigeon-holing applicable to all his film projects. L'Émigré does, nevertheless, fit into certain recurring patterns within Chahine's œuvre. It conforms to what Dave Kehr has neatly summarised as one typical feature of Chahine's work, that it often involves "choral affairs, in which many voices and many characters are blended into grand, powerful, and not always perfectly orderly compositions". Although Ram is L'Émigré's protagonist, the film's spectator is presented with a panorama of different characters. Simihit, Amihar, Amenophis, Hati and numerous other minor figures are all accorded their own space and time within the film. The narration's range affords the spectator brief sequences or moments which expand upon various characters' attitudes and motivations.

By giving space and time to different people and by avoiding extremes of judgmental commentary, L'Émigré's narrative structure supports the tolerance and humanism often identified as a typical Chahinian quality. Cairo Illuminated by Its People similarly refuses one-dimensional or reductive representations of the various categories of people inhabiting the city. As Kehr suggests, these "choral affairs" can verge on the disorderly, but one factor which gives L'Émigré a satisfyingly coherent narrative shape is the broad symmetry provided by Ram's journeys in search of knowledge, enlightenment and practical application of what he has learned. The film begins with his movement from Tonay to Egypt; the central section revolves around the crucial sequences in which the border area is farmed and irrigated; and the conclusion details Ram's return to Tonay.

For an epic film, L'Émigré's narrative moves along rapidly, and travels through space dynamically. Cinematographer Ramses Marzouk's tracking shots, pans and tilts open up spaces, complement or counterpoint character movements, and effectively punctuate the film's more static compositions. From the very first shot, Ram is often seen running or moving in some way. Throughout the film, tracks in to a medium close-up or close-up of a character's face amplify meaningful expressions or enhance significant lines of dialogue, thereby sustaining this measured but constant sense of movement. These strategies counteract the rigidity of mise en scène or respectful distance from characters often associated with the classical Hollywood epic.

L'Émigré's opening sequence provides a good example of the film's distinctive style. Rather than symphonic music and a portentous voice-over, the only sound accompanying the opening title and initial credits is desert wind. Whereas one might expect the first images in an epic to be stately establishing shots of impressive landscapes, cities, monuments or crowds of extras, L'Émigré propels its spectator abruptly into the middle of dramatic action. Ram is warned by his younger brother that wolves are attacking the family's flock. The older brothers fend them off. Ram is punished for his apparent negligence with a whipping from his eldest brother. All this unfolds in a series of shots, rapidly edited by Rashida Abdel Salam to last an average of five seconds each, but sometimes no more than two. Contrasting camera and character movements intensify the impression of confusion and disorientation. There is a camera tilt upwards in the first shot as Ram rushes frame-left over a hill to reach the sheep, and a tilt downwards in the second shot as three brothers wield sticks and throw stones frame-right to fight off the wolves. A moving camera follows one wolf as it flees rightwards in shot 3. In shot 4, more brothers race leftwards, with the camera moving alongside them. The soundtrack reinforces the situation's urgency and immediacy. The only sounds heard at this point are the wind, snarling wolves and the brothers' startled cries. L'Émigré's opening sequence announces that this will be a fast-moving and engaging film. It establishes the conflict between Ram and his brothers. It also inaugurates a specific and a general set of motifs which elaborate upon the harsh struggle against the forces of nature which their nomadic existence entails. When Ram is in Egypt attempting to access the sanctuary in pursuit of knowledge, he is menaced by another pack of wolves. Hati, who is as determined as Ram in pursuit of what she wants, later exclaims that "freedom must be ripped from the wolf's jaws". This primal struggle with the wolves connects to a series of other
animal and nature motifs developed throughout L’Émigré. Discussing Chahine's earlier film, al-Ard (The Land, 1969), Maureen Kiernan draws attention to a shot of "hands which tend and clutch the cotton plant [which] best represent[s] the fellaheen's [peasants] relationship to the land". She continues: "In a great many of his films, such a shot, decontextualized from the narrative becomes a motif which summarizes some major theme or relationship." L’Émigré adopts a similar strategy and, indeed, a similar preoccupation with direct relationships to the land.

One example of this strategy is shots of animals, such as snakes and tortoises, crawling slowly across the desert sand. These occur just after Ram has told his father Adam of his wish to leave for Egypt to study agriculture, and during Ram and his brothers' first journey across the desert from Tonay to the port. The reintroduction of Ram's family into the narrative towards the end of the film is again accompanied by animal references. This time, the family is starving and there are shots of animal skeletons lying in the desert sand. Just before reconciling with his brothers, Ram describes their way of life in terms of "living each day as it comes, like animals". The visual and verbal associations established between animals, the desert, nature's harshness and the traditions of Ram's tribe are set against agricultural cultivation - green fields dominate the mise en scène of the final part of the film - and human enlightenment. The tenacity required to defeat the wolves, to transcend the former and aspire to the latter condition, is summarised in another motif. At the end of the sequence in which Ram asks his father's permission to leave for Egypt to study farming, he grasps a handful of desert sand which slips through his fingers. He repeats the gesture later, during a moment of frustration before the arid border area given to him by Amihar is, after much effort, finally irrigated and farmed.

Although significance can be extrapolated from certain "summarising" shots in L’Émigré, they do not seriously impede or disrupt the narrative. The film is clearly targeted at the widest possible audience, and, in the Egyptian context, it is not only narrative legibility which indicates this, but also the inclusion of a dance sequence. Traditionally, narrative can always be suspended or shifted to another level in order to make room for some kind of musical performance. Most genres within Egyptian cinema have incorporated aspects of the musical, and many films find a way to include at least one song or a dance number. Chahine's work is no exception. His otherwise experimental and potentially "difficult" semi-autobiographical film Alexandria Again and Forever is replete with songs and dances, in most of which the Yahia/Chahine character enthusiastically participates. Destiny also features some fine performances. L’Émigré has one, when Hati and Ram attend the ceremony to Aton presided over by Simihit and the pharaoh's son.

Primarily, this dance sequence is a pleasurable, sensual interlude within a film which generally embraces visual pleasure and revels in the gracefulness and youth of many of its actors' bodies. After the dance begins, Simihit looks directly at Ram who is sitting next to Hati in the audience. Simihit's fantasy of everyone except Ram disappearing is visualised, and she leads him onto the performance space and up to sit on a throne previously occupied by the pharaoh's son. Stripped to the waist, Ram's artificially darkened skin highlights Simihit's projection of him as an exotic, desirable other. When the fantasy sequence ends, Hati looks at Ram and Simihit looking at each other and registers their mutual attraction. The pleasurable formal ritual of the dance momentarily diverts Ram from his pursuit of knowledge. Simihit's fantasy posits a possible future in which, as Simihit's lover, he would leave the "little people" and their everyday concerns behind and ascend to a place within the Egyptian elite. Later in the film, Ram and Simihit actually discuss this possibility. The dance also choreographs an interplay of looks. These signal Simihit's, Ram's and Hati's desires as forces which must be reckoned with in relation to the other issues which the narrative addresses. Thus, the final and by no means least important component of Chahine's style in L’Émigré is that it continues, like many of his other films, to seek innovative ways of representing desire in all its fluid, multiform and pervasive manifestations.
**L'Émigré** and Egyptian cinema in the 1990s

In order to further the case for L'Émigré's distinctiveness, Chahine's film needs to be situated in relation to other Egyptian films of the 1990s, as well as in relation to the development of the epic genre more broadly. Egyptian cinema past and present is, in general, even less well-known within English-language scholarship than Chahine, who at least attracts a certain amount of attention as an auteur. Two significant 1990s Egyptian films which have been written about in some detail in English are *Nasser 56* (Muhammad Fadel, 1996) and *al-Irhahi* (The Terrorist, Nadir Galal, 1994). Each of these films, like L'Émigré, generated public debate in Egypt. More than just routine releases, they became media events, talking-points and cultural phenomena through which people defined themselves and their attitudes. Locating L'Émigré in relation to *Nasser 56* and *The Terrorist* will demonstrate their common concerns, whilst also underlining what makes L'Émigré unusual. As Maureen Kiernan suggests, Chahine's work can usefully be understood as a "counter-cinematic practice...an alternative - alternative not alien - discourse" within Egyptian film culture. Given that this is an unfamiliar film culture to many English-language readers, it is necessary to have some insight into the kinds of film it plays off against.

*Nasser 56*'s cultural prestige and centrality to Egyptian public debate in the mid-1990s match those of L'Émigré. It is a serious, hagiographic combination of bio-pic and historical epic. It focuses on president Gamal Abdel Nasser's heroic role in nationalising the Suez Canal and resisting British, French and Israeli aggression. The film drew large, appreciative audiences during the 40th anniversary of these events. It is nearly two and a half hours long, shot in black-and-white, and incorporates documentary footage. *Nasser 56* features a compelling performance by Ahmad Zaki, one of Egypt's leading male stars, as Nasser. Dealing only with 1956, the film celebrates a glorious moment within Nasser's early career and modern Egyptian history. Tasteful domestic sequences throughout the film establish the president as a devoted family man. The benign father within his own household is also the benign father of the modern Egyptian nation. Outside the home, Nasser is abstracted into a cinematic icon in his public performances.

*Nasser 56*'s credit sequence sets the tone for the film as a whole. A drum roll and the sound of cheering Egyptians on the soundtrack amplify the emotional impact of an opening shot of a British flag being lowered, followed by documentary footage of British troops leaving Egypt. The credits proper form part of a montage sequence, to stirring symphonic music, of Nasser/Zaki delivering speeches linked by camera movements and dissolves to large, clapping, cheering Egyptian audiences. Shots here are extracted from the several lengthy speeches delivered later in the narrative. The film's final image is an iconic freeze-frame of Nasser/Zaki, arms held high after a climactic speech in a mosque, with symphonic music and more cheering on the soundtrack. *Nasser 56* insistently and powerfully reaffirms the myth of the late president as a charismatic authority figure, a leader who effectively thinks and acts for the Egyptian people as a whole.

*Nasser 56*'s relationship to current political confrontations and cultural debates within Egypt is complex. The film nostalgically invokes the charismatic leadership of modern Egypt's greatest political figure. Always dressed in suits or military uniform, he is an icon who implicitly reasserts the secular nature of modern Egypt in the face of contemporary Islamic fundamentalist challenges to how the state and Egyptian civil society should be organised. Yet, the film cannot simply be interpreted as a straightforward endorsement of the status quo. *Nasser 56*'s director, Muhammad Fadel, has a distinguished track record making socially critical serials for Egyptian Television. He directed *Layali al-Hilmiyya* (Hilmiyya Nights, 1988-92), an epic historical drama set in Cairo which spanned modern Egyptian history. The implications of this serial's valorisation of Nasser's regime, compared to those of Sadat and Mubarak, were extensively debated in the Egyptian press. *Nasser 56* takes this a stage further. As Steve Negus suggests, the film celebrates a style of visionary political leadership markedly different from that of the current president, Hosni Mubarak. His approach has always been more low-key. In the context of a contemporary
political situation presided over by a regime perceived by many as lacking clear direction or a strong bond with the majority of the population, Nasser 56 is a profoundly backward-looking mythologisation of recent history.

Chahine's work since the 1970s has, unlike Nasser 56, resisted nostalgia for past glories and charismatic leaders. The Sparrow, described by Tunisian film director and historian Férid Boughedir as the film which "turned Arab cinema around with the incredible audacity of its subject matter and structure", deals with Nasser's and modern Egypt's lowest point. This was the humiliating defeat in the 1967 Six Day War and Nasser's offer of resignation. Most of The Sparrow's narrative deals with a cross-section of ordinary Egyptians, and Chahine's subsequent films have marked out a critical distance from exalted political and military hero figures. One way in which L'Émigré achieves this is through the casting of a relatively unknown young actor, Khaled Nabaoui, as Ram.

L'Émigré's use of actors differs from the mobilisation of Ahmad Zaki's star status in Nasser 56. Zaki's widely acknowledged status as an Egyptian cinematic icon adds magnitude to that dimension of his portrayal of Nasser which emphasises the president's exceptionality and instinctive bond with the masses. Although playing a character modelled upon a revered figure in various religious traditions, Nabaoui, the unknown actor embodying Ram in L'Émigré, brings a freshness, modesty and Everyman quality to the role. His youthfulness and Ram's ordinary yet admirable attributes of determination, confidence and optimism contribute to L'Émigré's hopeful utopianism. Nasser 56 looks wistfully back to a recent past which is better than an uncertain present, whereas L'Émigré, despite being set in a much earlier historical period, is much more forward-looking, in the sense that the dialogue with others, demilitarisation, and redirection of human energy to invigorate the agricultural sector of the economy have yet to happen. Nasser 56 dwells upon past glories.

One concession which Nasser 56 does make to the present is its representation of a president who, whilst fundamentally secular, is not antireligious. The film is careful to represent Nasser praying in the mosque where he delivers his final speech, and to include shots of attentive religious leaders amongst his audience. However, in the context of the narrative as a whole, Islam is clearly only one, fairly minor component of Nasser 56's Egypt. In this respect, the film follows the lead of some recent Egyptian Television serials, analysed by Lila Abu-Lughod, which accommodate token assertions of Islamic identity within basically secular frameworks. Abu-Lughod points out that these instances indicate that some ground has been ceded by television serials which previously tended to ignore new Egyptian Islamic movements and identities. Nevertheless, when they do occur in these serials, assertions of Islamic identity are usually personal, rather than public, and never become politically oppositional. According to Abu-Lughod, they form part of a "struggle to reappropriate Islamic identity for secular nationalists", rather than a thoroughgoing attempt to engage with the challenge and appeal of new Islamic movements.

On those occasions when Islamist political activity is directly addressed in Egyptian media productions, as in The Terrorist, a dismissive and reductive, rather than tokenist, strategy tends to be adopted. This strategy, according to Walter Armbrust, involves structuring films such as The Terrorist around a "polarized rhetoric of misguided politicization of religion versus the state". The film is a star vehicle for the immensely popular actor and comedian Adil Imam, whose career has branched out in recent years into serious, as well as comic, roles. Imam plays the title role in The Terrorist. The Islamic movement to which he belongs in the film is manipulated by mysterious foreign powers. His personal motivations, rather than being grounded in concrete political or sociological factors, emerge from an aberrant psychology. Ultimately, he repents but, as a result, himself becomes another victim of terrorist violence.

In box-office terms, Adil Imam is probably Egypt's most successful male star. Outside his films, he has taken a very prominent role in promoting the polarised rhetoric described by Armbrust. In various public appearances and statements in the 1980s and 1990s Imam has, in Raymond Baker's words, "done more than any other cultural figure to confirm the regime's
assessment that a broader cultural crisis between a secular and an Islamic orientation was in fact nothing more than a national security threat. Like Nasser 56 and L’Émigré, The Terrorist provoked much public debate within Egypt. Rather than furthering these debates, the film replicates Western media stereotypes of the irrational Islamic terrorist for an Egyptian context. Although the character played by Imam eventually abandons his adherence to violence, other Islamic militants confirm the obduracy of the stereotype by brutally gunning him down at the end of the film. For a film following the polarised and reductive rhetoric of a progressive secular state vs. the threat of a dangerous, inherently destructive political Islam, there is no middle ground and no possibility for dialogue. Imam’s specific star image is that of the “little guy” disorientated by social and political change. The very fact of his playing an Islamic militant implicitly acknowledges the appeal of political Islam within contemporary Egypt. Despite its star’s apparent engagement with a serious issue, The Terrorist’s narrative refuses to engage in any substantial analysis of why ordinary, rational Egyptians might be disillusioned with the status quo, and why they might be attracted to politicised Islamist alternatives.

Compared to Nasser 56 and The Terrorist, L’Émigré is a radical and groundbreaking film. It challenges some of the frameworks which these other films take for granted. Chahine’s film raises many of the issues addressed in Nasser 56 and The Terrorist, but it poses them in an innovative manner. L’Émigré is concerned with many of the questions touched upon in Nasser 56, such as the role of the state, the responsibilities and duties of political leaders, the organisation of the economy, and the relationship between Egypt and the outside world. Yet, unlike Nasser 56, L’Émigré does not make a few token concessions to Islamic values which gloss a deeply nostalgic faith in the charismatic authority of a great secular political leader. L’Émigré does not attempt to accommodate Islam and promote the myth of a fundamentally benign secular state, as in Nasser 56 or the television serials discussed by Abu-Lughod.

L’Émigré tries to deconstruct the reductive polarisation between a progressive secular state and a dangerously politicised Islam promoted by films such as The Terrorist. The politics of everyday life, with its pressing concerns about how to provide everyone with enough to eat and how to interact productively with others, supersedes this distinction. L’Émigré’s novel interpretation of the story of Joseph explores what the contemporary relevance, value and appeal of a narrative derived from religious traditions might be - for religious and non-religious spectators alike. Chahine’s film therefore has the potential to unsettle, for better or worse, Egyptian spectators who might otherwise be drawn to accept the polarisation and identify with either camp. L’Émigré blurs, complicates, relativises and generally mixes up the divisions and boundaries between what, in more conventional Egyptian films, are clear oppositions.

Adaptation

When a film’s narrative is adapted from religious traditions, the choice of source narrative is enormously significant. Throughout its history, the American film industry has produced a variety of epic films adapting religious narratives. Two trends in particular have been prominent. One is the Christ film, from early examples such as From the Manger to the Cross (Sidney Olcott, 1912) through to the controversial The Last Temptation of Christ (Martin Scorsese, 1988). The other is adaptations of the story of Moses in the Exodus narrative, again from very early examples such as The Life of Moses (Charles Kent, production supervised by Reverend Madison C Peters, 1909-10) through to the animated version The Prince of Egypt (Brenda Chapman, Steven Hickner and Simon Wells, 1998). Other European film industries have also contributed to these traditions: Italy, for example, with films such as II Vangelo Secondo Matteo (The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964) and the epic television series Mose (Moses, Gianfranco de Bosio, 1972). Towering above them all, however, is The Ten Commandments (Cecil B De Mille, 1956). This monumental film continues to be regularly screened on British and American television, and remains, over 40 years later, a common point of cultural reference.
One of the advantages of producing film adaptations of Moses and the Exodus narrative is that such films have the potential to contain points of appeal for both Christian and Jewish audiences. William Urrichio and Roberta Pearson have explored how one of the earliest prestige productions, Vitagraph's *The Life of Moses* (1909-10), was carefully designed to appeal to the widest possible range of Christian and Jewish constituencies within the United States. The *Ten Commandments* (1956 version) follows a standard pattern in Hollywood 1950s and 1960s Old Testament epics by casting the Waspish star Charlton Heston as Moses. As Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans point out, in films based upon aspects of the Old Testament the synthesis of Christian and Jewish elements is unequal because "ultimately their Jewish content is dramatised only because it has been appropriated as the prehistory of Christian meaning, not in its own terms". Thus, for example, the Law which Moses/Heston receives in *The Ten Commandments* appears in an invented script, rather than in Hebrew, and only those aspects relevant to later Christian exegesis of Exodus are emphasised.

Despite this imbalance, *The Ten Commandments*, produced only a few years after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, does enable particular interpretations of American, ancient and modern Israeli history to be conflated. For example, Moses/Heston's iconic pose holding the tablets of the Law towards the end of the narrative resembles, as several commentators have noted, the Statue of Liberty. This draws upon a long tradition of narrating American history as a version of Exodus, and representing the United States as a "promised land". The most famous novel about the emergence of the modern State of Israel was entitled, naturally, *Exodus* (Leon Uris, first published 1958). The epic film adaptation of Exodus (Otto Preminger, 1960) appeared a few years after *The Ten Commandments*. Within this configuration, ancient Israel prefigures modern America whose history and most sacred values also parallel those of modern Israel.

The ancient/modern analogies established within Hollywood Old Testament epics, particular during their heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, have various implications. Insofar as Jewish-Christian relations within the United States are concerned, these are staged in assimilationist terms. In *The Ten Commandments*, the Hebrew Moses is "assimilated" into the star persona of Waspish Charlton Heston. Insofar as global ancient/modern analogies are concerned, there is in these films, according to Babington and Evans, "an unshakeable belief in Jewish claims to the land". This belief is buttressed by the parallels between ancient Israel and democratic, modern America. Egyptians, Philistines, Canaanites and the like are self-evidently enemies of freedom and progress.

Edward Said, in his "Canaanite" reading of the Exodus narrative, traces this issue all the way back to the original source behind the films. Exodus has been mobilised in various historical contexts as an inspirational narrative because it charts a passage from slavery and oppression to freedom. Nevertheless, Said argues that it is deeply problematic because of notions such as the "chosen people" and "the promised land" inherent within the narrative. Regardless of the particular adaptation, Exodus for Said depends upon the idea that certain people, whether ancient Canaanites or contemporary Palestinians, do not belong to the privileged "chosen" group, and therefore have no rights to the land. For Said, the Exodus narrative involves an exclusivist territorial politics inextricably entwined with its more obviously uplifting aspects.

Whatever the ultimate merits of Said's argument, it is significant, given this history of the Hollywood religious epic, that *L'émigré* is an adaptation of the story of Joseph. Like Moses, Joseph is a figure common to the Koran, the Torah and the Bible. Unlike Moses, he is not freighted with a problematic history, within an Egyptian context, of potentially exclusivist film interpretations. *L'émigré* follows many of the main elements of the story of Joseph as told in the Twelfth Surah of the Koran and in Genesis: 37-50. Yet, more than in any of these source texts, *L'émigré* emphasises Ram's role as someone who, as in Chahine's description of himself, "[doesn't] know frontiers". The film's title highlights this, as does the amount of screen time devoted to Ram's border-crossing journeys across deserts and across the sea, compared to the relatively cursory treatment which Joseph's
passage between Canaan and Egypt receives in the Twelfth Surah and in Genesis. Some narrative events in L'Émigré, such as farming the land which Ram cultivates with Ozir's help, are specific to Chahine's film. The fact that this strip of land, transformed from aridity to fertility, is located in a border area reinforces the film's insistence that liminal zones can be the most culturally productive areas.

Casting is another way in which the specificities of L'Émigré's adaptation of the story of Joseph give it a particular emphasis on overlaps and interactions between cultures. Graced with a patriarchal white beard, the veteran French star Michel Piccoli plays Adam, Ram's father. Consequently, the most noticeable differences between the appearance and nationalities of actors within the film are contained within a family, whereas Ram the emigre, the nomad from Tonay, and the Egyptians he encounters are all played by Egyptian actors. Ram is not visually differentiated as a foreigner. As Maureen Kiernan notes, one of L'Émigré's central contrasts "is not so much...Egypt versus the foreign but of the fertile poor in contrast to the impotent rich". Compared to Hollywood's potentially exclusivist adaptations of Moses and the Exodus narrative, what is repeatedly emphasised on a number of levels in L'Émigré's adaptation of the Joseph story is the way in which different cultures can be mutually enriched through peaceful interaction.

L'Émigré underplays Joseph's role in the source religious texts as an interpreter of dreams. This is briefly touched upon at the beginning of the film, when parallels between Ram and Joseph are being established. In general, however, Ram in L'Émigré, although sharing many of the same admirable human qualities, does not possess Joseph's divinely granted talent for dream interpretation. In the Twelfth Surah and in Genesis, the most important dream Joseph interprets is the King of Egypt's. Joseph reads the dream as a prediction of famine, and this allows preparations to be made to prevent it. L'Émigré omits the dream but retains its content; the emphasis is on averting famine.

Other details are freely adapted from the Twelfth Surah and from Genesis. The wolves motif which L'Émigré links to the basic issue of the struggle for subsistence is a reference which is more prominent in the Twelfth Surah than in Genesis. Genesis mentions that Potiphar, the character broadly equivalent to Amihar in L'Émigré, is captain of the palace guard, but the Twelfth Surah is less specific on this point. One area where these texts concur and where L'Émigré differs is in their representation of the relationship between Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis)/the wife of the unnamed Egyptian to whom he is sold as a slave (Twelfth Surah). In these texts, she is not named and is generally a less important character than Simihit in L'Émigré. Joseph's reciprocal desire for her is acknowledged in the Twelfth Surah, but here and in Genesis there is no meaningful relationship between them. L'Émigré represents their relationship very differently. There is also no real equivalent to L'Émigré's Hati in Genesis or the Twelfth Surah. In general, the women's roles in Chahine's film are much more pronounced.

Despite being a contemporary adaptation, L'Émigré is immediately recognisable as a version of the story of Joseph. This version purposefully blends elements drawn from Judaeo-Christian and Islamic sources, suggesting Chahine's commitment to a syncretic view of Egyptian and global culture. What is retained and even amplified from the original sources of Joseph's story in the Twelfth Surah and Genesis is the issue of how to produce and preserve sufficient food to feed everybody. L'Émigré implies that, whether or not its spectator adheres to a particular faith, there are some basic issues in the great religious texts just as urgent now as in the time in which they are set. Ram's border-crossing quest for agricultural knowledge links this to a modest celebration of the positive aspects of emigration. This does not simply involve grafting contemporary, secular or "postcolonial" attitudes onto religious narrative. It is more a case of highlighting elements which are already there.

As John Durham Peters has argued, notions of wandering, exile, nomadism and diaspora are deeply embedded within Judaeo-Christian religious texts and traditions. Similarly, Muhammad Khalid Masud has discussed the importance of "hijra", the obligation in certain circumstances to migrate, within various Islamic traditions. The primary instance of "hijra" is the prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina.
Although its exact significance is endlessly debatable, "hijra" can now even be interpreted as an injunction to seek knowledge and education in non-Muslim countries. Validation can easily be found within Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions for border-crossing and openness to other peoples and cultures. Edward Said's critique of the Exodus narrative minimises this aspect of these traditions and is suspicious of any mingling of religious and secular values. His critique may nevertheless be pertinent to Hollywood's appropriations of that particular religious narrative. L'Émigré takes a different approach. It is concerned not only to emphasise commonalities between Judaeo-Christian and Islamic religious traditions, and to explore the contemporary relevance of aspects of the story of Joseph, but also to map out a space where secular and religious concerns become indistinguishable. The quest for subsistence and the importance of openness towards others are issues and values which are not the sole provenance of either realm.

Epic histories

Film genres cannot be defined absolutely. They are more or less prominent in different periods, and change and develop over time. Often change and development occur by incorporating elements from, or combining with, other genres. One deliberately loose definition which applies to many films identified as epics is that of Derek Elley: "the epic form transfigures the accomplishments of the past into an inspirational entertainment for the present". Typically, these accomplishments define or change the course of a particular epoch, and are assumed to have some significance for the present. Often they involve encounters or, in most cases, confrontations between civilisations. As Steve Neale points out, despite the fact that its historical films do not always employ spectacular staging, and other genres such as comedies and musicals have been staged in epic mode, Hollywood has acquired a reputation for representing history on a massive scale.

Yet, the epic film, religious or historical, is not exclusively about subsistence. Throughout cinema history, the Italian film industry in particular has participated in an ongoing dialogue with Hollywood, especially in relation to epics representing ancient Rome. Italian films such as Quo Vadis? (Enrico Guazzoni, 1913) and Cabiria (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914) set the first precedents for epic film production which subsequent Hollywood efforts sought to surpass. Elsewhere, epic film production was also underway by the 1910s. Raja Harishchandra (King Harishchandra, Dadasaheb Phalke, India, 1913), based upon the Mahabharata, is one notable early example from a non-Western context. As far as North Africa and the Middle East are concerned, the newly liberated Algerian cinema of the 1960s produced some interesting historical epics. Chahine's Saladin was probably the most ambitious riposte to, and attempt to expand the scope of the cycle of, Hollywood epics produced during the 1950s and 1960s. Saladin's subject-matter - the defeat of the Crusaders by the film's eponymous hero - contrasts pointedly with the Christian victories against the Moors represented in El Cid (Anthony Mann, 1961), released two years earlier.

Although, in global terms, Hollywood religious and historical epic films can be seen as one amongst many local variants, Hollywood's global reach and command of economic resources have enabled its particular standards for this type of film production to be widely disseminated. As the heyday of the Hollywood religious and historical epic was drawing to a close at the end of the 1960s, an influential manifesto written by two Third World filmmakers launched an attack against the hegemony of Hollywood-derived modes of historical representation in film. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their classic "Towards a Third Cinema" argued that these modes had become so pervasive and so much part of the "common sense" of filmmaking that even recent Soviet films such as Vojna i mir (War and Peace, Sergej Bondarenko, 1965) submitted to them.

This meant that, regardless of a film's geographical point of origin, it was increasingly the case that "rather than having his ability to make history recognized, [the spectator] is only permitted to read history, contemplate it, listen to it, and undergo it". In Michael Chanan's gloss on this argument, this also
implies that "the capacity of the subject to participate in making history is denied to all except the heroic and exceptional individual." Tracing Solanas and Getino's later clarifications of their argument, Chanan concludes that the alternative they propose is not necessarily a rejection of epic or any other kind of film form per se. The crucial determinant of Third Cinema is "the interests to which the films answer...Third Cinema [in Solanas' 1978 definition] 'is the expression of a new culture and of changes in society'...a cinema of decolonization which expresses the will to national liberation, anti-mythic, anti-racist, anti-bourgeois, and popular."42

Saladin is certainly an epic of decolonisation and national liberation. Parallels between Saladin's struggle against the Crusaders and the recent Egyptian resistance to Franco-British-Israeli invasion in 1956 can easily be drawn. Chahine's famously tolerant view of the other is exemplified in Saladin through its hero's magnanimity towards the Crusaders. It is reiterated through a romantic sub-plot between an Arab Christian loyal to Saladin and a woman who is part of the Crusader camp. The possibility of acknowledging the ordinary spectator's "ability to make history" is, however, minimised by the film's privileging of Saladin as its central protagonist, and by insistent comparisons between his and president Nasser's exceptional heroism. As Hala Halim notes, the first part of the Arabic title of the film, Al-Nasir Salah al-Din, refers to "he who brings victory" and echoes the president's name. Anachronistic Pan-Arabist slogans associated with Nasser's regime, such as "there can be no victory without unity [between the Arabs]", are used within the film.43 Saladin is played by Egyptian star Ahmad Mazhar, who was the same age as Nasser and, like him, was known to have had a military background.

Although its historical perspective is, on one level, diametrically opposed to that of El Cid, Saladin conforms to the principles underlying this Hollywood film's narrative structure. The primary motor of, and explanation for, historical processes is the individual characteristics of exceptional protagonists and the personal relationships between them. El Cid begins with Rodrigo Diaz/Charlton Heston snaring the life and earning the gratitude of the captured Moorish prince Moutamin. This action affirms Rodrigo/Heston's innate nobility. It initiates a sequence of narrative events which result in his becoming the King's champion and leading the campaign against the Moors. This campaign requires little overt narrative justification because of the contrast between Rodrigo/Heston's complex, compelling persona as a "man of destiny" and the fanatical Moor leader Ben Yussuf's sadistic rebelliousness. In Saladin, the embittered widow of a treacherous adversary whom Saladin has killed in a duel mobilises Richard the Lion Heart and the European aristocracy to undertake a Crusade. Richard's flawed, shortsighted refusal to acknowledge treachery and division amongst the aristocrats within his own camp, compounded by his inability to match Saladin's magnanimity, is largely responsible for intensifying the conflict. In both films, personal qualities, aspirations and enmities drive their narratives and thus History itself. Broader economic, social and political issues are relegated to the margins.

In the 30 years between Saladin and L'Emigré stand Egypt's devastating defeat in the Six Day War against Israel, Chahine's semi-autobiographical films and the emergence of a more nuanced approach to historical representation within his work. Analysing Alexandria... Why?, Geneviève Sellier argues that one of the film's outstanding features is that it "respects the relative autonomy of these two dimensions [personal and collective history], contrary to many of the recent 'historical frescoes' which have a tendency to reduce individual destinies to their historical inscription, or vice-versa."44 In L'Emigré, personal history similarly intersects with collective history without either being collapsed into the other. Ram is defined as an individual in terms of his personal quest for agricultural knowledge. At the same time, Ram's trajectory from being a shepherd in Tonay to an agricultural expert also embodies what is generally seen as a significant advance in human history. This is the passage from primarily nomadic economies to more sedentary agricultural ones which enable communities to move beyond the level of merely struggling to subsist.45 In that sense, Ram's personal trajectory dramatically compresses the kind of long-term economic and cultural process which has rarely been dramatised in historical
epics. His individuality resides in the fact that he is the first person from his tribe to pursue this path, and in the way in which he, unlike many Egyptians, never forgets how agriculture is the foundation upon which Egyptian civilisation is built.

Alexandria... Why's historical representations also serve as a precursor to L'Émigre in another respect. This earlier film develops what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam describe as "a 'peripheral' Egyptian perspective on Europe".47 Alexandria... Why? insists that what Europeans might see as the central issues and great individual figures of the Second World War would not necessarily be perceived in the same way by the various sectors of 1940s Egyptian society which the film represents. Similarly, in L'Émigre, Ram's dogged pursuit of his goals sometimes places him at a tangent to other historical agents and processes within the narrative, allowing the spectator the possibility of critically assessing the range of historical agents and processes represented within the film. Ram is so preoccupied with his own quest that at first he pays little attention to the unrest which the adherents of Aton are causing in the streets of Egypt.

In a more conventionally plotted epic, one might expect L'Émigre's protagonist increasingly to coincide with, or oppose, the rebels as the personal meshes with the collective and individual motivations push history forward. Later, as the revolt spreads, Ram does temporarily get caught up with a group of rebels, but this is more incidental than deliberate as far as he is concerned. Ram remains unconvinced as to the merits of either Amon or Aton when he observes Simihit supervising the replacement of monuments and inscriptions to the former by new ones honouring the latter. Information supplied through dialogue suggests that one of the Aton cult's attractions is that it is seen by ordinary people as more inclusive and less the preserve of the repressive, authoritarian Egyptian élite than Amon's. Ram's observation of Simihit's replacement process, however, and the Egyptian élite's later adoption of the Aton cult imply the ease with which it can be institutionalised or manipulated by those in power. Whilst supplying a rational explanation for the rebels' adherence to Aton, L'Émigre maintains a cautiously critical perspective in relation to the politicisation of religion.

Ram's personal quest in L'Émigre is a narrative thread which for much of the film is kept distinct from that dealing with the increasingly revolutionary masses. Unlike in more conventional epic film narratives, the masses move independently in L'Émigre. The toppling of the pharaoh's statue, for example, does not result from the scheming of individualised conspirators or the orders of leaders. Within L'Émigre's narrative it is purely a consequence of collective action and a dramatic sign of the extent of the unrest. The narrative does not subordinate collective action to exceptional individuals, such as Rodrigo/Heston in El Cid, or Saladin/Mazhar in Chahine's earlier epic, whose personal qualities and star status prejudice the validity of collective struggles. Amihar's arrest of Amenophis after he has burned the fields and crops of Aton's supporters is a significant action, but one contextualised within L'Émigre's narrative as a necessary and rational response to Amenophis' disastrous policy, as well as an individually decisive act. Amihar's statement "starving people disgusts me" as he leads Amenophis away is a condemnation of the policy, as well as the person. Neither Ram nor Amihar is represented as a "man of destiny" in L'Émigre, Rodrigos or Saladins who can lead the narrative towards resolution. Coordinated, rather than individually heroic, responses to historical crises, and the development of radical policies addressing the real needs of the masses are what provide solutions in L'Émigre.48

In a partial resolution of different narrative threads at the end of L'Émigre, the Amon vs. Aton issue and the threat of famine recede. Disaster is avoided because Ram's idea, initially supported by Amihar - about redirecting the military to work in the agricultural sector - is implemented. Yet, the persistence of "othering" and the difficulty of sustaining such unity of purpose are suggested when, before this agricultural project is completed, workers involved in it are diverted by the Egyptian élite to build a new city dedicated to Aton. When he protests, Ram is curtly informed that "it's up to us Egyptians to decide on our priorities". L'Émigre is not so utopian as to imply that all economic problems and social conflicts can be permanently resolved. Nevertheless, a measure of the film's originality is that it seeks resolution without
violent mass confrontations intertwined with individually heroic triumphs and sacrifices. These typically provide spectacle and restore the status quo at the end of more conventional Hollywood-style epics. L'Émigré explores alternative approaches to the cinematic narration of historical processes.

**Spectacles of destruction and construction**

One of the defining features of many classical Hollywood historical or religious epics is visual spectacle and the sheer magnitude of the undertaking. These expansive qualities pertain to the epic film texts themselves and to the hyperbolic publicity surrounding them. In her essay "Surge and Splendor", Vivian Sobchack develops a nuanced analysis of this type of cinematic experience. She argues that the Hollywood epic offers the spectator a culturally and historically specific experience of "temporal excess". Given that the classical Hollywood epic mode was consolidated within American consumer society of the 1950s, this sense of "temporal excess tends to be encoded as empirically verifiable and material excess - entailing scale, quantification, and consumption in relation to money and human labor". One of the main functions of publicity around Hollywood epics is to verify and reiterate the scale of this excess.

In classical Hollywood film epics, spectators are presented with emphatically spectacular generic pleasures. These include impressively staged battles, crowd scenes, lavish costumes, the reconstruction and destruction of ancient monuments, and so on. In this way, "the historical is not merely verified but also constituted through the visible". Sobchack's analysis does not necessarily contradict Solanas and Getino's ideological critique of the conventional film epic. Yet, rather than advocate analytical forms of historical representation which encourage a commitment to participation instead of spectatorship, she tries to capture the sometimes awesome cinematic experience of being caught up in, and even overwhelmed by, a History which is "subjectively transcendent and objectively significant". Spectacular literalism, symphonic music and an overwhelming sense of magnitude are also abundantly evident in Hollywood religious epics such as The Ten Commandments. In this type of film epic there is, as Babington and Evans put it, an "insistence on monumentality, externality, the kinetic, and technology as the vehicle of the miraculous".

L'Émigré contains a number of spectacular moments, but these work somewhat differently from the way in which they typically function in the Hollywood epic mode. The divine never manifests itself in as literal a fashion as in The Ten Commandments. However, it is not the case that L'Émigré denies the importance of religious belief. Ram steadfastly professes faith in "the one God" throughout the film, and he is occasionally represented praying. Importantly, neither gesture is sufficient entirely to identify him with, or alienate him from, Judaism, Christianity or Islam. When Hati's mother dies, Ram consoles her. He reassures Hati that her mother's soul will return to God, despite the fact that Hati's family cannot afford to pay to have her body mumified. Ram asks Hati to close her eyes, imagine her mother singing, and not look at her body as it is carried out of the house. Rather than literalist spectacle, L'Émigré posits interior vision as the vehicle of religious belief. The spectator can choose whether or not to share this vision. Similarly, after three months of working the land in the arid border zone, Ram despairs of ever finding water, and goes out alone into the desert to pray. Shortly afterwards, it rains and Ram, Ozir and the others who have been working this land celebrate this perfectly natural but fortuitously timed event.

Epic films produced within Third World contexts are sometimes criticised for, perhaps inevitably, falling to be as massively spectacular as their Hollywood counterparts. Despite the considerable resources invested in it, this criticism has been levelled at Saladin, and Chahine has spoken in interviews about how not having the human and technological resources available to De Mille forced him to improvise new solutions. Perhaps for non-Hollywood filmmakers, competing with Hollywood in terms of sheer magnitude and capital expended on spectacle is inappropriate, as are critical assessments which accept Hollywood standards as an unquestioned norm. Michael Wood has argued that, on one level, Hollywood religious and historical epics are
always about "Hollywood's capacity to duplicate old splendors, to bring Egypt and Rome to the screen".\(^{54}\) For him, spectacle within these epics, and spectacles of destruction in particular, constitute "a ritual expression of a lack of need".\(^{55}\) This correlates to the "planned prodigality", the "spectacular waste" of American life, and implicitly expresses faith in American productivity and global economic supremacy.\(^{56}\) This argument helps to illuminate what is distinctive about \(L'\text{\'Emig\'r\textregistered}\)'s more modest use of spectacle. Chahine's film does not stage massive destructive spectacles which, in the context of consumer society, celebrate waste and "lack of need". \(L'\text{\'Emig\'r\textregistered}\) carries, with its central focus on subsistence and agricultural production, validates what could be described as constructive spectacle.

What moments of spectacle and spectacular action there are in \(L'\text{\'Emig\'r\textregistered}\) are caused by, or associated with, ordinary people. There are two instances of destructive spectacle in the film, but they are relatively modest ones. They are closely linked to the key point of political crisis within the narrative rather than primarily, perhaps "wastefully", being there to display production resources and overwhelm the spectator with History. The first occurs when a crowd of rebels surge out from the background of a long shot, and surround and tie up four priests of Amon who are proceeding along the famous Avenue of Sphinxes in Thebes. The crowd then attach ropes to pharaoh Amenophis' statue and topple it in a slow-motion shot. With its rapid editing, frenetic crowd movements with people running in opposing directions, and alternation between long shots of the crowd and closer shots of individuals within it, this sequence is strongly reminiscent of Sergei Eisenstein's 1920s work. Specifically, it recalls the opening sequence of \textit{Oktubre'} (October, 1928), in which a statue of Tsar Alexander III is toppled by a crowd with ropes. As Dave Kehr notes, Chahine is adept at quoting other films and cinematic styles, but rather than doing this in a "bluntly derivative" way, he "actively reimagines his sources, using their spirit and sense to solve problems".\(^{57}\)

The October quotation links \(L'\text{\'Emig\'r\textregistered}\) to an alternative, radical tradition of cinematic historical epic representation. The sequence which immediately follows the toppling statue represents Amenophis and his retinue, dwarfed by the fallen monument. This evokes similar shots in another classic film, this time an Egyptian one, \textit{Al-Mumia} (The Mummy/The Night of Counting the Years, Shadi Abdel Salam, 1969).\(^{58}\) Both \(L'\text{\'Emig\'r\textregistered}\) and \textit{The Night of Counting the Years} explore and question the relevance of spectacular ancient Egyptian monumentality for ordinary Egyptians. Amenophis's response to this direct assault on the symbolism of his regime's power by ordering the burning of the rebel supporters of Aton's fields. Fires light up the darkness in a long shot which provides the second moment of destructive spectacle in \(L'\text{\'Emig\'r\textregistered}\). Given the centrality of agriculture and food production within the film, this spectacle of destruction is little short of obscene, justifying Amenophis' removal from power.

In general, \(L'\text{\'Emig\'r\textregistered}\) is an upbeat film, full of light, colour and energy. Its brightest moments of constructive spectacle celebrate ordinary achievements in agriculture. Ram discovers a freshwater waterfall in the arid border region where he and his companions are trying to cultivate the land. He runs to tell the others, and together they use this to irrigate their crops. After this has been accomplished, Ram and Hati sit at the top of the waterfall. Hati asks Ram to marry her and he agrees. They cavort in the water, and, when Hati slides over the edge, Ram follows her in a slow-motion dive which accentuates his graceful vigour. The two are filmed with water running sensuously over their bodies, Ram's in particular, and long shots bring out the waterfall's size and beauty. For the characters, it is one of the happiest moments in the narrative, and for the spectator one of the most visually appealing. It is a constructive, ecological spectacle which counters the destruction represented elsewhere in the narrative. Near to the end of the film, a similar moment occurs when Ram pours some of the grain he has stored over Berri, Hati's brother, covering him up to his neck. Delight and relief light up the faces of a crowd of onlookers who had previously feared famine.

The waterfall sequence in \(L'\text{\'Emig\'r\textregistered}\) celebrates the leisure and personal fulfilment which can, and should, be enjoyed after economic productivity has been achieved. It is far removed from the spectacles of consumerist "waste" in Hollywood films.
identified by Wood. One of a number of connotations generated by this pleasant spectacle in *L'Emigre* is that the poor, by virtue of their struggle for subsistence, are closer to the sources of life than the elite, and should be celebrated for this reason. The waterfall that Ram and Hati play in contrasts with the pool and fountain in Simihit's carefully ordered ornamental garden into which Ram also jumps twice within the narrative. Even if the waterfall sequence romanticises the poor and their labour, a tendency Chahine has admitted as being a weakness in some of his earlier work, it is certainly a distinctive use of spectacle within an epic format.59

Many commentators have noted the importance of water, rivers and the Nile as visual motifs throughout Chahine's films. They signify life, movement, change and eroticism. Particularly as perceived by an artist who was shaped by the 1930s and 1940s cosmopolitan port culture of Alexandria, they are also an opening onto a wider world. Within the context of Chahine's œuvre, it is therefore not surprising that the life-affirming, border-crossing Ram is repeatedly immersed in water. Within the context of Chahine's œuvre, it is also significant that *L'Emigre's* most impressive spectacle of construction actually reverses all the elements of a famous sequence in Chahine's much earlier and much bleaker contemporary drama from the 1950s, *Cairo Station.*

In *Cairo Station,* an impoverished, crippled newspaper vendor, Kinawi (played by Chahine), is obsessed with the vivacious Hannouma/Hind Rustum, who sells soft drinks around the station. He proposes marriage to her in the plaza outside, in front of flowing water coming from some large fountains backed by a statue of the pharaoh Ramses. Hannouma flirts and jokes with him but turns him down. During their conversation, she glances querulously at his puny figure, dwarfed by the giant Ramses statue in the background. Rejection deepens Kinawi's obsession and eventually leads to murder. He fails to connect with any of the possibilities that the water behind him in this sequence represents and remains throughout the film dwarfed by the oppressive legacy of ancient Egypt. In *Cairo Station,* this symbol of established power is never challenged, and the needs of the people are not addressed. As an ordinary, poor Egyptian, Kinawi is unable to achieve anything which can supersede this signifier of the country's past glory and, within the context of the film, his present insignificance. In *L'Emigre,* Ram is quite different. He succeeds in every area Kinawi fails in.

**Egyptian modernity and its discontents**

In his book, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (1996), Walter Armbrust develops a novel analysis of Egyptian film history. Armbrust relates the films to a conception of Egyptian modernity which he sees as dominating Egyptian culture in the period prior to the 1970s.60 According to Armbrust, this conception of Egyptian modernity supplied the central ideological assumptions underlying both entertainment films and critically acclaimed realist films. Thus, in different ways, *al-Wanda al-Bayda* (*The White Rose,* Muhammad Karim, 1933), the first successful Egyptian musical, and *al-Azima* (*Resolution,* Kamal Salim, 1939), celebrated as an early realist film, both adhere to it. This conception of Egyptian modernity was understood in general terms as a delicate balance between selected elements of "turath," the indigenously Egyptian heritage, and certain beneficial Western cultural and technological influences. The social cement holding this together, at least in theory, was various forms of alliance between the enlightened, reformist Egyptian middle-class and "ibn al-balad." "Ibn al-balad" is a phrase with a complex range of connotations, but in this context it broadly refers to the ordinary, uneducated, basically decent "common man" located in the poorer urban quarters.

One of the reasons why *Resolution* is celebrated, therefore, is because it is an aesthetically sophisticated film which condenses the dominant Egyptian ideology of modernity within its protagonist, Muhammad/Hussein Sedki. Coming from a "baladi" background, he rises through hard, honest work to middle-class status without ever disparaging his roots. Chahine's films, on the other hand, have often contained sexual or political representations considered risqué or controversial within Egyptian culture. His work sometimes bucks prevailing trends within Egyptian culture. *Cairo Station,* released in 1958, is a case in
point. Saladin could be seen as generally conformist within the context of Nasser's regime, but the initially unpopular Cairo Station goes against the grain of the general tendencies within pre-1970s Egyptian cinema identified by Armbrust.

Cairo Station is a tour de force, shot entirely in the immediate environment of the location to which its title refers. It focuses upon people who scrape a living within this space: newspaper vendors, porters, soft drink sellers. Some work illegally, and all of them, especially the protagonist Kinawi/Chahine, have very little chance of becoming socially mobile. Kinawi's limp becomes a graphic metaphor for how restricted his life is in every respect. As Guy Gauthier suggests, Cairo Station establishes a basic opposition based around movement. Kinawi and the immobile community of casual workers in the station are effectively trapped within this space. They are surrounded by the ceaseless movement of the many social types who pass through it: Americanised Egyptian youth dancing to pop songs; pious religious men; peasants carrying produce; middle-class people boarding first-class carriages. There is a lack of connection between these groups in the film - they all travel in different directions.

In Cairo Station, Kinawi has come up to Cairo from the countryside and got stuck there; he can neither move on nor return. In a film such as Resolution, he might, with education and a concerted effort at self-improvement, eventually combine the best elements of "turath" and middle-class aspiration. This is not an option in Cairo Station. A brief sequence in Chahine's film which epitomises its overall representation of social disconnection is when some middle-class reformers begin to lecture on a station platform about the appalling condition of rural women. A rural woman carrying a basket on her head walks straight past them, oblivious to what is being said. The reformers are more concerned with being photographed for the cover of a magazine. Hannouma, the woman with whom Kinawi is obsessed, is only interested in evading the police whilst illegally selling soft drinks to the crowd listening to them on the platform. This sequence is typical of the way in which Chahine's films include multiple narrative threads, and often provide the spectator with tangential and potentially critical perspectives. In this case, what is put into question is the social and cultural cohesion which Egyptian modernist ideology prior to the 1970s promoted.

Cairo Station could be seen as being ahead of its time. It anticipates what Armbrust suggests is a common structure of feeling in more recent Egyptian films. He argues that, in the wake of the devastating 1967 defeat in the war against Israel, and President Sadat's socially divisive 1970s "infitah" free-market policies, the older conception of modernity is seriously undermined. Films such as Subimarkit (Supermarket, Muhammad Khan, 1990), for example, testify to its exhaustion. Supermarket features an impoverished (because scrupulously honest) middle-class hero Ramzi/Mamdouh Abdel Alim. He has, like many typical pre-1970s protagonists, absorbed the valuable, and distanced himself from the damaging, elements in Western culture. He has balanced this with what is best within his Egyptian heritage. He combines a love of Western classical and good Arabic music. Yet, he is surrounded and frustrated by other characters who have embraced the spirit of "infitah" wholeheartedly, and who have grown rich enough to drive a Mercedes and eat fresh Californian oranges. In Supermarket, the old ideology of Egyptian modernity is no longer effective. Its constituent parts no longer hold together. Ramzi's modest aspirations are stifled by a corrupt, thoroughly commodified urban landscape which offers no potential for social integration. As Armbrust puts it, "what is missing [from the more recent Egyptian films] is the element of progress, the synthesizing of various traditions to form a new identity".

UEmigre is similar to Cairo Station in that it bucks the predominant trend within its post-1970s historical context. It does not share the sense of ideological exhaustion which Armbrust detects as an underlying element of many contemporary Egyptian films. As discussed earlier, neither is it profoundly backward-looking, as is Nasser 56. L'Émigré does not attempt simply to reconstitute the older, pre-1970s conception of Egyptian modernity. In interviews, Chahine has stressed how much he wanted L'Émigré to appeal to younger people in Egypt and elsewhere within the Arab world, people whose identities
and attitudes would have been formed primarily within post-1970s culture. Describing one screening, he says: "It was magnificent to see this cinema full of young people usually very blasé at the end of a film, even blasé about violence, applauding. L'Emigré doesn't contain violence, nor unbridled sexuality, but eroticism and morality and the search for the future." In the same interview, Chahine also drew encouragement from L'Emigré's success with youthful audiences in countries such as Lebanon and Tunisia, which are also undergoing their own specific crises in relation to older notions of progress and modernity.

L'Emigré differs from, and enters into dialogue with, other ways forward into the future which also appeal particularly to the young by proposing alternatives to the older, discredited conception of Egyptian modernity. Pertinent to L'Emigré is Salwa Ismail's analysis of contemporary radical Egyptian Islamist discourse's opposition to the state. Ismail argues that this discourse is orientated towards a "conception of space... antithetical to modern notions of 'nation' and 'society', for it seeks to establish 'dar al-Islam' (land of Islam) which does not recognize cultural or geographic boundaries". One is either located completely and exclusively within this new territory, or is completely and utterly excluded from it. Ismail distinguishes between Egyptian radical and conservative Islamist discourse. The latter is less directly confrontational towards the state, and its most significant marking of spatial boundaries is in terms of resistance against "cultural invasion". The invading "opponent is designated as either the Christian West or the West (secular)." In general, Egyptian Islamist discourses minimise economic factors. L'Emigré does not explicitly or directly challenge the West as an imperialist force or as a fount of cultural corruption. The film's refusal to privilege clearly bounded, exclusive categories such as the Egyptian nation or "dar al-Islam" precludes any such totalising critique. This is one of the reasons why some of Chahine's films, such as L'Emigré and Adieu Bonaparte, have attracted criticism within Egypt from both Islamist and orthodox Leftists.

What L'Emigré does insist upon, however, through its conclusion of Ram and the Egyptians working together to beat the famine, is regional self-sufficiency and cooperation over basic economic issues. Economics is a primary motive factor in L'Emigré. This contrasts with Egyptian Islamist discourses which obscure economics, and also downplay the relationship between classes which was so central to the pre-1970s conception of Egyptian modernity. Class is also important in L'Emigré, although, despite its nod to October, it is not a revolutionary film in any traditional sense. The incipient social and political crisis is averted not by a complete overthrow of the ancient Egyptian regime, but by a radical change of policy. Nevertheless, L'Emigré moves beyond the notion of class alliance within the older conception of Egyptian modernity. It represents relationships and Christians coexisting. In L'Emigré, different cultures and traditions are thoroughly and inextricably implicated with each other. L'Emigré's narrative represents the ancient Egyptians, as well as Ram's tribe, being positively transformed through their cultural encounter, with Ram as the medium of this transformation. Chahine repeatedly reminded interviewers that the film's narrative was based upon a story common to the three major religious traditions which contemporary Egyptian Islamist discourses seek categorically to divide and set against each other.

Ismail argues that Egyptian conservative Islamist discourse, with its emphasis on a spiritually and morally corrupting "cultural invasion" from the West, reconfigures the older Egyptian nationalist discourse's construction of "the image of the West as an imperialist force in opposition to the Third World, wherein the struggle is conceived as primarily a political and economic one". In general, Egyptian Islamist discourses minimise economic factors. L'Emigré does not explicitly or directly challenge the West as an imperialist force or as a fount of cultural corruption. The film's refusal to privilege clearly bounded, exclusive categories such as the Egyptian nation or "dar al-Islam" precludes any such totalising critique. This is one of the reasons why some of Chahine's films, such as L'Emigré and Adieu Bonaparte, have attracted criticism within Egypt from both Islamists and orthodox Leftists.
between classes not as inevitably converging, but as prone to volatility, the causes of which need to be addressed. Social conflict within Egypt, L'Émigre implies, needs to be thought through at the same time as relationships between Egypt and other nations beyond its borders are reconsidered. L'Émigre can be read on one level as a multilayered allegory about issues relevant to contemporary Egypt, the Middle East and the world beyond this region.

Allegories of 1990s Egypt and the Middle East

It can be argued that L'Émigre has allegorical dimensions, but the film cannot be reduced to nothing but allegory. One less often remarked point about Fredric Jameson's much-debated proposition that "all third-world texts are necessarily...to be read as...national allegories" is that it presumes this is the way in which they are read within Third World contexts. Jameson proposes this argument in order to correct First World misreadings of Third World texts which miss crucial allegorical dimensions; however, by saying nothing about reception in Third World contexts, he seems to assume that they will be transparent in those contexts. This is debatable, because even if a text's allegorical dimensions are more likely to be registered in some contexts rather than others, there is no guarantee that this will be the case. If, as Jameson states, texts utilise "the 'floating' or transferable structure of allegorical reference...to generate a range of distinct meanings or messages, simultaneously", it is unlikely that all readers or spectators will consciously catch all these meanings. Allegorical interpretation is a complex process: the same element within a film can signify a variety of different things, depending on which allegorical parallel is drawn. Some meanings or messages are more emphatic than others, some may be absorbed unconsciously, and some may require more conscious reflection. To complicate things further, allegorical interpretation can also outrun authorial intention.

L'Émigre begins with a title card proclaiming that Ram is "like Joseph". The primary parallel upon which the text insists is between L'Émigre's narrative and the story of Joseph. It urges the spectator to view the film as a version of this story in all but name. This was evident enough in Egypt for the initial banning of L'Émigre to be justified with reference to a 1983 religious decree prohibiting the representation of Islamic prophets, of which Joseph is one. On this level alone, L'Émigre's particular version of the Joseph narrative is a significant intervention into 1990s Egyptian culture, even before any more precisely delineated allegorical dimensions are defined. L'Émigre is a respectful yet controversial adaptation of a religious narrative which can be interpreted, by Egyptian or non-Egyptian spectators, as an allegory referring to contemporary Egypt and the Middle East. However, this partly depends upon whether they possess the contextual knowledge and the inclination to do so.

Aijaz Ahmad's response to Jameson's Third World "national allegory" theory develops several criticisms of his argument. One is that it reductively privileges "the nation" as the only framework through which acknowledgment of, and resistance to, the pervasive experience of colonialism and imperialism can be articulated. For Jameson, all Third World allegory ultimately refers to this fundamental opposition. Ahmad argues that this homogenises the diversity of Third World cultural production and ignores significant internal differentiations within these various contexts. In relating these debates to film, Shohat and Stam distance themselves from Jameson's generalisations, but suggest that "the allegorical tendency available to all art becomes exaggerated in the case of repressive regimes, perhaps, especially where intellectual filmmakers, profoundly shaped by nationalist discourse, feel obliged to speak for and about the nation as a whole".

If, in Chahine's case, one specifies "authoritarian regime locked into a cycle of opposition to and accommodation with Islamist opposition", Shohat and Stam's argument is certainly relevant to L'Émigre and Destiny. Some of Chahine's previous work, such as Saladin, was certainly "shaped by nationalist discourse", and the fact that he is the best-known Egyptian filmmaker outside Egypt places him in a position where he might be expected "to speak for and about the nation as a whole". At the same time, this position has also opened up space for the
development of an auteurist, semi-autobiographical discourse. Also relevant is the fact that Egypt historically has been the crucible of much Pan-Arabist discourse, the implications of which stretch beyond Egypt itself, and that Chahine has always emphasised his cosmopolitan Alexandrian background. All these factors are mobilised in films such as Alexandria Again and Forever as a distinctive contribution to the larger shift which Shohat and Stam detect in many Third World films of the 1980s and 1990s. A significant number of films in this period, they argue, "do not so much reject the 'nation' as interrogate its repressions and limits". This interrogation in L'Emigré sometimes extends beyond the boundaries of the nation altogether.

L'Emigré was, like many other epics, chided by some critics for its historical inaccuracies, but arguably these allow the film to extend its allegorical reach. One way of allegorically decoding L'Emigré would be to equate the Amon cult with the institutionalised aspects of conservative Islam endorsed by the contemporary Egyptian state, and the Aton cult with that part of the spectrum of politicised Islam which espouses active opposition. This framework leaves Ram and his father Adam as the only characters within L'Emigré who adhere to a monotheism that correlates to contemporary Judaism, Christianity or Islam. Within L'Emigré, the Amon and Aton cults are represented as the ideologies of opposing political blocs, rather than as signifiers of profound religious conviction. Ram is the only character to articulate his belief in "the one God" when arguing with Amihar about aspects of the Amon cult. This simple expression of personal belief is conveyed using a phrase which would be particularly resonant within a predominantly Islamic culture. Amon and Aton are, by contrast, negatively marked in L'Emigré through their association with formal ritual and pagan sun symbols. In his debate with Amihar and Simihit, however, Ram is careful to make clear his basic respect for other people's beliefs.

Ram's monotheism, although inflected at this point in the narrative by a proto-Islamic emphasis on the absolute oneness of God, is, in general, non-specific and definitely non-repressive. The manner in which Ram's religious conviction is expressed in L'Emigré parallels an understanding of contemporary Egyptian culture in which different religious traditions coexist within a broadly conceived Islamic culture, and are not in conflict with each other. In his essay, "The Other Arab Muslims", published the year before L'Emigré was released, Edward Said offers a description of contemporary Egyptian culture which conforms to Ram's attitude. He describes an Egypt where "Islam of course is a religion, but it is also a culture; the Arabic language is the same for Muslims as it is for Christians, both of whom, believers and non-believers alike, are deeply affected - perhaps the better word is inflected - by the Koran, which is also in Arabic". This is the ideal version of contemporary Egyptian culture which L'Emigré allegorises.

Other allegorical parallels include the fundamental issue of Egyptian and regional self-sufficiency in agricultural production. Egypt was agriculturally self-sufficient in the early 1970s; in the 1990s, the economy had altered to the point where approximately half of the nation's food had to be imported. Effective irrigation and efficient use of the limited amount of arable land available in a country whose land mass is largely desert remain key government policy areas. Said characterises the contemporary situation in Egypt in experiential terms. He estimates that "perhaps 58 million out of 60 million people...wake up each day worried about how they are going to get...enough food for themselves and their children". Water remains a precious commodity in Egypt and the Middle East, and so L'Emigré links this constant motif within Chahine's films to a vital contemporary issue. In this respect, L'Emigré resembles Chahine's earlier Egyptian-Soviet co-production al-Nass wa al-Nil (People and the Nile, 1968), about the construction of the Aswan High Dam, which also features a spectacular scene of sensual celebration in water.

What is new and provocative in L'Emigré is the location of the freshwater waterfall and the land it irrigates in an arid border zone. The water irrigates the fields and enables crops to be grown which eventually feed both the Egyptians and Ram's tribe. Translated into contemporary terms, the arid border zone, although not precisely located within the film, could well be on
the Egyptian border with Israel. Borders are referred to again later in the film when one objection to Ram’s plan of diverting the army into agriculture is that it would leave Egypt’s borders open. Allegorically, these aspects of L’Emigre could be interpreted as hinting at possible mutual benefits of cooperating, sharing expertise, and pooling certain resources with Egypt’s neighbour, Israel. Cross-border cooperation is represented as an alternative to investing primarily in national security and readiness for military confrontation. Ozir the Egyptian’s last words to Ram the foreigner, after their first crop and just before he leaves the border zone to return to Thebes, are “we did it together”.

Debates around this aspect of L’Emigre demonstrate how allegory can open a Pandora’s box of contesting interpretations, especially when it touches upon acutely sensitive issues. Some Egyptian commentators felt the allegorical implications they detected in L’Emigre’s border-crossing were politically problematic. One review, crassly entitled “The Adventurous Immigrant Succeeds in Making the Impotent Egyptians Accept Normalisation”, accused the film of being a Zionist tract.\(^\text{74}\) Sayed Said’s more even-handed response was:

> Whether we agree or not with Youssef Chahine’s ideas, we must salute his courageous decision to put the problem of relations with the other at the forefront of his two films Adieu Bonaparte and L’Emigre [but]...He forgets it is almost impossible to establish a dialogue between two parties of whom one carries guns and the other is unarmed.\(^\text{75}\)

Ibrahim Fawal, on the other hand, has pointed out that such interpretations are incompatible with Chahine’s publicly stated political views. Along with other leading Egyptians, Chahine was a signatory to a manifesto opposing normalisation with Israel until legitimate Palestinian aspirations for territory and statehood are met.\(^\text{76}\) He has been a consistent critic of the Israeli state’s oppression of Palestinians and tacit American support for this.\(^\text{77}\) Fawal attempted to close the Pandora’s box opened up by L’Emigre’s allegorical resonance in relation to contemporary Egyptian-Israeli relations by redirecting the film’s potential meanings back towards its author: “Those familiar with Chahine’s films and politics would know that Chahine – speaking as citizen of the world, if you will – is casting a wider net: the open borders he advocates are among all nations, and not just between Egypt and Israel”.\(^\text{78}\)

Where L’Emigre does allegorically confront issues directly relevant to the balance of power is in its representation of Amihar and the Army’s role within the unrest in ancient/modern Egypt. Amihar’s equivalent in the Twelfth Surah and Genesis: 37-50 is a relatively minor figure, but in L’Emigre he is an important nodal point within the narrative, someone whose actions are partly dictated by the larger alignment of political forces. If Ram provides a focus for many of L’Emigre’s most utopian elements, Amihar represents political pragmatism and responsiveness to shifts in existing power relationships. His troops are initially deployed against the supporters of Aton, but later he removes Amenophis from power after the pharaoh has rashly ordered the fields of Aton’s supporters to be burned. This prevents social unrest and famine from intensifying, and the redirection of the army into agriculture towards the end of the narrative begins to address some of the fundamental issues underlying these problems.

Before this task is completed, however, the new and, in Ram’s view, less fundamental priority of building a city to Aton takes precedence. Rather than glorify Amihar or the Army, L’Emigre simply registers the pivotal role that the military and its commanders play, for better worse, in times of crisis in ancient/modern Egypt. In “The Other Arab Muslims”, Said recounts Egyptian commentator Mahmoud Amin el Amin’s analysis of the balance of power in 1990s Egypt: “the [Army, government and Islamic opposition] are now in an ambiguous and equivocal relationship with each other. Both the government and the Islamics have extensions into the army...it now depends on who has penetrated the army more”.\(^\text{79}\) As Chahine has stated, L’Emigre is primarily an optimistic film about “the search for the future”, but it can also be read as an allegorical confirmation of this very level-headed assessment of the present.
Gender and sexuality

It has often been noted that Chahine's films are full of desire, whether categorised as gay, straight, bisexual or queer. They explore novel and, in relation to both Egyptian and non-Egyptian cinema, distinctive ways of representing desire. Often, as in Kinawi's marriage proposal to Hannouma in Cairo Station, the joyful dive of an Egyptian and Soviet engineer into the life-giving river in People and the Nile, and Ram and Hati's celebration in the waterfall in L'Émigré, this is linked to the water motif flowing throughout Chahine's films. The latter film lives up to Chahine's claim that it embodies not "unbridled sexuality, but eroticism and morality". Ram/Khaled Nabaoui and Simihit/Yousra are the twin focal points for the camera's most admiring gazes in L'Émigré. The film repeats the dual focus on Amr/Amro Abdel Guelil and Nadia/Yousra as recipients of Yahia/Chahine's and the camera's desiring gaze in Alexandria Again and Forever. Because it is more of a conventional narrative feature than its self-reflexive, semi-autobiographical predecessor, L'Émigré also delegates desire and desiring point-of-view shots to certain protagonists. The precise way in which these are distributed follows some interesting patterns.

Simihit is defined as a desiring subject from her first appearance within L'Émigré's narrative. She walks into the foreground of a long shot of Ram and Amihar discussing the Amon cult. Ram initially has his back turned to her. He turns, continues talking, and a series of tight close-ups of Simihit/Yousra's face, with light flickering across it, alternate with close shots of Ram's right hand, neck and legs. Slow, gliding camera movements caress Ram's body, and eye movements and slight tilts of Simihit's head in her close-ups make this an intensely subjective point-of-view structure. Simihit says nothing, whilst non-diegetic music on the soundtrack gradually overtakes Ram and Amihar's dialogue in volume. Towards the end of L'Émigré, Simihit's last public act is her proudly defiant declaration of desire for Ram. Surrounded by an audience, none of whom opposes or criticises her, she states: "I offered myself to him and I don't regret it. And he refused."

Egyptian cinema has a long tradition of idealising romantic love and representing marriages where the partners, rather than their families, choose each other. However, cultural climates are always in flux, and Simihit's public statement of unrepentant desire, which no one in her diegetic audience contradicts, is an audacious one within a 1990s context. Its boldness can only be comprehended by situating it in relation to a new trend amongst certain Egyptian film, stage and television stars. Recently, some female stars have added a radical dimension to their images by going public about taking the veil and leaving the film or television industry altogether. Female star images have become a battleground where different ideas about the role and representation of women are contested, and Yousra herself became the subject of a court case for alleged "public indecency" just over a year after L'Émigré's release.

In narrative terms, Hati is just as active and assertive as Simihit within L'Émigré. She helps to clinch the deal which secures Ram as one of Amihar's slaves, and therefore makes him part of the household in which she works. She tells Ram quite unambiguously "I choose you"; she follows him and Ozir to the arid border zone; and she is the one who asks Ram if he will marry her when they cavort in the waterfall. Unlike Simihit/Yousra, however, Hati is not situated within elaborate point-of-view structures. Yousra is the star whose name comes first in the opening credits, and stylistically it is the relationship between Simihit and Ram which receives most attention. Their relationship, between a younger man and an older woman, recalls that between Okka/Mohsen Mohieddin and Saddika/Dalida in Chahine's The Sixth Day. Yet, in L'Émigré, unlike this earlier film, it is the woman who is most active in pursuing her love object.

The sexual encounter, which Simihit later publicly declares, begins at the height of the conflict between Amon's and Aton's adherents. Fires are raging in the streets. They are also raging internally because, from these, there is a cut to another extreme close-up of Simihit's eyes, with firelight flickering across her face. She goes to meet Ram and they embrace, with just the edges of their faces and bodies illuminated in the semi-darkness. Ram breaks away, telling Simihit as he leaves: "there's nothing wrong
with needing someone". Despite his feelings, the sophisticated, elaborate world of religious ritual and court politics to which Simihit belongs is not the basic agricultural one Ram needs to be in. He must bear the burden which Babington and Evans suggest is typically imposed upon male protagonists in religious epics. As far as Simihit is concerned, Ram must achieve the "self-sacrifice and the victory of the spirit over sexual temptation [which] marks civilisation's heroes of sublimation".

What this implies is that women in L'Emigre can act more freely upon their personal desires because, as narrative agents, they are less clearly tied to the civilisational projects in which the men are engaged. The sequence introducing Simihit underlines her primary motivations as sexual frustration and desire. Although she is High Priestess of Amon, the point-of-view structure which constructs her subjectivity and desire in relation to Ram literally drowns out the theological debate between him and Amihar. In the sequence following this one, Simihit, after a chaste goodnight kiss from her husband Amihar, retires to her bedchamber. She throws off her cloak and jewelry, and slips into a dream or fantasy sequence, signalled by an abrupt change of lighting to diffuse, pallid blue. Simihit angrily accuses a statue of Amon of being god of nothing but drought and death. She grabs a sword, slashes at the statue's groin, and blood spurts out. Given that Amihar is a eunuch, the sexual connotations are abundantly clear. Simihit's desire is later reiterated in her fantasy dance sequence with Ram. Similarly, Hati's agency and subjectivity within the narrative are defined primarily in terms of her dogged pursuit of Ram. For women in L'Emigre, subjectivity and sexuality are more clearly marked, but also more detached from historical and collective processes than for the men.

Men in L'Emigre are, of course, also motivated by desire, but it tends to be less overt. Ram's goal is agriculture and his role is to demonstrate the civilisational benefits of border-crossing. He and Hati are together at the end of the film, but this is not a key component in the resolution of the narrative. She barely appears in the final shots. Amihar is more interesting in his relation to sexuality and desire. An important public figure, his sexuality and frustrations around it provide a subterranean drama within L'Emigre. His sardonic but admiring smile is a constant in most of his interactions with Ram. Prior to the shots where Simihit first looks intensely at Ram's body, Amihar walks in long shot to a position just behind her. His point of view is thus more or less identical to hers. Later, after Amihar has quizzed Ram about whether or not he and Simihit have slept together, he stands alone in the same room where this gazing at Ram's body occurred. Amihar draws a sword as if to run in anger to attack Ram, stops, practises some swordplay, then throws the sword in the direction of the statue dominating the room. All this mirrors the dream or fantasy sequence where Simihit accuses Amon, and signifies Amihar's frustration at his exclusion from the scene of any kind of desire. In Amihar's case, however, this is a subtle and fleeting moment. In the next sequence, where he arrests Amenophis, sublimation is achieved through decisive action in the public sphere.

Although they do not move as fluidly between personal and collective or historically significant action as Amihar and Ram do, Simihit and Hati occupy significant places within L'Emigre's allegorical structure. Shohat and Stam argue that, in many Third World films, as in many other cinemas, "often women [are] made to carry the 'burden' of national allegory". Women's agency within these film narratives may be relatively restricted, or limited to secondary spheres of action, but they can still symbolise deep or core national values. If this is the case in L'Emigre, it operates in an unusual way which, as with the film's other allegorical aspects, exceeds or complicates national boundaries.

Arguably, Simihit provides an element of continuity and stability for Egypt in L'Emigre. As High Priestess, she is central to the Amon cult and later, as it becomes the dominant one, to Aton's. Simihit bridges the transition between two regimes by remaining the symbolic guardian of what are defined as the most important values within Egyptian society. Yet, as she reveals to Ram, she is a foreigner, from an unnamed land conquered by Amihar's armies. Yousra, who plays Simihit, is also regarded within Egypt as one of its cinema's most "Westernised" stars. The element of continuity and stability within Egyptian society in L'Emigre therefore is allegorised by a woman who embodies
syncretic cultural processes. Hati, on the other hand, seems better placed to allegorise deep-rooted Egyptian values. She is earthy, wears plain, simple clothes, speaks her mind, and is, in many respects, the model of a young Egyptian peasant woman. Nevertheless, she is the one who leaves with Ram to go to Tonay and thereby continues the never ending criss-crossing of borders and mixing of cultures.

L’Émigre and the end and beginning of cinema

This short book has been written in the hope that L’Émigre might eventually find a wider audience in English-speaking contexts. In conclusion, therefore, some brief speculative thoughts linking the film to concerns extending beyond Egypt and the Middle East are in order. Outside Egypt, French film culture has been most receptive to Chahine’s recent work. Shortly after the release of Adieu Bonaparte, the journal CinémAction devoted an entire issue to Chahine. The co-production support which exists in France to encourage auteur cinema has been crucial to the success of Chahine’s Misr International Films. Cahiers du Cinéma covered L’Émigre and its banning in depth, and the film was screened on French Television. Interestingly, Cahiers du Cinéma’s coverage linked together L’Émigre, Chahine’s self-reflexive short Cairo... As Told by Youssef Chahine, and JLG/JLG - Autoportrait de Decembre (JLG/JLG - Self-Portrait in December, Jean-Luc Godard, 1994) as “three films which encompass the cinema.” For contemporary Cahiers du Cinéma’s critics, Chahine’s auteur status is not in doubt, and is sustained by the regular interviews he gives them. Casting Michel Piccoli in Adieu Bonaparte and L’Émigre has also helped to secure distribution in France and expand Chahine’s French cinéphile audience.

Piccoli has a small but pivotal cameo role in L’Émigre as Adam, Ram’s father. He is the only character totally in sympathy with Ram from the beginning to the end of the film. He becomes an iconic point of reference in L’Émigre. Several times during the narrative, Ram visualises the same image of Adam waiting for him in the far background of a long shot. This repeated shot serves as a motif which summarises a major theme and relationship in the film. The narrative concludes with Adam and Ram’s reunion; the final shot is of them embracing. L’Émigre suggests that progress and change need not necessarily involve generational conflicts. Some Cahiers du Cinéma’s critics suggested parallels between Ram, based upon Joseph, and Chahine himself, commonly known as Jo. If this classically auteurist line of reasoning is pursued, however, it might be more accurate to suggest that the centre of value within L’Émigre is constituted by the relationship between Adam and Ram; between a wise and experienced father, played by a veteran actor about the same age as Chahine, and his dynamic, forward-looking son.

Piccoli as Adam also brings other connotations to the role. Specifically, in the 1980s and 1990s he became strongly identified with a group of reflexive French auteur films which meditate on the status and possible "end" of cinema in a digital, post-television, postmodern age. Piccoli has played memorable roles in Godard’s Passion (1982), Jacques Rivette’s La Belle noiseuse (1991), Agnès Varda’s Les Cent et une nuits (101 Nights, 1995) and Godard’s Deux fois cinquante ans de cinéma français (Two Times Fifty Years of French Cinema, 1995). For a spectator familiar with French intellectual cinéphile culture, the casting of Piccoli in Chahine’s L’Émigre could be seen as offering an indirect contribution to this debate. Piccoli/Adam in L’Émigre, the last man of French cinema, becomes the first man of a different tradition and situation. Primarily addressing Egyptian and Middle Eastern concerns, yet produced by a director intimately familiar with European and American cinema, L’Émigre brings a wider global perspective to bear upon this French cinéphile debate. L’Émigre could be read as a salutary reminder that cultivation, in its most fundamental sense, comes before culture, whether postmodern or of any other description, and before cinema, of whatever kind. The debate can only restrict itself purely to cinema, images and the role of the auteur in First World contexts, where it is easier to overlook this fact.

Chahine’s œuvre contains recent films such as Alexandria Again and Forever and Cairo... As Told by Youssef Chahine, which, at first sight, align themselves more obviously with the reflexive French ones cited above. Alexandria Again and Forever contains
a sequence in which Yahia/Chahine and Nadia/Yousra are together during the Eid celebrations. Nadia's mother has a television set in her flat showing Cairo Station. She is startled to realise that a character from the film is in her home, and she and Yahia/Chahine quickly get into a debate about which is his best film. He insists on the first in his semi-autobiographical trilogy, Alexandria... Why? Nadia's mother is equally insistent in her preference for his earlier agricultural epic, The Land. One of Alexandria Again and Forever's concerns is to explore how some of Chahine's films have become a small part of the texture of Egyptian life. His films' reception by Egyptian audiences forms part of the auteur's self-reflexive meditations in his semi-autobiographical trilogy. For Chahine, the process of questioning the status of cinema and one's role as an auteur is interactive, as well as philosophical and self-referential. With L'Émigré, Chahine's next feature, it seems that Nadia's mother's preference has been taken into account. Semi-autobiographical elements are subsumed within, rather than negated by, the move to a more populist and accessible format. Characteristic preoccupations, authorial motifs and elements from Chahine's previous work are quoted and reworked in L'Émigré, albeit less explicitly or obtrusively than in the semi-autobiographical films. L'Émigré thus becomes a rich film which can be read and enjoyed on a number of levels.

Moving beyond the rarefied atmosphere of French intellectual film discourse, L'Émigré develops an alternative to the "end of epic", which Vivian Sobchack accounts for in relation to general trends in postmodern culture where faith in "grand narratives" has apparently declined. She argues that, in the 1980s and 1990s "[as a culture, we seem to be too self-conscious, too image-conscious, and too aware of our social heterogeneity] to find any but nostalgic appeal in the directed temporal force of the genre". Sobchack notes that the most interesting epics of recent years acknowledge these shifts. Significantly, they tend to be directed by Europeans, rather than by Americans. The examples she cites are Walker (Alex Cox, 1987) and The Last Emperor (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987). If the discussion is extended beyond Europe and the United States to include L'Émigré, however, another option emerges. L'Émigré exhibits a "directed temporal force", but combines this with the utmost sensitivity to "social heterogeneity". L'Émigré is "image-conscious" insofar as, whilst quoting and reworking elements from Chahine's back catalogue, citing film historical reference points such as October, and gesturing towards contemporary French auteur cinema, its primary concern is to return to representations and images which still matter to a great number of people.

L'Émigré poses a question for Egypt, the Middle East and the world beyond that region. To whom does the story of Joseph belong? Should it be claimed by any one group? What is its relevance now, and how should it be told? In producing L'Émigré, Chahine has staked a claim for its continuing relevance as a story which belongs to everyone. The action taken against the film in Egypt demonstrates that there are constituencies who also acknowledge this narrative's powerful resonance but would like to suppress this particular representation of it. L'Émigré does not simply oppose politicised Egyptian Islamic discourse; it shares with it a respect for this prophet and a conviction that his story is still important. What L'Émigré does which is most unsettling is to inhabit some of the same territory as politicised Egyptian Islamic discourse whilst disturbing the boundaries, exclusions and oppositions it tends to construct.

For spectators located outside this immediate contest in Egypt, L'Émigré has much to offer. This is a film which could be classified as perhaps the first Third Cinema religious epic. L'Émigré is a film which again highlights how Eurocentric our film canons are, and how the narrowing distribution of non-Western films in particular continues to limit our cultural horizons. It is a film which highlights how Eurocentric and exclusively Judaeo-Christian our cinematic traditions of historical and religious representations have been. Film culture here would benefit from wider exposure to films such as L'Émigré because to view and learn about such films extends and enriches us in at least two ways. As Paul Willemen puts it, it is essential when analysing a film such as L'Émigré to "understand the dynamics of a particular cultural practice within its own social formation". At the same time, "engagement with other cultural practices can" -
and, in Willemen's view, must - "thus be geared towards the unblocking, or the transformation, of aspects of the analyst's own cultural situation". This book has been written out of the conviction that, as well as being a historically significant film in Egypt, \textit{L'Émigre} could raise important questions for non-Egyptians. But the first battle here, as it was in Egypt, is simply to get it screened.

Notes

The most comprehensive recent Chahine filmography can be found in "Spécial Youssef Chahine", supplement to Cahiers du Cinéma 506 (October 1996): 49-66. A concise filmography in English is included in Berénice Reynaud, "Everywhere Desire", Sight and Sound 7: 8 (August 1997): 21-23, and in Ibrahim Fawal, \textit{Youssef Chahine} (London: British Film Institute, 2001). For ease of reference, transliterations of Chahine's Arabic film titles have been taken from the latter source. Given its current lack of distribution in Britain and North America, the French title \textit{L'Émigre} has been retained throughout this text. My thanks to Karin Lock for expert help with French translations, Sarah Whitehouse for providing a base in Paris from which to track down Chahine material, Julian Hoxter for urging me to shorten my epic paragraphs, and Lina Khatib and Ed Buscombe for reading and commenting on the manuscript.


4 Cited in "Spécial Youssef Chahine": 47.


6 Ibrahim Fawal, \textit{Youssef Chahine} (London: British Film Institute, 2001), the first English-language book to survey Chahine's entire career, appeared as this study was in production.


8 Translated from the French: "Chahine est une des dernières grandes institutions non gouvernementales existantes encore dans le monde arabe". Thierry Jousse, "Chahine, encore et toujours: Propos de Yousry Nasrallah", in "Spécial Youssef Chahine": 32.


12 Translated from the French: "[Les pétro-monarchies du Golfe] n'ont pas tardé à imposer un code moral très strict qui a marqué une nette régression par rapport à l'âge d'or du cinéma égyptien". Christophe Ayad, "Le Star-Système: de la Splendeur au Voile", in ibid: 140.


15 Translated from the French: "J'use de ma fonction pour dire qu'une majorité silencieuse, merveilleuse et démocrate existe et


17 For discussion of L'Emigré's soundtrack, see Vincent Ostria, "Les bruits du sourd: Entretien avec Dominique Henequin et Olivier Ducastel", in "Spécial Youssef Chahine": 34-35. L'Emigré has a symphonic score, composed by Muhammad Nouh and performed by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, but it is generally less prominent than in many examples of the classical Hollywood epic.


20 Two books in English which offer historical surveys of Egyptian cinema are Mohammed Khan, The Cinema in Egypt (London: Informatics, 1969), and Mustafa Darwish, Dream Makers on the Nile: A Portrait of Egyptian Cinema (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998).

21 Kiernan: 130-131.

22 Recent Egyptian Television serials are discussed further in Lila Abu-Lughod, "Finding a Place for Islam", Public Culture 5: 3 (1993).


24 Translated from the French: "Le Moïneste...fait prendre un virage à 180 degrés à tout le cinéma arabe par l'audace inouie de son sujet et de sa construction". Férid Boughedir, "Youssef, le fondateur", in "Spécial Youssef Chahine": 40.


28 Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans (Biblical Epics: Sacred narrative in the Hollywood cinema [Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1993]) identify three main sub-genres: the Old Testament epic, with Moses and Exodus providing the most often filmed narrative; the Christ film; and the Roman/Christian epic. That the Bible has been the primary source for Hollywood religious epics goes without saying.


31 Babington and Evans: 34.

32 Ibid: 40.


34 Kiernan: 151.

35 John Durham Peters, "Exile, nomadism, and diaspora: the


39 For further discussion, see Maria Wyke, Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema, and History (New York; London: Routledge, 1997).


44 For discussion of Rodrigo/Heston’s personae in this film, see Leon Hunt, "What Are Big Boys Made Of: Spartacus, El Cid and the Male Epic", in Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (eds), You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993): 65-83.

45 Translated from the French: "Chahine respecte la relative autonomie de ces deux dimensions, contrairement à beaucoup de 'fresques historiques' récentes qui ont tendance à réduire les destins individuels à leur inscription historique, ou l'inverse". Geneviève Sellier, "Alexandrie Pourquoi? Une Esthétique du Melting Pot", in "Youssef Chahine l'Alexandrin": 63.

46 L'Émigré balances an emphasis on the benefits derived from sedentary agricultural production against a validation of migration, movement and metaphorical "nomadism" as crucial to the dissemination of knowledge.


48 Chahine has roundly criticised "policy which hasn't come out of any strategy, from any imperative logic carried forward by the force of an entire people". Andree Tournés, "Interview with Youssef Chahine", Framework 14 (spring 1981): 11.


51 Ibid: 286.

52 Babington and Evans: 15.

53 This point is made in relation to Saladin in Halim: 88. Chahine discusses directorial improvisation in Thierry Jousse, "Le spectacle et la vie: Entretien avec Youssef Chahine", in "Spécial Youssef Chahine": 14.


Kehr: 25.

For a discussion of The Mummy, see Shohat and Stam: 153-156.

Chahine's representation of the poor is discussed in Armes: 246. For a critique of how the hard work of "tilling and planting" is omitted from L'Emigre's narrative, see Fawal: 176.


Guy Gauthier, "Gare Centrale: Trois secondes d'arrêt", in "Youssef Chahine l'Alexandrin": 54-59.


Translated from the French: "C'était magnifique de voir ce cinéma plein de jeunes en général assez blasés à la fin d'un film, même blasés de la violence, applaudir. L'Émigré ne comporte pas de violence, ni de sexualité effrénée, mais de l'erotisme et de la moralité...et la recherche de l'avenir". Jousse (1995): 32.


Ismail: 168

Ibid.


Shohat and Stam: 272.

Ibid: 288.


Ibid: 391.

Cited in Fawal: 216.

Translated from the French: "Que nous soyons ou non d'accord avec les idées de Youssef Chahine, nous devons saluer son choix courageux de mettre en avant le problème de la relation avec l'Autre dans ses deux films Adieu Bonaparte et L'Émigré...Il oublie qu'il est presque impossible d'établir un dialogue entre deux parties dont l'une porte des fusils et l'autre est sans armes." Sayed Said, "Politique et Cinéma", in Wassef (ed): 213. Nasser 56, with its narrative of resistance to the superior military might of imperialist powers, perhaps speaks more directly to the sentiments voiced here.

Fawal: 177.

See, most recently, Tesson.

Fawal: 178.


Babington and Evans: 227-228.

Shohat and Stam: 287.

For further discussion, see Cedric Anger et Thierry Jousse, "Produire Chahine: Propos de Humbert Balsan", in "Spécial Youssef Chahine": 36-37.


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"Spécial Youssef Chahine", supplement to Cahiers du Cinéma 506 (October 1996).


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