POPULAR DANCERS OF EGYPTIAN CINEMA:
PERFORMING RESPECTABILITY AND MODERNITY
FROM THE LATE 1950S TO THE EARLY 1970S

by

Danielle LeBlanc
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Approval

Name: Danielle S. LeBlanc
Degree: Master of Arts
Title of Project: Popular Dancers of Egyptian Cinema: Performing Respectability and Modernity from the Late 1950s to the Early 1970s

Examining Committee:
Chair: Dr. Mary-Ellen Kelm
Associate Professor, Department of History

Dr. Paul Sedra
Senior Supervisor
Assistant Professor, Department of History

Dr. Thomas Kuehn
Supervisor
Assistant Professor, Department of History

Dr. Derryl MacLean
Supervisor
Associate Professor, Department of History

Dr. Kenneth Seigneurie
External Examiner
Associate Professor, World Literature Program

Date Defended/Approved: 14 April 2011
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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of popular dancers in Egyptian cinema of the late 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, while deliberating the capacity of certain dancers to achieve a level of esteem over the course of their careers and in their film roles. Films that feature the prominent dancers Samia Gamal, Tahiya Karioka and Naima Akif are considered in the course of three chapters. The relationship between Egyptian notions of respectability, identity, tradition and modernity, the on and off-screen construction of the dancers’ characters and their roles in certain films is considered. The connection between dancers’ roles and major historical events, such as the 1952 Egyptian revolution, the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the 1967 war with Israel, and the significant conceptual changes that occurred as a result of these events are also speculated on.

Keywords: Dancers; Dance; Belly Dance; Egypt; Cinema; Naima Akif; Samia Gamal; Tahiya Karioka; modernity; respectability; tradition.
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Introduction

It is 1955 and a “bellydancer” performs on screen in a darkened cinema in Egypt. She is wearing a rather simple, full length, short-sleeved dress. In the film, she dances on a theatre stage elaborately designed to look like a street in rural Egypt, complete with an ahwa (coffee shop) and male patrons drinking tea and smoking nargila (water pipes with flavoured tobacco). The men on stage with her, including the live band, represent “traditional” Egyptians and are dressed in galabiyyas, turbans and skullcaps, outfits associated with peasants, farmers and the poor. By contrast, the audience seated in the theatre, watching her performance on stage, is comprised of “modern” upper middle class Egyptians, men in suits and women in European style evening gowns. Depending on the location of the cinema where the film is playing, the cinema audience watching the movie could possibly be dressed in either fashion.

Cut to the next scene: The dancer, dressed in a very fashionable evening gown with a fur stole, stands on her doorstep with a handsome, up and coming young doctor. He alludes to marriage. He asks the dancer to think it over while acknowledging that it is a tough decision as she will be giving up her career in “show business” to marry him. He leaves and the dancer has a discussion with her friend, a singer, in which they debate the value of marriage. The dancer is concerned about giving up her fame and fortune, and the name she has made for herself as “an actress,” (the term “dancer” is never used in the film) in order to become a housewife. Conversely, the singer says fame is fleeting and beauty will fade. She herself has been looking for a husband since she was twelve years old. Ultimately, the dancer decides to retire in order to marry.
This scene from the film *Cigarette and a Glass (Sigara wa Kas, 1955)* is unusual for several reasons. First, there is a clear contrast between the “traditional” Egyptian society of the peasants, and the cosmopolitan audience of the cabaret. The dancer’s ability to move between these two roles suggests a dual identity on the part of the dancer, but also represents two of the various facets of Egyptian identity at the time. Secondly, this scene is notable because of the evident exclusivity of the roles of a dancer and a wife. From the early twentieth century, debates had raged in the Egyptian media about the acceptability of women in the workforce and universities, and images of the “New Woman” of Egypt were prominent. By the 1950s the New Woman, educated and working, was well established as a symbol of Egypt’s “modernity.”¹ However, in *Sigara wa Kas* the roles of working dancer and wife are incompatible, and throughout the film it becomes clear that the dancer’s particular type of work is the problem. She performs in a cabaret for an audience of men and women, and despite retiring she is still subject to vices associated with her line of work, such as drinking alcohol and smoking. Finally, the film is out of the ordinary because a public dancer does marry a doctor, one of the highest classes of society.

The marriage of a doctor and a dancer is unusual given that public dancers had long been considered disreputable by Egyptian society. Throughout the 20th century, dancers were generally believed to be of the lowest social and moral classes of Egyptian society, synonymous with prostitutes. More recently in Egypt, alongside the rise of conservative Islamism in the 1970s, dancers have experienced widespread persecution. In Egypt in 2006 a highly controversial dancer, Dina, was blamed in the media for sexually inciting men at the opening of her film during the Muslim holy day of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the month of Ramadan. She allegedly caused groups of men to rampage through Cairo, sexually assaulting women. In 2008 the prominent Egyptian lawyer Nabih al-Wahsh brought a case against Dina for dancing and seducing students at a high school year end party, as well as suing the school for hiring her. In January of 2011, al-

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2 In the late 1800s Edward Lane related that public street dancers (ghawazi) who performed unveiled were not permitted into the homes of Egyptian elite as this would not be proper. See Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, Volume 1* (London: John Murray, 1871), 240. Karin van Nieuwkerk relates that dancers in Egypt in the twentieth century were considered suspect for exposing themselves to the male gaze and taking money from men that would otherwise go to the men’s families. Karin van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like Any Other* Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 155.


4 See Reem Leila, “Unsafe Streets,” *Al-Ahram Weekly,* October 9-15, Issue 917 (2008). http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/917/eg6.htm. Accessed December 10, 2010. In this article Leila addresses the rise in sexual harassment in Egypt, which is blamed on “economic deprivation and the increasingly conservative religious trend” as a result of “conservatism influenced by the Wahhabi trend in Saudi Arabia.” Furthermore, by 1995 dancers had been banned from appearing on state owned television shows. Ironically, this ban did not extend to airings of older films which inevitably have dance scenes (see van Nieuwkerk, 65). This may be due to the widespread popularity of dancers from the era, such as Samia Gamal, who played the dancer in Sigara wa Kas. Since this ban only extended to state owned television stations dancers do still appear on shows on many other satellite stations, as well as on video clips.

Wahsh filed a lawsuit against Dina for “ethical mockery” for her involvement in the production of a television show that seeks out dance talent from around the Arab world.\(^6\)

However, not all dancers have experienced such negative reactions to their performances, and not all dancers were considered entirely irredeemable. Viola Shafik, who has written several books and articles on Arab cinema, estimates that music and dance scenes appeared in at least one-third of films produced between 1931 and 1961.\(^7\) Three prominent dancers of this era went on to cinematic stardom and are still recalled fondly years after their deaths. Naima Akif, a circus performer-turned dancer and actress, starred in fourteen films and made headlines in magazines in the late 1940s and 1950s before her early death at the age of 33 in 1966.\(^8\) Samia Gamal was proclaimed “The National Dancer of Egypt” by King Farouk, appeared regularly in the media, and starred in over eighty films.\(^9\) Dancer-actress Tahiya Karioka starred in hundreds of films, plays and television soap operas over the course of a career that spanned over fifty years.\(^10\)

Their popularity suggests that they were somehow able to achieve a level of esteem that many other dancers could not.

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\(^7\) Viola Shafik, Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity, Revised (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 103.

\(^8\) Mustafa Darwish, Dream Makers on the Nile: A Portrait of Egyptian Cinema (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 33.


Ethnographers, anthropologists and historians alike have often considered dance to be an expression of culture. For example, it has been suggested that dancers represent regional ethnicity,\textsuperscript{11} resistance to colonialism,\textsuperscript{12} and the suitability of men and women for marriage.\textsuperscript{13} This raises a number of questions which guided my research for this thesis. What kind of culture is expressed in dance films from the late 1940s to early 1970s in which dancers, one of the most disreputable elements of society, were major figures in films and important cultural affairs?\textsuperscript{14} How are we to understand the popularity and prominence in films of the three dancers Samia Gamal, Tahiya Karioka and Naima Akif? In what ways did the film roles of these three dancers interact with changing conceptions of national identity, class, gender and modernity? Finally, what do the answers to these questions reveal about what it means to be shameful or respectable in Egyptian society in a period when Egyptian national identity was in transition and how are we to understand Egyptian identity in light of these questions?

\textsuperscript{13} William C. Young, “Women’s Performance in Ritual Context: Weddings among the Rashayda of Sudan,” \textit{Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East}, ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 37-56. Young argues that Rashayda wedding rituals, which include poetry, singing and dancing, provide an opportunity for men and women to rank the attractiveness and suitability for marriage of available members of the opposite sex based on their appearance and performance. They also exchange props and gifts during and after performances, which indicate their attractiveness and abilities at dancing, costuming, poetry, etc.
\textsuperscript{14} For example, Tahiya Karioka danced at King Farouk’s wedding in 1936 and the wedding of the daughter of Egyptian Prime Minister Hussein Sirri in 1941 as well as several other prominent members of the Egyptian elite. President Nasser utilized the folkloric dance group, the Reda Troupe, to represent Egypt abroad and to entertain visiting foreign dignitaries. See Darwish, 27, and Chafiqa Soliman Hamamsy, \textit{Zamalek: The Changing Life of a Cairo Elite 1850 – 1945} (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 292 and 313, and Jay Walz, “New Dance Troupe in Cairo Shows Form Instead of Figure; Student Group Charms Nasser’s Guests -- Adopts Mannerisms of the People and Elusive Melodies of the Nile,” \textit{New York Times}, November 27 (1960): 24.
Egyptian cinema of the 1950s and 60s depicts dancers in a very multi-faceted manner. Based on my own assessment of a wide variety of literature pertaining to dancers and numerous Egyptian films, I agree with the conclusions of Karin van Nieuwkerk and Roberta Dougherty, who have found that the status of dancers in Egyptian society was conflicting and ambiguous. As noted, they were often considered a part of Egyptian culture, but one that elicited mixed feelings from society. Furthermore, Dougherty notes that dancers’ film roles varied and defy generalization.

I would like to add to Dougherty’s evaluation by arguing that in certain films the ambiguous status of dancers was used to represent and address complicated ideals of Egyptian identity as presented in the media by elite members of society and in state policies. Furthermore, I suggest that the capacity of the dancer to garner some level of esteem, if not respectability, in certain films is dependent both on their relationship to the particular aspect of identity in question as well as their previous film roles and representation in the media. In particular, the dancer’s status in certain films corresponds to her relationship to concepts of modernity, concepts which shift over time. The inclusion, or exclusion, of dancers in films does not necessarily make a film any more or less serious. However, it does provide an opportunity for film makers to tap into the stigmas and stereotypes that go along with dancers, and in particular popular and prominent dancers, to add textual layers to the characters of the films, thereby complicating dichotomous images of women as respectable or shameful, immoral or moral, modern or traditional.

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From the advent of British colonial rule in 1882 to the death of President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970, to the early years of President Anwar Sadat, Egypt was in a state of rapid socio-political flux. Various components of Egyptian national identity began to form in the context of colonial resistance and revolution. New ideas regarding women’s roles in society and the nation were debated publicly in newspapers. Attempts were made in various forums such as the media and the educational system to define and combine “modernity” and “tradition” into the on-going development of Egyptian nationalism and identity.

The terms respectability, esteem, modernity and tradition require some explanation. Respectability implies the social acceptance of one’s behaviour and character, as well as having a good reputation. As noted below in regards to Farida Fahmy, a folkloric dancer in the 1960s, Fahmy achieved an elevated status as a dancer wherein she was “socially unassailable.”16 However, the dancers in the films discussed in this thesis do not obtain this status as they are, in one way or another, morally or socially flawed. Often that flaw relates to fluctuating ideologies of women’s status in society, and concepts of modernity and tradition. Furthermore, real life nightclub dancers play these flawed characters, and society views nightclub dancers as morally suspicious because of their profession. Therefore, because of the inherent moral flaw of the dancing profession compounded with the flaws of the film characters, it is difficult to conceive of the dancers or their characters as morally and socially unassailable. However, I suggest that the dancers Samia Gamal, Tahiya Karioka and Naima Akif, and the characters they play, were able to achieve some level of esteem, if not respectability, in their careers and film roles. They

are able to inspire admiration and regard in their on and off-screen audiences. Although not necessarily reputable, they are estimable in some way.

Exactly what defines and constitutes “tradition” and “modernity” presents difficulties, as both terms are constantly evolving. Walter Armbrust describes the dilemma as such:

The paradox, then, is that modernist rhetoric, an imagery of breaking with the past and of cumulative progress, has flourished in commentary on culture high and low, while the world to be reformed by these efforts remains sluggishly unresponsive. The fixity of modernism itself is a further paradox. Not just in Egypt but anywhere such language is prominent, one is always running, always progressing, and never quite catching up.\(^\text{17}\)

Modernity, then, suggests progress. In the Egyptian context, Egyptian intellectuals of the 20\(^{th}\) century attempted to create a specifically Egyptian modernity by blending Western thought with Egyptian “tradition,” maintaining a link to Egypt’s traditional past.\(^\text{18}\) This tradition, which calls to mind particular manners of speech, rituals, practices and dress associated with “popular culture” and the lower classes, or folklore as Armbrust refers to it,\(^\text{19}\) is often in tension with “modernity.” Folklore has been variously revered, elevated and idealized, lauded as “authentic” or deemed “backwards,” a hindrance to modernity or something to be transcended.\(^\text{20}\)

By studying cinema dancers, we may begin to understand how revolutionary Egyptians attempted to construct their own “modern” national identity using dancers as symbols of the Egyptian nation. Cinema provided a forum for disseminating new


\(^{19}\) Armbrust, *Mass Culture*, 37.

concepts of class, culture, race and gender. It also provides one of our only mediums for studying dancers of the era in question. Take, for example, the two scenes from the film described earlier. The lower class *baladi* stage performers, juxtaposed with the fashionable upper class audience, belie the clash of Egyptian “traditional” culture with concepts of “modernity.” Yet in these two scenes the dancer embodies both aspects of Egyptian identity. She alternates between the roles of *baladi* dancer and a sophisticated and stylish Cairene woman.

**Historiography**

In order to conduct my research I intend to build on three major fields of historiography. These fields provide insight into general research on Egyptian dance, female performers and Egyptian cinema, and women as representatives of the Egyptian nation. I have attempted to combine these fields in my thesis to provide a broader understanding of how cinema dancers created a dialogue with Egyptian society in which the roles that dancers played expressed and interacted with ideologies pertaining to Egyptian identity.

**General Research on Egyptian Dance**

The historiography that specifically addresses dancers in Egypt is minimal. There is a handful of scholarly work which discusses the history of dance in Egypt, but few texts consider dance in light of developing concepts of Egyptian nationalism and colonial resistance. In the last thirty years a growing number of books have been written by practitioners of “Bellydance,” coinciding with a rise in popularity of “Bellydance” around

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21 *Baladi* literally means “of the country.” It is generally used to refer to rural peasants and farmers.
the world. Several books and articles on Bellydance have been written by anthropologists and ethnographers who base much of their work on their own personal experiences as dancers either in Egypt or North America, as well as their observations on dancers in the Middle East.

Most prominent amongst the academic research on Egyptian dance is the work of social anthropologist Karin van Nieuwkerk, ‘A Trade Like Any Other:’ Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt. van Nieuwkerk examines the history of dancers in the nineteenth and twentieth century, with a focus on the general societal perceptions of dancers, their marginality, issues of gender, honour, shame and religion. van Nieuwkerk’s primary focus is the status of contemporary dancers and how they are perceived within Egyptian society. She also relates the general history of dancers in Egypt. van Nieuwkerk mostly discusses festival dancers and nightclub performers and the differing attitudes of Egyptian society towards them, which in her text appear ambiguous at best. Dancers were tolerated, but not “considered to exhibit all the qualities of really good Egyptian women” and “on account of their livelihood they are culturally marginal.”

While van Nieuwkerk describes several different categories of dancers in

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22 Here I differentiate between “Bellydance,” which is a style of Middle Eastern dance that is most commonly seen in nightclubs, restaurants and theatre productions around the world and dance as it was performed in Egypt in the era in question. “Bellydance” is associated with the style of dance most often portrayed in Orientalist writings and more contemporary films, as well as the most prominent style of dance in Egyptian films. I prefer to avoid this term as it does not appear to have been in use in Egypt during the era in question. The term is generally assumed to have made its appearance as danse du ventre (dance of the abdomen), a French term from the time of Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt that is often used by Westerners and Orientalists rather than Egyptians. Raks Sharqi (eastern dance) is a term that begins to appear in Egyptian magazines in the 1960s to describe the older style of dance performed in cabarets and films, and to differentiate between this and the new styles of “folkloric” and ballet dance that were becoming popular. I use the more neutral term of “dancer” in this thesis as it is the term is most commonly used to refer to dancers in Egyptian film.


her work, she does not discuss the critical interaction between cinema dancers and Egyptian society, which created a new category of dancers.

Farida Fahmy and Marjorie Franken both researched The Reda Troupe, Egypt’s “National Folkloric Troupe.” Fahmy was the lead dancer in The Reda Troupe for nearly thirty years. Her 1987 Master’s dissertation on Mahmoud Reda, “The Creative Development of Mahmoud Reda, A Contemporary Egyptian Choreographer,” addresses Mahmoud Reda’s research and training methods, with some discussion of the role of The Reda Troupe in elevating the status of dancers in Egypt in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{25} Anthropologist Marjorie A. Franken has written several articles on Farida Fahmy and Mahmoud Reda, as well as a book entitled \textit{Daughter of Egypt: Farida Fahmy and the Reda Troupe}, which traces the development of the troupe.\textsuperscript{26} Franken contrasts the image of the troupe in the 1960s and 70s with that of Orientalist descriptions of dancers in the nineteenth century but only briefly touches on several prominent dancers of the era in between (such as Samia Gamal, Naima Akit and Tahiyaa Karioka). Franken argues that Fahmy was able to be a “legitimate” (or respectable) dancer for several reasons. Fahmy performed folkloric (or “artistic”) dance in a troupe, rather than as a soloist performing in a nightclub, and she was an amateur rather than a trained dancer.\textsuperscript{27} She was educated and had the support of her upper middle class family,\textsuperscript{28} and Fahmy’s mother acted as chaperone for the troupe’s female dancers.\textsuperscript{29} All of these contributed to Fahmy’s ability

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Farida Fahmy, “Creative Development of Mahmoud Reda: A Contemporary Egyptian Choreographer” (Master’s Thesis, UCLA, 1987).
\item \textsuperscript{26} Marjorie A. Franken, \textit{Daughter of Egypt: Farida Fahmy and the Reda Troupe} (Glendale, California: Vassilians Depot, 2001).
\item \textsuperscript{27} Franken, \textit{Daughter}, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Franken, \textit{Daughter}, 43 and 24-27.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Franken, \textit{Daughter}, 26.
\end{itemize}
to maintain her reputation as “socially unassailable,” and therefore elevate dance to a respectable level.

While asserting that The Reda Troupe and Farida Fahmy herself elevated dance to a level of respectability through their representations of Egyptian culture, neither Fahmy nor Franken expand on the ways in which the troupe’s cinematic predecessors were also portrayed as cultural symbols. Furthermore, Fahmy herself only starred in two films in the 1960s, contrasted with the numerous films of Samia, Naima and Tahiya.  

Dance historian Anthony Shay has edited and written several books that deal with folkloric dance and Egyptian dance. His works on Egyptian dance include *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power*, and *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism and Harem Fantasy* (a compilation of anthropological and ethnographic essays on Middle Eastern dance). In *Choreographic Politics* Shay paraphrases what many others such as van Nieuwkerk, Fahmy and Franken say in regards to dancers in Egypt and in particular the Reda Troupe. Shay makes some observations regarding the influence of colonial discourse on Egyptian culture on Reda’s dance style, suggesting that Reda altered the Egyptian folkloric styles of dance to suit Westernized elites, who were “colonized individuals.”

Shay draws from Timothy Mitchell’s interpretations of Michel Foucault, which argue that the Egyptian implementation of certain British methods in the 1800s was designed to discipline the mind and body of colonised peoples. These Egyptian students

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30 Franken, *Daughter*, 26
31 Farida Fahmy appears in starring roles in two films with the Reda Troupe, *Mid-year Vacation (Igazit nos al-Sanaa*, 1963) and *Love in Karnak (Gharam fil Karnak*, 1965).
33 Shay, *Choreographic*, 132.
then internalized colonial attitudes about the backwardness of Egyptians and Egyptian culture. Shay argues that Reda, whom he deems a product of this educational system, internalized this attitude along with the Nasser era notion of a glorified, romanticized peasant. According to Shay, Reda was therefore influenced to create a “pale and anaemic version of the vital dance form that the interested observer can see in the field at urban and rural wedding celebrations.”

In both *Choreographic Politics* and *Belly Dance* Shay argues that dancers were a source of shame to the state and the elite upper class.

Shay’s arguments present two important facets of the ways in which Egyptian dance was influenced by colonial attitudes towards Egyptian culture, on the one hand to reject “low culture” and on the other to elevate “traditional” culture as a part of a nation’s historic past. However, outside of his discussion of the Reda Troupe, Shay does not address other dance icons such as Samia Gamal, Tahiyya Karioka and Naima Akif who may have similarly appropriated and/or rejected colonial attitudes regarding Egyptian dance. In his discussion Shay touches on the concepts of nationalism and class, but does not consider them in relation to notions of modernity and gender. Nor does he discuss what elements are required to make a dancer appear respectable or disreputable to society.

Stavros Stavrou Karayanni has written on the relationship among Orientalism, imperialism and dance in his work *Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, & Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance*. Karayanni’s work focuses on the colonial project in Greece, male dancers and concepts of sexuality, and Orientalist perceptions and

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35 Shay, *Choreographic*, 133.
representations of Eastern dancers. Karayanni refers to Homi Bhabha’s work on colonial encounters, arguing that the relationship between Orientalists and dancers was not necessarily a binary of domination and subjugation (here Karayanni is referring to Gustave Flaubert’s encounters with the dancer-prostitute Kuchuk Hanem).  

Karayanni’s discussion of colonialism and dance in the Middle East addresses nineteenth century colonial encounters and concludes with how this relates to contemporary Western dancers, leaving a significant gap of time and geographical expanse in between.

In her Master’s thesis, “Firqat al-Zaffah: Egyptian Dance and Music in the Cairo Wedding Procession,” Carolee Kent provides a description of Cairo wedding processions in hotels in the 1980s. Kent suggests that the zaffah (wedding procession) “evokes a sense of nostalgia for traditional folk characters” because of the social ritual involved in the very distinctive and ritualistic fashion of the zaffah.

Cassandra Lorius’s article “‘Oh Boy, You Salt of the Earth:’ Outwitting Patriarchy in Raqs Baladi,” addresses the dance performances of Fifi Abdou, a prominent contemporary nightclub dancer. Lorius considers how Fifi’s performances play on class distinctions between the upper class and baladi culture. Furthermore, she suggests that the display of baladi culture and Fifi’s sexuality subvert patriarchy. However, Fifi is a more contemporary dancer and the article does not deal with cinema dancers.

Rihab Kassatly Bagnole’s PhD dissertation, “Imaging the Almeh: Transformation and Multiculturalization of the Eastern Dancer in Painting, Theatre, and Film, 1850-

37 Karayanni, Dancing Fear, 52.
1950,” focuses on the artistic aspect of Orientalism and images of dancers in paintings and film.\footnote{Rihab Kassatly Bagnole, “Imaging the Almeh: Transformation and Multiculturalization of the Eastern Dancer in Painting, Theatre, and Film, 1850-1950,” (PhD Dissertation, College of Fine Arts of Ohio University, Ohio, 2005).} Bagnole predominantly focuses on the works of Western Orientalist painters and theatre productions, but accords some space to the films of Farid al-Atrash which feature the dancers Tahiya Karioka and Samia Gamal. Bagnole argues that the famous singer al-Atrash positioned the dancer in his films in relation to his music and according to his own fantasy and agenda. Bagnole’s concern is with the Western influences in al-Atrash’s music and production, rather than the relationship between dancer’s representations and societal issues, and his assessment ends in 1950, roughly five years before my own thesis begins.

Roberta L. Dougherty has also produced two articles that deal with dancers and cinema respectively. Dougherty’s article “Badi’a Masabny, Artiste and Modernist: The Egyptian Print Media’s Carnival of National Identity,” addresses the Syrian dancer who trained several of the dancers of early Egyptian cinema.\footnote{Roberta L. Dougherty, “Badi’a Masabny, Artiste and Modernist: The Egyptian Print Media’s Carnival of National Identity,” in \textit{Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond}, ed. Walter Armbrust (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 243 – 268.} Masabni was also the first dancer to perform in a full-length feature Egyptian film, \textit{Malikat al-Masarih (Queen of Theatres)}, in 1935.\footnote{Marjorie Franken, “Farida Fahmy and the Dancer’s Image in Egyptian Film,” in \textit{Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East}, ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo, Egypt: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 266. Also, Roberta Dougherty, “Badi’a Masabny,” 6.} Dougherty suggests that Masabni could be considered a nationalist figure based on her political commentaries in newspapers and through her productions. Dougherty’s other article, “Dance and Dancer in Egyptian Films,” provides an overview
of certain roles that dancers fulfilled in Egyptian cinema. Dougherty argues, as mentioned earlier, that the status of dancers in society is ambiguous, and their film roles defy generalization. Dougherty does not address the roles of cinema dancers in the context of the various major events and shifting concepts of nationalism, identity, gender roles and concepts of class in twentieth century Egypt. It is through consideration of the above concepts that I would like to expand on her conclusion.

The works of various anthropologists and ethnographers, while valuable in their attention to historical context, and perceptions of shame and gender, have predominantly focused on the negative status of dancers, Orientalist writings and contemporary dancers, leaving a significant gap of time in between. It is this period of time I intend to consider from a historical perspective through the medium of film.

Works on Egyptian Female Performers in General and Egyptian Cinema

In recent years there has been a small number of works that address either female performers or women in cinema. As mentioned, Karin van Nieuwkerk’s work is the most comprehensive to deal with female performers, and in particular, dancers. Other authors such as Viola Shafik, Sherifa Zuhur, Virginia Danielson, Joel Gordon, Walter Armbrust and Cynthia Gray-Ware Metcalf have addressed female singers and women in Egyptian cinema. These works are useful in that their conclusions on female performers are in many ways applicable to dancers. Many of them relate female performers to nationalism and modernity. Furthermore, certain women (such as Umm Kulthum) are argued to embody the nation itself.

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Viola Shafik’s books on cinema are two of the predominant texts on Egyptian cinema, and provide valuable information on Middle Eastern cinema in general. Her works include Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity and Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation.\textsuperscript{45} Shafik briefly mentions dancers and the fact that they appear in numerous films. She says that one of the major functions of belly-dance scenes in Egyptian cinema is to “permit male voyeurism.”\textsuperscript{46} She seems to accept Franken’s perspective that only Farida Fahmy was able to evoke “positive connotations” through her dance because she performed in the context of a “folkloric” company rather than as a “bellydancer.”\textsuperscript{47} In this thesis I consider how dancers other than Fahmy may have achieved various degrees of esteem as cinema dancers, and intend to show that, in light of socio-political circumstances, dancers in Egyptian film carry significance beyond male voyeurism.

Several other writers have dealt with female performers and cinema. Among these are Sherifa Zuhur, Virginia Danielson, Joel Gordon and Walter Armbrust. Zuhur’s compilations and works on the singer Asmahan and Virginia Danielson’s book on Umm Kulthum both provide a close examination of the lives of female singers and their

\textsuperscript{45} Viola Shafik, Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity, Revised (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007); Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007).

\textsuperscript{46} Shafik, Popular Egyptian Cinema, 165.

\textsuperscript{47} Shafik, Popular Egyptian Cinema, 166.
relationship to nationalism, colonialism, religion, class and gender. The numerous works of both Joel Gordon and Walter Armbrust both provide useful insight into the various themes of Egyptian cinema and their relationship to the above concepts of nationalism, colonialism, class and gender, but neither scholar addresses dancers in any comprehensive manner except Armbrust’s analysis of the film *Khalli Balak min Zuzu* (*Pay Attention to Zuzu*, 1972), which I consider in my third chapter.

More recently, in an unpublished dissertation, Cynthia Gray-Ware Metcalf wrote a detailed biography of the actress Ruz al-Yusuf (also the creator of one of Egypt’s longest standing newspapers and arts review). Metcalf’s focus is on lower class female performers and how these women were able to attain celebrity status in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. She discusses the rise of nationalism and anti-colonial sentiments that were involved in the development of the theatre industry in this period. While she does provide a detailed account of Badia Masabni’s rise to fame, she does not address dancers’ roles in the development of Egyptian nationalism and

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identity.\textsuperscript{51} As her focus is on Ruz al-Yusuf and the theatre industry, she does not extend her research beyond the 1930s to include cinema performers.

**Women as Representative of the Egyptian Nation**

Authors such as Beth Baron and Lisa Pollard have examined the Egyptian media in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, focusing on images which linked women to Egyptian nationalism.\textsuperscript{52} Beth Baron says that although a nation is an abstract concept with no material form, since the rise of nationalism “the nation has been represented visually.”\textsuperscript{53} Baron examines images in which women were literally depicted as the nation and found that Egypt was occasionally represented as an innocent woman clothed in the Egyptian flag, subjugated by either Egyptian elites or images of the British colonizer.\textsuperscript{54}

Lisa Pollard found that caricatures of women were utilized in the press as a means of expressing Egyptian modernity and nationalism. These images were meant to combat Western perceptions which gendered Egypt based on the supposed depravity of men who were raised in the seclusion of the harem, or by unfit peasant women who were blamed

\textsuperscript{51} As mentioned, Badia Masabni was a Syrian dancer and casino owner who is credited for launching the careers of many famous Egyptian singers and dancers at her Casino Opera.


\textsuperscript{53} Baron, “Nationalist Iconography,” 105.

\textsuperscript{54} Baron, “Nationalist Iconography,” 121.
for their own “laziness and stupidity.” Pollard says the media published articles on
domestic matters such as hygiene, child rearing and education, teaching girls and women
that “sound mothers created sound nationalists,” further linking women to the
development and emancipation of the nation.

Mervat Hatem and Laura Bier have examined the status of women in relationship to
the regime of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who came to power after the 1952
Revolution that freed Egypt from British colonial rule, as well as the early years of
President Anwar Sadat in the 1970s. Hatem has found that, while taking on a form of
“state feminism” and women’s rights, the policies of the state reinforced the mentality
that women should be educated and employed to be bettermates, but ultimately were
channelled into roles that were considered by the state to be “naturally female,” such as
caregiving and the education of small children. The state’s increase in job opportunities
for women was also a means of contributing to the progressive and modern image of the
state.

Laura Bier has shown that Nasser’s state attempted to eradicate the “backwardness”
of the Egyptian nation in order to “modernize” the nation for national advancement.

These attempts involved development and modernization through state provision of the
basic implements of a modern society, such as running water and electricity, which were
expected to increase the standard of living and therefore decrease the rate of peasant
reproduction. Later attempts in the 1950s and 60s included the regulation of the rapidly

55 Pollard, Nurturing, 65.
56 Pollard, Nurturing, 123.
57 Hatem, “Secularist and Islamic Discourses,” 88.
58 Mervat F. Hatem, “Economic and Political Liberalization in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism,”
59 Laura Bier, “The Family is a Factory” Gender, Citizenship, and the Regulation of Reproduction in
expanding population, and by proxy an attempt to regulate women’s bodies with increased awareness of birth control. The regulation of women’s bodies became symbolic of the state’s “progress” towards modernity.

Baron, Pollard, Mervat and Bier all show the ways in which women, and state management of them, came to symbolize Egyptian independence and “modernity.” However, the ways in which dancers, as bearers of culture and tradition, were presented in film enacting these concepts has yet to be examined. By building on these three fields of research, general works on dancers, female entertainers, and women in relation to the media and state, I intend to show how dancers were used to probe and represent the various debates regarding the status of women, respectability and modernity in Egypt from the 1950s to early 1970s.

Methodology

My primary sources included a wide variety of Egyptian films from the 1940s through to the 1970s. I initially cast a wide net for my timeline in order to get a sense of the changes and the ways in which dancers were presented in films in relation to films that did not have dancers as lead characters, or at all. Without statistics for box office returns it is difficult to determine which films were most popular. Therefore, I chose films to watch based first on availability, as many older films are difficult to obtain, either not available commercially or otherwise. Secondly, I chose films that featured well-known actors and actresses, as the popularity of the stars may have lent some
popularity to the films themselves. Through various methods I also attempted to
determine those films that may have been popular during the era in question.60

Other primary sources have included issues of Al-Kawakib, a popular star
magazine. While an extensive review of the representations of dancers in the media was
beyond the scope of this thesis, I made use of some magazine articles in order to try to
understand the relationship between the dancer’s on and off-screen personae and how this
contributed to their roles in films.

In the process of my research it was of course necessary to make use of secondary
sources beyond those listed above for contextual history. In particular I have made use of
sources that examine the concepts of “modernity” and “tradition” in Nasser and Sadat’s
Egypt. The numerous works of James Jankowski, Israel Gershoni, Zachary Lockman,
Donald Malcolm Reid and others who are listed throughout the footnotes of this thesis
have provided the valuable historical contextualization that has helped me analyze films
and articles. 61

60 Without statistics for box office returns it is difficult to determine how popular films of the era were,
although it may be possible to infer that, based on the popularity of the stars themselves, their films
would also have been. Therefore I order to determine which films were popular, I compiled a list based
on films that are mentioned in various secondary sources pertaining to the dancers in question and to
popular Egyptian cinema, as well as films that are mentioned in various newspaper articles, blogs and
websites related to the dancers. I also examined several websites that sell Egyptian films and chose
classic films which are still widely available, which suggests their enduring popularity.

61 James Jankowski, Nasser’s Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic (Boulder, Colorado:
Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002); James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, eds., Rethinking Nationalism in
the Arab Middle East (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Israel Gershoni and James
Jankowski, Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930 (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1999); Israel Gershoni and Meri Hatina, eds., Narrating the Nile: Politics,
Cultures, Identities (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008); James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni,
ed., Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997);
Donald Malcolm Reid, “Nationalizing the Pharaonic Past: Egyptology, Imperialism, and Egyptian
Nationalism, 1922-1952,” In Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East, eds. James Jankowski and
Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); 127-149; Donald Malcolm Reid, Whose
Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I
(Berkely: University of California Press, 2002); Zachary Lockman. Contending Visions of the Middle
For each chapter of the three chapters of this thesis I have chosen one film to examine in depth. I chose these films for several reasons. Each film features one of the popular dancers, Tahiya Karioka, Samia Gamal and Naima Akif in a prominent role, if not the main role. Each of these films was produced well into the dancers’ careers, when their on and off-screen personae were well established, allowing for an analysis of the ways in which the dancers’ previous roles and career impacted their later roles. Each film is widely available commercially and on DVD, indicating its popularity. These films are interesting in the manner in which they present the dancer as a multi-faceted character, rather than simply for the purpose of male-voyeurism or the typical pause-for-song-and-dance sequence popular in musical films of the era.

The first two films, Maw’id maʿ al-Majhul (Rendezvous with the Unknown, 1958) and Tamr Hinna (Henna Flower, 1957) have not been examined in a scholarly fashion, while Walter Armbrust has provided an important analysis of Khalli Balak min Zuzu (Pay Attention to Zuzu, 1972) which I intend to build on. In the first chapter, I consider the ways in which the character played by Samia Gamal, Nana the nurse-turned-nightclub dancer, interacts with the concept of the modern “New Woman” of Egypt and the changing status of women in the public sphere. In the second chapter I address class and “traditional” society through an examination of Naima Akif’s character, Tamr Hinna, the low class fair dancer in Tamr Hinna. In the final chapter I consider the role of the dancer in society, and how their status changed throughout the 1960s and early 70s in relation to shifting concepts of modernity and respectability.

As for transliteration from Arabic to English, I have followed the guidelines of the International Journal of Middle East Studies, except in cases where popular
pronunciation of a word differs. For example, I have used the Egyptian colloquial Gamal Abdel Nasser rather than Jamal ‘Abd al-Nassir. In the case of written Arabic sources, all translations are my own. Most of the films available commercially provide decent subtitles, and in cases where my own mediocre Arabic skills have hampered my listening ability and accurate translation I have turned to friends fluent in Arabic for assistance. I take full responsibility for any mistakes in translation.
Chapter 1 Rendezvous with the Unknown: The Dancer and the “New Woman” of Egypt

Samia Gamal is one of the most popular dancers in the history of Egyptian cinema, starring in over eighty films during a career that lasted over forty years. Films of the late 1940s and early 1950s generally portrayed her in a positive light, as she often played the love interest of the famous singer Farid al-Atrash. The two play nightclub performers, in love and destined to be married, but something, be it another man or woman or economic problems, comes between them before they eventually reunite for a happy ending. Marriage is clearly in their future, and Samia’s moral status as a dancer who exposes her body in public is generally not an issue.

If Samia’s status as a dancer is weighed in her early films, she is often found acceptable for marriage. For example, in Dark and Handsome (Asmar wa Gamil, 1950) Samia plays a poor girl who begins performing in theatre shows, eventually winning approval from her father for her public performances and the love of a street vendor. In Say Hello (Ta’al Salam, 1951), Samia plays a dancer in her own father’s nightclub. Those around her, in particular her father as well as her admirer (played by Farid al-Atrash) deem her to be of a higher social class than her admirer, a waiter. When the

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63 Farid al-Atrash actually produced several films starring himself and Samia. Rumours abound that the two were in a relationship and therefore it is not unlikely that he wanted her to be portrayed positively for that reason. There are various reasons given why the supposed relationship could not and did not last. For example, it is said Samia did not want to marry him because she feared that he would denigrate her in time, either as a performer, a non-Druze (Farid was from a conservative Syrian Druze royal family), as a person whose origins were lower than his, or as the undesirable familiar, meaning a spouse. See Sherifa Zuhur, “Building a Man on Stage,” Men and Masculinities, January (2003), 288. Another rumour suggests Farid refused to marry because he believed marriage kills art. One rumour, which I will address later in this chapter, indicates that Farid distanced himself from Samia because of her supposed affair with King Farouk. See Sami M. Moubayed, Steel & Silk: Men and Women who Shaped Syria 1900-2000 (Seattle: Cunepress, 2006), 525.
waiter tells the dancer he loves her, her father says their social levels do not match, “a waiter singing to her is like a Ford driving a cart.” In *Tell No One* (*Mataqulsh Lahad*, 1952) Samia is engaged to Farid, yet pursued by the character of Istifan Rosti, a rich man who has asked her to marry him, and argues with a male relative about her acceptability as a dancer. The man asks if Rosti is not ashamed to have a dancer in the family; Rosti responds that her dance is art, and in love we are all equal. Ultimately however in these early films no class lines are crossed as Samia and Farid are both performers and therefore of the same class, or if she is poor, so is her partner, thereby eliminating any potential issues around cross-class romances and morality. Furthermore, Samia’s early characters maintain their virtue, as there is no hint of premarital sex or inappropriate sexual conduct between them and their sweetheart, something commonly associated with public dancers, and marriage seems likely at the end.

After the 1952 revolution Samia’s roles became more serious, and her doubtful morality was made use of in her roles to probe contentious issues, such as women’s shifting status in society. One such example of this is the 1958 film *Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul*. Samia plays Nana, a nurse turned nightclub dancer who seduces Magdy, played by the younger Omar Sharif. The two have a steamy affair while Sharif is on the outs with his sweetheart. Although Sharif and his sweetheart reconcile, the end of the film is enigmatic, and the status of the dancer is unclear.

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64 *Maw’id* can be translated in several ways: as a promise, a date, an appointment or rendezvous. Variants on the word with the same root can also have a more menacing meaning, such as threat, or menace. Therefore, the film title can alternately mean a date, encounter or rendezvous with the unknown, with a potentially menacing overtone. Because of the variants in translations, I will maintain the Arabic title in the film rather than the English.
Egyptian films of the Golden Era, generally considered to be the 1930s to 1960s, tended to favour women of virtue over women of loose morals. Films that featured a dancer as “the other woman” generally end with the immoral woman who has adulterous or premarital sex cast aside in favour of the modest and honourable woman. Yet in *Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul* we get hints that the immoral dancer may be worthy of some level of esteem. While she may not be respectable in the sense that she is modest, innocent, and chaste, the film seems to call into question what type of behaviour is desirable and worthy of admiration for Egyptian women in the 1950s.

The usage of the famous dancer-actress Samia Gamal as a femme fatale of questionable esteem complicates images of the “New Woman” propagated in the media and state policies of the 1950s, as dancers were generally considered disreputable by society. Dancers were considered disreputable because of their association with nightclubs, alcohol, prostitution and exposing their bodies to the male gaze. Samia’s femme fatale character, Nana, is contrasted with Nadia, a woman who is educated and working as a nurse, and then retires to the private sphere of the home to raise her family after marriage. Nadia is a model of the “New Woman,” and an updated version of the model woman propagated in the media and films in the early half of the century.

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66 For example, the Tahiya Karioka film *Shore of Love (Shati al-Gharam*, 1950) features Tahiya as a dancer in an affair with a wealthy playboy; she receives a monthly allowance and gifts in exchange for her time. The playboy falls in love with, and marries, a woman played by Layla Murad, an actress well known for her roles as an innocent and modest woman. The dancer is literally and physically cast aside in favour of the ideal wife. *Struggle on the Nile (Sira’ fil Nil*, 1959) features the bombshell Hind Rustam as a dancer who seduces the character of Omar Sharif, but is brutally killed in the midst of a fight. Sharif subsequently returns to his village sweetheart.

68 Images of the ideal “New Woman” of Egypt will be addressed in depth shortly in this chapter. As for films, Layla Murad’s films provide a prime example of the “ideal” woman of the media. Murad often plays an innocent middle-class woman who is educated and working. Upon marriage she retires to stay home and take care of her family and run her house. For example see *Layla, the Schoolgirl (Layla, Bint Madaris*, 1942) and *The Shore of Love (Shati al-Gharam*, 1950, mentioned above).
Conversely, although Nana the dancer has some of the characteristics of the New Woman, she rejects the potential to be the model New Woman.

I believe *Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul* provides a complex commentary on the status of Egyptian women in the midst of major socio-economic and political change in the post-revolutionary 1950s. I suggest that the *maw‘id ma‘ al-majhul* (or rendezvous with the unknown) that the film derives its title from is not simply an appointment with the thugs that are embezzling money from Sharif’s business, but a rendezvous with an unknown and indefinable type of woman, a type of woman that was emerging in the 1950s that defied categorization and stereotypes. Samia’s status as a famous dancer is used in the film to express this ambiguity.

Through a close examination of *Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul* I will explore the ways in which this film seems to question women’s status. I will begin with an overview of the film, and then turn to the construction of Samia Gamal’s character on and off-screen. I will move on to discuss the status of dancers in Egypt, and how this fits in with the larger image of women in Egypt, and in particular in post-revolutionary Egypt, and new policies towards women.

**Overview of Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul**

The plot of *Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul* is driven by an embezzlement scheme. In the opening scenes of the film a man is killed as he is about to uncover an embezzlement conspiracy operating from his own business in which money is being secretly shipped out of Egypt. An innocent man, Rashid, who was a friend and former employee of the victim, is forced by the crooks to leave the country or be implicated as the murderer.
While investigating the innocent man, Magdy, the brother of the murdered man, attempts to get to know the innocent man’s sister Nadia in order to determine if she knows anything about the murder. Instead, Magdy and Nadia find love together. However, Nadia’s conscience prevents her from accepting Magdy’s marriage proposal, as she suspects her own brother is involved in the death of Magdy’s brother. Magdy suspects that the reason Nadia will not marry him is because she is involved with another man, and so he leaves her.

In his distress Magdy goes to a club, where he drinks and encounters Nana, a dancer played by Samia Gamal. Nana had once worked in the same hospital as Nadia as a nurse, but gave this up in order to become a nightclub dancer. Magdy and Nana had met once before outside the hospital where Nadia worked, and the two had briefly flirted. Here they do more than flirt; they begin an affair. It becomes clear that marriage is out of the question for these two, though, as Magdy is still in love with Nadia, and the implication is that Nana is not marriage material because she is a dancer and an older woman.

While on a date with Nana at the exclusive Montazah beach in Alexandria, Magdy sees Nadia, and the two reunite. Nadia has received a confirmation from her brother of his innocence in the murder of Magdy’s brother, and she is now free to marry Magdy with a clear conscience, although she does not share this with Magdy. The two then marry and have a daughter. Several years pass before a new investigator, a former friend of Magdy’s, reopens the murder case of Magdy’s brother. In the process of his investigation, it seems he suspects Nadia’s brother, and spends time with Magdy and Nadia in order to determine what she knows.
Magdy, Nadia and the investigator go out for dinner at a nightclub, and here Magdy encounters Nana the dancer again. Magdy’s wife Nadia knows Nana from the hospital, and the two chat, while Magdy and Nana pretend not to know one another. However, it becomes clear that Nana makes use of her friendship with Nadia to infiltrate Magdy’s life. First she appears at his job site, and later in his home, visiting with Nadia. Nana overhears a conversation in which Nadia arranges to meet with her brother, who has come back to town in secret. Nana then calls Magdy and tells him his wife is betraying him with another man. Magdy discovers Nadia has been hiding the truth about her brother, and assumes that Nadia’s brother is guilty of the murder of his own brother, so he kicks Nadia out of his house, keeping their daughter.

In the midst of this the embezzlement scheme heats up, as the police arrest Nadia’s brother, and use his information to get a lead on the real killers who have continued to operate out of Magdy’s business and embezzle money out of the country. The real killers are close workers of Magdy’s and they kidnap Nadia and her daughter in order to prevent Magdy from chasing them. Nana, with whom Nadia has sought shelter since Magdy kicked her out, attempts to save Nadia and her daughter. It is revealed that she has been working with the police as an informant. The women are saved and the embezzlers arrested. However, rather than seeing Magdy and his wife and daughter reunite, at the end of the film we see Magdy watching Nana the dancer drive away, an inexplicable look on his face and a slowly developing smile. His own wife and daughter, saved moments before by Nana, are nowhere to be seen.
The status of dancers in Egypt

An early scene from the film provides a basis for understanding Nana’s character in the film, as well as the questionable status of dancers in Egypt. The scene also provides a basis for understanding the differences between Nadia and Nana. We see Nadia, in a hospital hallway in nurse’s uniform, discussing an unruly patient with another nurse. We quickly discover the unruly patient is actually Nana, a famous dancer played by the real-life famous dancer, Samia Gamal.

One of the nurses is attempting to take Nana’s temperature, but she refuses. Samia tells Nadia the other nurses hate her because she used to work as a nurse with them, but has become a famous dancer now. The other nurse tells Nadia she believes Samia is not sick, but keeps coming to the hospital in order to show off and hand out tips, and that she thinks she is better than the other nurses now. The nurse is appalled at Samia’s joking suggestion that she try dancing herself, and says she would never dance and flaunt her body. This is clearly something distasteful for the nurse. Samia laughs and tells the other woman she would have to fix her face and body first, and learn to dance.

The nurses leave and Samia turns on the radio, playing upbeat Latin music. She dances around the room until she realizes a doctor is watching her, and suddenly she clutches her stomach, pretending to be ill. She flirts with the doctor, asking if he remembers when she worked there and he told her he loved her. He says he does not know anymore, as she has changed now, and that he thought she used to like her work. She replies that life is short and she is in a hurry.

It is clear here that Samia’s decision to become a dancer is one that is disdained by other women. This type of reaction towards a woman who has chosen to dance was
probably not unusual given the status of dancers in Egypt in the 20th century. In real life, dancers, along with other types of performers such as singers, male and female, were considered suspect by society in general due to their proximity to alcohol, drugs and public displays of their bodies.69 Dancing was not a profession to be pursued out of desire or pleasure, and even financial hardship was a more admirable option than dancing for money. Certain kinds of dancers, such as those who performed in nightclubs, were often seen as closely related to prostitutes or immoral, as they took money from men who would otherwise be spending that money on their families. Other dancers, such as those who performed in the privacy of elite homes or at festivals and weddings, were afforded a slightly higher status than street performers, but were still considered suspect because of their profession and for exposing themselves to the male gaze.70

The fact that Samia’s character in Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul has the opportunity to work in a respectable profession such as nursing but chooses to leave this to dance defies societal convention, and is never explained in the film. Clearly it is not a profession to take up willingly, but the fact that the nurse says Samia is showing off suggests that there is actually something to show off, even if it is only that she makes more money. The fact that she chooses this lifestyle over the more admirable life of a nurse sets Nana up in contrast to Nadia, a woman who represents a more idealized woman that was propagated in the media and in state policies, as described below.

**Women in the Pre-Nasser and Nasser Era**

Although Nana and Nadia are very different, both embody facets of Egypt’s “New Woman.” Beth Baron has shown that in the early half of the 20th century the image of the

70 van Nieuwkerk, ‘A Trade,’ 155.
New Woman was employed by Egyptian nationalists in order to illustrate Egypt’s ability for independence and movement towards “modernity.” This woman was generally unveiled, educated, sophisticated, urban, drove a car, and reflected “the realism and dynamism of contemporary Cairo, where politics were centered.” The New Woman was only one image of Egyptian women’s identity portrayed in the media in the early 20th century. After the 1952 revolution which freed Egypt from decades of British colonial rule, images of the New Woman became more prominent in films and media, and the new state created greater opportunities for women to take part in the public sphere through increased job opportunities and higher education. However, the state policies were somewhat conflicting and did not necessarily trump older values regarding women’s behaviour.

The contrast between Nana as the woman who defies convention and becomes a dancer and Nadia as the woman who works and eventually becomes a wife and mother (as I will discuss below) may be indicative of the ambiguous and shifting attitude towards women’s role in society in the 1950s. Nadia and Samia are both types of the New Woman of Egypt, educated, working and urban. The actress Fatin Hamama says the New Woman had “personality,” presumably meaning that she asserted herself as an individual. The New Woman was “the daughter of this new society with all that it has granted her: culture, education, freedom, the liberties of an open world far from the world of chains and obstacles.” They have found themselves, achieved and asserted their

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71 See Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
72 Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 70-71.
beings. While Nadia has taken advantage of these new opportunities and become a model wife and mother, Nana is an example of these freedoms gone wrong. The fact that the nurse is upset that Nana “shows off” and hands out tips implies she is shameless in her profession and her status as a dancer.

Nana also displays other characteristics of the New Woman, as she drives her own car. While Baron says in the early half of the 20th century this was a symbol of the elite New Woman, in the 1950s driving seems to be more a symbol of wealth and elite status. It is rare to see a woman driving in a film, and if she is, she is usually upper class. While waiting for Nadia outside the hospital one day, Magdy encounters Nana, who is having difficulty getting her car started. Magdy offers his assistance and gets her car started. The two flirt and it is not so much what they say as how they say it. Nana throws Magdy suggestive looks, and he responds in kind. Nana is driving her own convertible car, a symbol of her status as a rich dancer. She also makes fun of Sharif’s old car. This stresses the financial differences between the two as well, as she has a new convertible, while he has a simple older car.

Joel Gordon notes that in films of the Nasser era: “Rich boys have cars, rich girls drivers; poor boys take public transportation and ride bikes.” In some films, “good girls,” or respectable girls, may also take public transportation. We see the contrast here between Nadia and Nana, as we see Nadia, a good girl, taking the bus to work, while

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75 Gordon, Revolutionary Melodrama, 136.
76 For example, in the 1958 film Tamr Hinna, addressed in the next chapter, the dancer’s transformation from lowly street performer to upper class woman is symbolised by her learning to drive a convertible car. Women’s inability to drive was also made fun of. In the 1955 film Cigarette and a Glass (Sigara wa Kas) a singer traps a man in her car and nearly frightens him to death by driving all across the road.
77 Gordon, Revolutionary Melodrama, 124.
78 Gordon, Revolutionary Melodrama, 132.
Nana drives her own convertible car. Nana is financially independent and also independent and capable enough to drive herself around without a driver or chaperone.

**A “Modern” Woman**

In the first half of the 20th century “Western” was often equated with “modern.” However, Egyptian modernity was one that was “avowedly rationalist,” but with “greater emphasis on maintaining continuity with the past.”\(^79\) Throughout the early half of the twentieth century and well into Nasser’s rule, elites debated in the press over which aspects of Western “modernity” to incorporate with selective aspects of an idealized traditional culture which eliminated the supposedly vulgar aspects of Egyptian “folklore.”\(^80\) The fact that we often see Nana dancing to modern Latin music in *Mawˈid maˈ al-Majhul* is also an indication of her modernity, as it suggests she is worldly, and in tune with popular Western trends. Tango, rhumba and mambo music were very popular in America in the late 1940s and 50s.\(^81\) It may also be a reference to Samia’s own appearances in the New York nightclub, The Latin Quarter, in 1952.\(^82\) Samia’s appearance in The Latin Quarter received a two-page spread in the Egyptian magazine *Al-Kawakib*, complete with a letter in English from the club itself stating that Samia’s appearance had drawn one of the largest crowds the club had ever had.\(^83\) The continuous references to Latin music suggest that Nana, and her real life counterpart Samia Gamal, are able to blend Western concepts of modernity along with select elements of Egypt’s

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“folkloric culture” in a fashion similar to media debates regarding Egypt’s national identity.

In her first scene in Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul Nana dances in the hospital room to Latin music. When Magdy becomes distressed over his split with Nadia and encounters Nana again in a nightclub, upbeat Latin music plays and men and women dance. The music then switches from Latin to Egyptian, with the music played by a full band of men dressed in tuxedos. Nana’s arm appears snakelike from behind a pillar, and then she steps out from behind the pillar, cloaked in shadow until she moves towards the spotlight. She is dressed in a Western style evening gown with fringe and a “folkloric” hip scarf that shakes as she dances for the audience. After she finishes, we see her in a Western, modern style dress dancing to upbeat Latin music again, amongst a crowd of couples. Afterwards, she sees Magdy at the bar and approaches him. The two dance to upbeat Latin music, which eventually becomes slow Latin music as the night progresses, and the two dance close together. We see her dance in her apartment to Latin music at other times as well.

The relationship between “tradition” and “modernity” as components of Egyptian identity is one that shifts throughout the 20th century. In the early half of the 20th century elites contributing to media debates turned to Egypt’s ancient past to help define Egypt’s identity in the face of colonialism. This ideology, known as Pharaonicism, focused on the ability of historical Egyptians to be “industrial, self-reliant, and committed to modernization.” However, this ideology came to be seen as a product of Westernized

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elites, and rural immigrants to the cities did not identify with either the alien Western
culture or the idea of Pharaonic culture, as neither had anything to do with their current
Arab-Muslim culture.⁸⁵ It was argued in the media that a more “authentic alternative was
required” as only a national culture “based on Egypt’s indigenous Arab-Islamic heritage
was capable of serving as the foundation for a widely shared system of national values
and priorities.”⁸⁶ Egyptian intellectuals of the 1930s and 1940s asserted that “there was
a viable alternative to the course of wholesale Westernization which had been so popular
in the 1920s.”⁸⁷ They argued that Egypt could borrow some elements from the West, and
Western concepts of modernity, and combine them with elements of Egyptian culture and
tradition. Concurrently, in the years between 1919 and the 1952 Egyptian revolution, the
Egyptian peasant was utilized as a symbol of Egypt’s cultural authenticity and “the
unsullied goodness of the peasant ideal was aligned with true nationalist sentiments.”⁸⁸
Walter Armbrust notes that although Nasser’s government glorified the “peasant” as well,
they were to be drawn towards modernity, and “peasant culture” was something to be
transcended.⁸⁹

While I will address Samia’s off-screen persona and previous film roles later in this
chapter, it is important to note in this context that Samia probably would have been
recognized as a cultural symbol, as she often performed in traditional costumes and
danced to popular Egyptian music in a recognizably Egyptian fashion, albeit one blended
with modern and Western elements. Samia had been declared “The National Dancer of

⁸⁵ Gershoni, Redefining, 14.
⁸⁶ Gershoni, Redefining, 14.
⁸⁷ Gershoni, Redefining, 39.
⁸⁸ Samia Kholoussi, “Fallahin: The ‘Mud Bearers’ of Egypt’s ‘Liberal Age’,” in Re-Envisioning Egypt,
1919-1952, eds. Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson and Barak A. Salmoni, 288 (Cairo: The American
University in Cairo Press, 2005).
Egypt” by King Farouk in the 1940s, suggesting that, according to Farouk anyway, she was literally a symbol of the nation. Her popularity as an actress and in the media (which I will address shortly) suggests that society accepted her as a popular cultural icon at the least.

In simple Egyptian dress, Samia is performing the idealized folkloric tradition, suggesting that she is in touch with her Egyptian roots. Yet she is also capable of living a modern lifestyle. At times in her films she performs in a modern evening gown, as in Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul, and at others in a revealing Westernized “bellydance” costume, dancing to contemporary Egyptian music which is fused with Western instruments and orchestras. This implies an Egyptian identity comprised of a blending of the traditional and the modern in a uniquely Egyptian fashion. Samia’s fusion of East and West is one in keeping with the developing “modern” Egyptian identity. In Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul we see Samia predominantly in modern, fashionable clothing, dancing to non-Egyptian music. This suggests that while she has retained some elements of “tradition,” such as her Egyptian dancing, she has shed many of the elements of the Egyptian past, emerging as a different kind of modern woman. This modern identity is one that is in keeping with the idea of the New Woman of Egypt.

However, the scenes in which Nana appears dancing to Latin music in Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul are generally ones that indicate her seductiveness and indulgence, something her audience at the time would have perceived as dangerous and oversexed, rather than a positive sign of Egypt’s modernization. For example, when she encounters Magdy in the nightclub, she plays the seductress, standing close to him and asking to know why he is

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drinking, and then asks him to dance with her. While dancing, she seductively asks his “secret.” Over time, the music turns from upbeat Latin to blues, and they dance close together.

The next morning it is clear the two have been intimate. We see Magdy lying on a beach chair by the water, and Nana comes over and lies on top of him and they kiss, and then run hand in hand to the beach. This scene is in contrast with an earlier scene between Sharif and Nadia, in which the two lay on the sand side by side. We never see them kiss in the film, although we do see Magdy and Nana kiss and touch one another. This scene is also juxtaposed to the next scene, in which we see Nadia looking sad and gazing out into the distance from a balcony.

The implication in this scene, and in following scenes of Nana and Magdy, is that Nana’s sexuality coupled with her independence is dangerous. Not only is she independent in that she seems to support herself, and owns a car and maintains her own apartment, but she is sexually independent. She clearly chooses a man she wants and pursues him. Furthermore, the fact that she is with the doctor earlier in the nightclub indicates that although he is unsure if he still loves her, she is clearly desirable enough for him to see her again. This sexual independence is one that may come with age, and while it is not explicitly stated in the film, the audience would be well aware that Samia Gamal was approximately ten years older than Omar Sharif, the actor who plays Magdy, and she had been acting for over ten years longer than Sharif. Homa Hoodfar, in her anthropological work amongst lower income families in Egypt, has found that low-income Egyptian men and women generally feel women should marry a man older than them. According to the people Hoodfar interviewed, a woman is expected to obey her
husband, and an older, and therefore wiser, more experienced and mature, man is easier
to obey than a younger man, or one of the same age, particular since it is believed that
women mature faster than men. Although neither Nana nor Magdy are low-income,
Nana’s age, coupled with her sexuality, would likely have rendered their relationship as
highly speculative in the eyes of the film’s audience.

A relationship between an older woman and a younger man also poses the
possibility of a gender role reversal, something which was of concern for men in the early
half of the 20th century. With women’s appearance in public came the constant presence
of women’s sexuality, which translated into a fear of gender role reversal in which a
woman might become sexually active and seek men out, rather than the other way
around. Hanan Kholoussy says this was not acceptable to some contributors to the media
in the 1940s, who felt that women’s place was safely in the home where they could “not
wreak havoc on the nation.” The following scenes reinforce the idea of her sexual
control, as well as the danger it can pose and its linkage to Western-Latin music.

After Nana and Magdy are seen on the beach, we then see Nana dance around her
apartment in a filmy dress to Latin music again. She flirts with Magdy, the two look at
each other lustfully then they share a passionate kiss. The two proceed to dance and kiss.
Nana tells Magdy to forget the other woman as she will not make him happy. At this
point she does not appear yet to know the other woman is actually the same nurse she
worked with at the hospital, and who she encountered earlier in the film when she was
“sick.”

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92 Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse*, 57.
Their affair continues for some time, and one of Magdy’s co-workers tell him he should leave Nana as Nana is bad for him, and Magdy is neglecting his work for her. This indicates that while Nana is bad for him, Nadia was not, as his romance with her did not prevent him from focusing on his work.

In the next scene between Magdy and Nana, Nana tells Magdy her heart is hooked. He tells her that he has already warned her “there will be none of that,” with the implication “that” is a long-term commitment and marriage. Nana asks if he loves the other woman so much that he cannot get over her. Magdy tries to leave for work, but Nana moves to take his shirt off and the implication is that, through seduction, she keeps him from work. It appears that her sexuality is a danger to his wellbeing.

Furthermore, this scene is interesting in that it portrays Samia as a woman who knows her lover will not marry her, but continues the relationship nonetheless. This is unusual given that women who have sex before marriage are regarded as shameful by Egyptian society in general. Maro Youssef, in her dissertation on Egyptian women in cinema, notes that despite being granted more freedom after the 1952 revolution, marriage and sex continued to be intertwined. Women who had sex before marriage were considered to be unfit wives and mothers who might more easily commit adultery and ignore their duties in the homes.93

Sex before marriage usually brought shame on the woman and her family, and although there is no mention of Nana’s family in the film, it is certainly unusual to see a woman having sex for pleasure, as she clearly does. Often in films, dancers who do have

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sex with a man they know will not marry them, are dancer-prostitutes. In many of Samia’s previous films roles, which I will address shortly, she is cast as a dancer who adamantly insists that she has not “sold herself” for money. In *Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul* we see no financial interactions between Nana and other men, and presumably her affair with Magdy is one of pleasure.

**Nasser’s “New Woman”**

Nana is a seductive and overtly sexual woman and is contrasted with Nadia, who appears as the ideal “New Woman.” Nadia is educated, and has worked, but appears to have retired to the domestic sphere to raise her daughter and be a wife, whereas Nana is very much a public woman. I believe that the ways in which these two women are shown in and outside of the home reflect the ambiguous attitude of the new revolutionary state towards women.

*Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul* was released in 1958, six years after a group of Egyptian army officers led a revolution that freed Egypt from British colonial rule. A variety of socio-economic tensions resulted in a revolution that overturned the government. A group of military officers led the revolution, and in particular, one officer named Gamal Abdel Nasser, who assumed the presidency in 1954. The military coup was initially met with hope and relief after the turbulent decades of the 1930s and 40s. This was likely due in part to what Joel Gordon describes as “the savior myth” that had been constructed

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94 For example, in *Shore of Love (Shati al-Gharam, 1950)* as mentioned above, Tahiya Karioka has a paid relationship with a rich playboy.

95 Judith Tucker describes a variety of activities related to the “public” sphere, such as participation in education, economic and political activity and social relations outside the family, whereas the “private” sphere is equated with the domestic sphere. See Judith Tucker, *Women in nineteenth-century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8.

by disaffected liberals, progressives, communists, and Muslim Brothers who hoped that “a military junta would, after imposing constitutional reforms, restore parliamentary life and then return to the barracks.” With Nasser and his Revolutionary Command Council, the group of officers who took power in 1952, many thought Egypt had found its “just tyrant” and the officers were greeted by many as conquering heroes while Nasser himself emerged as a national and regional hero in the mid-1950s. The early years of the revolution were a time of hope and enthusiasm for many Egyptians, particularly as the government promised a more egalitarian society free of imperialism and foreign interference.

Nasser’s policies attempted to address the socio-economic tensions that led to the revolution. These socio-economic issues included a largely impoverished and landless population and feminist issues that had been debated since the turn of the century. While land reforms aiming to ease economic frustrations achieved limited success, the ambiguity with which Nasser’s state addressed women’s rights left the status of women murky, and policies were, at times, conflicting. Women were increasingly visible in the public sphere, but their acceptability there was questionable, as I will demonstrate.

This is not to say that Nasser or his policies directly influenced Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul, but rather the film is reflective of the ideologies present within Egyptian society, and which the state attempted to address. Throughout the first half of the 20th century Egyptian women battled for women’s rights, while the country battled for independence from British colonial rule. For many women, rights included increased education and job

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98 Gordon, Nasser’s, 38.
99 Gordon, Nasser’s, 37.
100 Danielson, The Voice, 13.
opportunities, as well as changes to personal status laws that favoured men in matters of divorce and inheritance. Concurrently, Egyptian nationalists debating in the press portrayed women as a symbol of Egypt’s progress towards modernity and independence. The home was considered a microcosm of the state. Egyptian feminists and elites advocating for the modernization of Egypt argued that women should be liberated; they should be educated and intelligent. Educated women would make better companions for educated men, and would be better suited to raise healthy, intelligent children who would eventually create a strong, independent, modern nation. Ultimately though, this meant that while women should be educated, and allowed to work before marriage, the general consensus amongst those who contributed to the media debates was that women’s most important place was in the home, raising the nation.

After the 1952 revolution, Nasser’s state did not move to change the notion of the home as a microcosm of the nation, but it did change the way the state interacted with women, and women’s rights. Nasser banned all political parties, which included women’s organizations with a political agenda. This resulted in the imprisonment of several feminist leaders, including the influential Islamist feminist Zeinab al-Ghazali. al-Ghazali advocated for women’s rights, but also advocated that women’s primary duty was to serve their nation as good wives and mothers. Increased activism by feminists from 1952 – 1954 served to convince the state that it had to address women’s issues in

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102 For a detailed argument on this see Pollard, Nurturing the Nation, 189-204.
104 Leila Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam, 197.
order to gain women’s support for the revolution, and so the state took on a form of “state feminism,” and bundled women’s rights into its agenda.\textsuperscript{105}

Nasser’s policies called for equality of the masses, and women won the right to vote, albeit in a limited fashion,\textsuperscript{106} and they did see heightened access to higher education and job opportunities. These new concessions contributed to the image of the state as modern, and capable of independence. Mervat Hatem, who has written several articles on women’s rights in the Nasser era, has noted that “the provision of employment, education, health, and other social benefits to sizable sections of the female population also contributes to the progressive image of the state.”\textsuperscript{107}

While Nasser’s new state was predominantly secular and ushered in a new era of increasingly public life for women, it could not, and perhaps even would not, rid the country of older patriarchal traditions. Hatem argues that the ways in which women were educated, and the jobs which they were channelled into, were extensions of their domestic duties, in that they continued to care for small children and men. While higher education was increasingly accessible for women, home economics, sewing and domestic work continued to be a component of women’s education, serving to remind women of their domestic calling. Women were also encouraged to take up jobs that involved traditionally female roles which included nurturing others, such as healthcare, early childcare education, and secretarial work, which generally required working in the service of a man.\textsuperscript{108} Hatem notes that while the state promoted equality of the sexes, it

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\textsuperscript{106} Ahmed, \textit{Women and Gender in Islam}, 205
\textsuperscript{108} Hatem, “Secularist and Islamic Discourses,” 88.
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also continued to uphold the patriarchal nature of the older Islamic personal status laws from the 1920s and 30s. These laws made it difficult for women to initiate divorce, and essentially defined women as the economic dependents of men. According to Hatem, the impetus behind the laws was that women were “unstable emotional beings that could not be trusted with the right to divorce.”

Furthermore, as mentioned, the state demobilized Egyptian feminist organizations by banning political parties and imprisoning several prominent feminist leaders.

Laura Bier has noted that the state took on a paternalistic approach to women in its attempts to control the rising population. Initially, the state attempted a socio-economic approach in the hopes that improvements in living standards would help the country to “modernize” and slow reproduction. These techniques included state provision of basic amenities such as running water, toilets and electric lights which were aimed at raising the standard of living, thereby causing the birth rate to drop and eradicate the “backwardness” of the nation. When this failed, in the late 1950s and early 60s, the state moved to encourage birth control and family planning. This was couched in the language of familial obligations, which created a “homology between the individual family and the national family headed and cared for by the paternal state.”

The move towards birth control had its roots in the early 1950s and concerns regarding the modernity and progress of the state. Bier notes that in a 1954 press conference, the minister of Social Affairs expressed his concerns that unregulated overproduction (which was typically associated with the lower classes) could create a nation of weaklings and

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beggars who would be incapable of acting as productive citizens. Ultimately Bier argues that state concerns regarding birth control was one of many state measures that “aimed at reshaping the spaces, practices, and affective bonds of Egyptian family life in a manner that was quantitatively (if not qualitatively) unprecedented in Egyptian history.” It was part of the state’s attempt to create new types of families and a “modern” society, linking women’s bodies to reproduction, modernity and citizenship.

The erratic and ambiguous attitude towards women’s status, and the remnants of sentiments from the earlier half of the century which placed women’s primary role as wife and mothers, are visible in *Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul*. On the one hand, we see Nadia as the model wife and mother, and on the other, Nana as an independent woman who has chosen an unconventional route for her life as a dancer and police informant. In the first half of the film we often see Nadia in and around the hospital where she works. However, once they marry and have a daughter, we never see her at the hospital again. After marriage she is predominantly shown in the home with their daughter, occasionally in an apron. During a dinner scene with Magdy’s friend, Nadia and Magdy appear very much in love, and Magdy’s friend comments that it is as if they are still on their honeymoon. Clearly, Nadia is a doting wife. When their daughter comes down the stairs, presumably awoken from a sleep, and asks for “Mamma,” Nadia immediately gets up and goes to her, indicating she is a good mother. In the following scene we see her in the home, in an apron, playing with their daughter.

Later in the film, Nana appears at Magdy’s workplace in order to remind him of their last drink together. He tells her to leave, and she does, only to go to his house to

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visit his wife. Here we see Nadia’s daughter slurping soup, and Nadia, the good mother, teaching her that this is not polite. It seems as if she has fulfilled the ideal of an educated, working woman who gives up her work to assume the dutiful role of a good wife and mother, raising the next generation of the nation. Nadia is of the “private” sphere, meaning that she is shown mostly in the home, as a wife and mother.

Conversely, Nana the dancer is often shown in public spaces, engaging in both social and economic activity. She approaches men in clubs and is seen on the street and in nightclubs performing and socializing. When she is in her own apartment she is with Magdy, seducing him. She is a woman who clearly must have been educated and working in the same manner as Nadia, but rejected the supposedly ideal lifestyle of a modest woman who retires to the private sphere. Furthermore, in contrast to Nadia she does not appear the ideal wife and mother. During Nana’s visit to Nadia, Nana openly and cheerfully tells Nadia that she had been married, but is now divorced. Nadia says she is sorry to hear it, but Nana laughs and says it was a terrible marriage, and she barely got out of it. This is enigmatic, but telling, as divorce can be considered shameful, depending on the circumstance. If a man is abusive or does not support his wife then a woman may be pitied, but divorce is usually something to be avoided.116

116 Nawaal El Sadaawi notes that, amongst the peasant classes, often if a woman attempts to leave her husband for mistreatment and return to her own family, the men of her family will return to her husband in order to avoid the shame of divorce. See Nawaal El Sadawi, The Nawal El Saadawi Reader (London, Zed Books Ltd, 1997), 89. Hoodfar says that women avoid divorce for two primary reasons, firstly because children legally belong to their fathers and women do not want to risk losing them and secondly because it is often difficult for a woman with children to remarry. Hoodfar, Between Marriage, 76. Marcia Claire Inhorn notes that, even in cases where women have legitimate right to divorce their husbands, such as in the case of a man’s infertility, they are “expected not to exercise this option – which, according to women, speaks of their superior devotion, humanity and asl (upbringing).” See Marcia Claire Inhorn, Infertility and Patriarchy: the Cultural Politics of Gender and Family Life in Egypt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 124.
As mentioned earlier, it was also extremely difficult for women to obtain a divorce in the 1950s, as the family law court system was one which favoured men over women. After changes to the divorce laws in the 1920s, in order to obtain divorce women would usually have to provide evidence of refusal of financial support, incurable defects contracted by the man after marriage, or have a stipulation in their marriage contract that they had a right to divorce. Otherwise men must initiate the divorce. For Samia to be so cavalier about her divorce in *Maw'id ma' al-Majhul* indicates that she may not take the shameful nature of divorce very seriously. It also suggests her marriage was either a very bad situation, or that she was in a situation prior to the marriage in which she could assert her independence and stipulate her right to divorce in her marriage contract.

The cavalier attitude that Nana demonstrates towards her marriage may be a pun of sorts on Samia Gamal’s real life turbulent love affairs. The audience would probably have known of Samia’s scandalous and short-lived marriage to Texas oilman Sheppard King III. The magazine *Life* reported in 1951 that the two met at one of Samia’s performances in Paris, and that after her show they “went on a round of nightclubs and at dawn he proposed to her. There followed 17 wonderful days, noisily at first, but ‘the last three nights we just stayed home with a bottle of Scotch and talked.’” Then Sheppard called in the press so that U.S. newspaper readers might share his joy.” Sheppard’s mother actually threatened to disinherit him if he married Samia. Their brief marriage and subsequent divorce was much publicized in American magazines such as *Time* and *Life*, as evidenced in the following details of their marriage. It is possible Egyptian magazines also published articles, given the aforementioned reference to the two-page

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spread in Al-Kawakib which detailed Samia’s performance in New York’s Latin Quarter. King sent the divorce papers to Samia while she was visiting in Egypt. He had become engaged to a younger Turkish dancer while Samia was away. One potential reason for their divorce may actually have been Samia’s career, and her inability to retire to the private sphere of the home, away from her very public life as a dancer. In June of 1953, a year and a half after their marriage, Time noted that the two had split, but were reconciled after Sheppard met with Samia’s lawyer and agreed to allow her to fly back to Egypt once a year to film movies. Not long afterwards Sheppard said he was tired of “playing cat and mouse” with Samia and announced that he was “throwing her over for another torso-tosser named Nejla Ates, a 21-year-old Turk” who also happened to be a dancer. Samia’s rumoured affairs with both King Farouk and Farid al-Atrash would also be known to her audience. Samia’s own failed marriage and affairs suggest that in real life, as in Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul, because of her career she was unable, or unwilling, to be a wife and mother such as Nadia.

Another scene in which Nana and Nadia are contrasted comes when Nana overhears Nadia arrange to meet her brother in secret. Nana promises Nadia she will not tell Magdy, but once Nadia is gone, Nana calls Magdy, and insists he come to her apartment to hear something very important. This encounter is one that is indicative of


122 Moubayed, Steel & Silk, 525.
the title of the film, as Magdy and Nana have a *mawʿid*, an encounter or rendezvous, regarding unknown matters. Variants on the word *mawʿid* with the same root can also mean threat, or menace. There is certainly an element of danger in their rendezvous, and the *majhul* (something unknown) is clear as well.

When Magdy arrives, Nana is lounging on her couch in negligee. Nana flirts with him but he resists. Their conversation is as follows:

Magdy: Can you tell me what this very important and dangerous subject you called me for is?
Nana: Any subject between the two of us, if we are alone, is dangerous and important. Come sit beside me.
Magdy: Is this what you have to say?
Nana: You can’t bear to sit even for five minutes? (Nana gets up sulkily)
Magdy: speak up or I will have to leave.
Nana: What can I be next to Nadia? I am nothing compared to her.
Magdy: Don’t mention her name.
Nana: Don’t think for a second your wife is a model amongst women.
Magdy: She may be your inferior in many things but she’s my wife.
Nana: Do you love her?
Magdy: Didn’t I marry her?
Nana: It’s not a rule. [Implying that you need not love someone to marry them] Is she as loyal to you as you are to her?
Magdy: Don’t forget she’s your friend, and opened her house to you.
Nana: Don’t forget she stole you from me.
Magdy: You understand wrong.
Nana: I called you here to open your eyes. Nadia Hanem is betraying you.\(^1\)

Sharif smacks Nana but as he is leaving she tells him the address of the motel where he can find Nadia with another man. It is not revealed to Sharif, and it is unclear whether Nana herself knows, that the other man is actually Nadia’s brother and Nadia is not truly having an affair.

What is notable about this scene, aside from the shock of seeing the iconic Samia Gamal being smacked, is that Magdy tells Nana his wife may be inferior to her in many

\(^{1}\) Hanem is a title used for elite women, meaning “Lady.” In this context Nana says “Lady Nadia” sarcastically, as she is implying that Nadia is not behaving in a lady-like fashion by having an affair.
ways. It does not appear that this comment is made sarcastically. It is unclear if he
means Nadia is less than Nana in the sense that Nana is famous, or rich, or if she is less
than Nana as a person. Regardless, it implies that despite being a dancer, Nana is
superior to Nadia in some way. This recalls the nurse’s comment from earlier in which
she says Nana comes to the hospital to “show off.” While “showing off” is something
that the nurse says disdainfully, as showing off is immodest and impolite, and in
particular showing off being a famous dancer is particularly shameless, it also indicates
that Nana has something worth boasting about.

The result of their encounter is that Magdy catches Nadia alone in a hotel room (she
has just met her brother who is subsequently arrested for the murder of Magdy’s brother)
and he smacks her the same way he smacked Nana, creating a parallel between the two
women. Although Nadia explains and shows Nana a note from her brother, he thinks that
her brother is guilty of killing his brother, and that she has known all along. He kicks her
out of his house and says she is no longer his wife, and he retains custody of their
daughter.

In an interesting twist, Nadia turns to Nana for shelter. Nana offers her assistance
and says she will try to assist Nadia in reconciling with Magdy. Through the lead
investigator Magdy discovers that Nadia’s brother is really innocent, and Magdy wants to
reconcile, but does not know where Nadia has gone. We discover that the men involved
with the embezzlement scheme and murder of Magdy’s brother actually work closely
with Magdy, and manage to convince Nadia to take her daughter and come with him.
Nana sees Nadia and the girl enter the men’s car, and follows them to a secluded estate in
the countryside.
While trying to see where the men take Nadia, Nana is also grabbed by the guards and all three women are placed in an underground room under the observation of a guard. The guard is a large, dark-skinned man dressed as a peasant. He is listening to old Egyptian music and making tea in a pot. He does not appear particularly bright or articulate, and he readily falls for Nana’s flirting in her attempts to save Nadia and the girl.

The way in which the thug is portrayed serves as a contrast to the other, more modern portrayals of Nana, Nadia and Magdy. As mentioned earlier, Nana dances to Western music, drives a new car, and wears modern clothing. Magdy is modern, as he has been to Europe for school, and wears Western clothing. Nadia is modern, as she worked in the hospital and also wears modern clothing. These three all represent facets of a modern Egypt, while the thug appears to be a representative of Egypt’s uneducated, “backwards” past.

Nana hikes up her skirt and crosses her legs, which clearly gets the guard excited. He tries to grab her and kiss her, and Nana motions to Nadia and the girl to run. The women are caught at the door, but Nana throws a pot of boiling tea in the guard’s face and all three women try to run. Nana is quickly saved by the police, but Nadia and the daughter end up on a boat, attempting to hide from the big, backwards guard. In the midst of this, the police tell Magdy that Nana is actually a police informant who has been helping them to break the murder case. Magdy thanks Nana, and then goes to save Nadia and his daughter.

A battle ensues between Magdy and the traditionally clothed thug but the police manage to intervene and shoot the thug. We do not actually see Magdy reunite with his
wife and daughter, although it is clear they have been saved. Instead, we see Magdy and Nana together at the end of the film, standing by the side of the road next to the water.

The final scene goes as follows:

Magdy: So you were undercover this whole time?
Nana: That was the one thing you couldn’t know.
Magdy: So pursuing me was an act, then?
Nana: Not always. I really did love you at one point. Goodbye.
Magdy gets into a boat and Samia speaks again.
Nana: Try to forget me.
Magdy: And if I don’t?
Nana: I’ll file a complaint.

We then see Magdy watching Nana enigmatically as she walks to her car and drives away. Once she is out of sight, he turns and the audience sees him develop a slow smile.

Magdy’s own sweet wife and daughter, despite having just been saved, are nowhere to be seen. Triumphant music plays in the background. This enigmatic ending, coupled with Magdy’s earlier comments regarding Nadia as Nana’s inferior, and the nurse implying Nana was showing off, suggests that Nana is in some way admirable, if not respectable. However, while Magdy may deem her worthy of esteem, she may not yet be worthy of marriage. Although in an earlier scene Magdy tells his wife Nadia they are no longer married, the implication at the end of the film is that he will return to Nadia, rather than rekindle his relationship with Nana.

The revelation that Nana has been working as a police informant is particularly interesting, as it allows for the rehabilitation of her character to some extent at the end of the film. While throughout the film the audience is led to believe that she is a femme fatale as she attempts to separate Magdy and Nadia and seduce Magdy to come back to her, at the end it seems we are to assume that she has infiltrated Magdy’s life not to
destroy his marriage, but to aid the police. What exactly her role with the police was to be is unclear, and why it was necessary for her to set Magdy up to catch Nadia in a secret meeting with her brother is not answered. It appears that the audience is meant to accept her work with the police as an explanation for her wrong-doings, although it does not explain her affair with Magdy prior to his marriage to Nadia, and the re-opening of the murder case. Her situation as a nurse-turned-dancer-turned police informant, and her ambiguous status at the end of the film suggest that the mawʿid maʿ al-Majhul of the film is Magdy’s rendezvous with a different kind of woman, one who defies elite and state ideals of womanhood and follows an unconventional path. In order to understand the enigmatic ending of the film, it is also useful to have a greater understanding of Samia Gamal’s on and off screen character. In her own life Samia defied convention (as noted in regards to her affairs and marriage) and it is not unlikely that her off-screen persona is related to her on-screen persona in Mawʿid maʿ al-Majhul.

**Samia Gamal**

As mentioned in the introduction, Samia’s character in Mawʿid maʿ al-Majhul is at odds with many of her previous film roles in which she plays a “good girl” dancer, or at least a dancer whose virtue is somehow reclaimed at the end.124 Samia’s film persona, as well as her media persona, would have been well-known to her audience. Samia’s first film appearance was in the 1941 film Victory of Youth (Intisar al-Shabab) with the famous singer Farid al-Atrash. Her career took off after a series of films produced by al-

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124 Roberta Dougherty makes note of one of Samia’s films from the 1954, *The Beast (al-Wahsh)* in which Samia’s character goes “unreconstructed” as the adulterous lover of an opium addict and thief. Dougherty notes that Samia made an almost identical film six years later, *Prince of the Night (Abu al-Layl)*, 1960 in which she is reclaimed in the end when she has a change of heart. See Roberta Dougherty, “Dance and the Dancer in Egyptian Film,” *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism & Harem Fantasy* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2005), 163-164.
Atrash in the late 1940s and early 1950s, all of which portrayed Samia in a positive light. Rihab Kassatly Bagnole says that, while Tahiya Karioka took on roles that portrayed her as a femme fatale (she seduces young men away from their work, school and family obligations), in her early years Samia Gamal rejected this image, and represented the new woman, a feminist who believed in her potential, equality, and her right to work and prosper.\footnote{Bagnole, “Imaging the Almeh,” 219.} While I believe such a strong assertion requires more evidence of Samia’s own beliefs beyond the films that Bagnole analyzes, which do not address Samia’s convictions, or even those of her characters, her later roles do present more complex characters than her earlier films with Farid.

Following the 1952 revolution, Samia’s roles took on more serious issues as films generally did,\footnote{Joel Gordon’s notes that the Nasser era ushered in a shift from “melodramatic” films to “social realism,” or a change from commercial and dramatic films to films that dealt with more serious social issues. These changes were already taking place prior to the revolution, but Gordon suggests the involvement of the revolutionary government may have hastened the process. Gordon, Revolutionary Melodrama, 31. However, it can be difficult to differentiate completely between the two genres as melodramas could address serious social issues and realists were often commercial.} and in particular, ones that questioned the respectability of dancers and women’s roles. Take, for example, the film *Cigarette and a Glass* (*Sigara wa Kas*, 1955). Samia plays a famous dancer who gives up her career to be a dutiful wife, but cannot give up her memories of her past, continuing to drink and smoke until she almost kills her own daughter. Generally, though, Samia’s films end happily in classic melodramatic style and even in *Cigarette and a Glass* we are expected to understand that Samia has given up her memories and that all will be well.\footnote{For more on the genre of melodrama, see Gordon’s Revolutionary Melodrama, 99. For an examination of a film in which Samia’s character is not a “good” girl belly dancer, see Roberta Dougherty’s “Dance and Dancer in Egyptian film,” Orientalism, Transnationalism & Harem Fantasy, eds. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2005).}
Certain scenes from *Maw’id maʿ al-Majhul* may recall *Cigarette and a Glass* to the audiences’ minds. After Nana performs in the nightclub she sits and has a drink, one that appears to be alcohol. It seems likely that she and Magdy continue to drink and dance late into the evening, as we see them slow dancing rather clumsily on a nearly empty dance floor. Later, when Magdy, Nadia and the lead inspector encounter Nana at the club, she is smoking and drinking. *Maw’id maʿ al-Majhul* is the opposite of *Cigarette and a Glass* in that in *Maw’id maʿ al-Majhul*, Samia gives up the chance for marriage and a family in order to be a dancer, while in *Cigarette and a Glass* she gives up dancing to be the model wife and mother.

Samia’s change in roles could be due to several factors. As noted, films generally shifted towards “social realism.” Secondly, Samia no longer made films with Farid al-Atrash, and began taking on roles with various directors. Third, by 1958 Samia’s character would have been well-established in the press and through her film roles. She would have been well positioned to take on roles that tested the boundaries of respectability, particularly given the ability of directors to draw on her previous roles and off-screen character.

A small sampling of the star magazine *Al-Kawakib* suggests that the media were highly involved in constructing Samia’s off-screen, character, career and capacity to be viewed as an actress of good moral character, rather than just a shameful nightclub dancer. Gamal appeared numerous times in *Al-Kawakib* from 1949 to 1953, and her photo often appeared more than once in each month’s issue. Samia’s character was touted as humorous and irresistible, a jokester and a free spirit, white of heart, sensitive,
reflective and a doting wife and mother.\textsuperscript{128} This is particularly interesting given that at this time Gamal was neither wife nor mother. Joel Gordon notes that the power of the media, and in particular the power of the editor of \textit{Al-Kawakib}, to craft the careers of actors was extremely significant.\textsuperscript{129} It is likely that this media representation enabled dancers to blur the lines between respectability, honour and shame in their film roles, and to question what and who were truly respectable.

Samia’s popularity may also be due in part to her rags to riches Cinderella story, which is one that would likely appeal to her audience. She came from a lower class background, and it is common knowledge amongst Egyptians that she began her career dancing in a popular nightclub, eventually rising up to perform in films. Samia`s story is typical of other stars of her era who rose from poverty to represent the Egyptian nation, such as the singers Abdel Halim Hafez and Umm Kulthum. As noted, the status of the peasant was elevated in the early half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century as being more “authentically Egyptian” than elites who had become Westernized.\textsuperscript{130}

Furthermore, the director of \textit{Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul}, Henri Barakat, had worked with Samia Gamal on several occasions,\textsuperscript{131} and he is noted as being one of the most prominent mainstream directors to frequently address feminist issues. Viola Shafik, author of several articles and books on Arab cinema, notes that outspoken feminist films “advocated for female education and professionalism, rejecting seclusion and ignorance while juxtaposing these binarisms to a nationalist framework in which female liberation

\textsuperscript{128} “Samia Gamal,” \textit{Al-Kawakib}, July 1949, 83.
\textsuperscript{129} Gordon, \textit{Revolutionary Melodrama}, 36.
\textsuperscript{131} Barakat’s films with Samia Gamal prior to \textit{Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul} include \textit{The Gente Lady} (Afrita Hanem, 1949), \textit{The Count of Monte Cristo} (Amir al-Antikam,1951) and \textit{Don’t Tell Anyone} (Mataqulsh Lahad, 1952). He also directed Tahiya Karioka’s 1950 film \textit{Shore of Love} (Shati al-Gharam).
was regarded as operative in achieving national independence and economic progress.”

Conversely, Shafik also notes that these films also tended to “exclude polysemic female identities at the same time. Motherhood, in particular, was constructed as the antithesis of the educated working woman.” While in *Maw‘īd ma’ al-Majhul* we see Nadia as a woman who stops working in order to become a wife and mother, Nana is polysemic, a complex character who fulfills a variety of conflicting roles, first as the educated, working woman, then as the femme fatale dancer, then as police informant and woman of ambiguous status and desirability.

Virginia Danielson, in her seminal work on the famous Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum, notes the ability of certain performers to transcend the stigmas attached to public performance. Danielson says that “displaying oneself as an actor on stage, as a singer of love songs, or, worst of all, as a dancer, was seen as an unworthy use of time not commensurate with dignified behaviour. By becoming a star performer one could overcome these prejudices.” It is possible that Samia was able to overcome some of the prejudices associated with being a dancer to a certain extent by becoming a star performer, but it would have been difficult to entirely transcend the stigmas associated with her profession.

The case of the singer Umm Kulthum is worthy of contrast to that of Samia Gamal and other dancers addressed in this thesis, as Umm Kulthum was also popular at the same time as the dancers. As mentioned above, Umm Kulthum, like Samia Gamal, came from

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a lower class background. However, Umm Kulthum’s public persona was carefully crafted, first by her father and then by herself, to be one of virtue and unquestionable reputation. In order to overcome the negative stigma of a female performing in public before men, as a child her father had her dress in a boy’s coat with a Bedouin head-covering when she performed. Since one of the stigmas associated with public performance was the potential presence of drugs and alcohol, Umm Kalthoum’s father made efforts to ensure her audience was not drunk or unruly during her performances. Furthermore, either her father or her brother always attended her to ensure that there was no question of her virtue, as prostitution was generally associated with female performers as well.

To contribute to her virtuous image, Danielson notes that Umm Kulthum would have been “recognized by her early audiences as min al-mashayik, reared among the shaykhs,” and she got her start reciting the Qur’an with her father and brother. Many of her songs have religious aspects to them. As she grew older, Umm Kulthum also emphasized her peasant roots, connecting herself to the Egyptian masses by constantly (and especially in the years following the revolution) identifying herself as one of the

135 Andrew Hammond, *Pop Culture in the Arab World: Arts, Politics and the Media*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 193. Samia was born Zainab Ibrahim Mahfuz in 1924 in Wana, a little Egyptian town and then shortly after her birth the family moved near the Khan el-Khalili market in Cairo. Umm Kulthum was the daughter of a poor village shaykh, and in her early years as a performer, her family was too poor to take public transportation so she would walk several kilometres to performances. See Danielson, *The Voice*, 25 and 28.

136 Danielson notes that as she grew more in command of her career, Umm Kulthum was “wary of the press and mindful of the need to control her public image.” Danielson, *The Voice*, 84.


138 Danielson, *The Voice*, 29. For example, when Umm Kulthum was fourteen years old, her father performed at a public house and during his performance became concerned about audience drunkenness. He made the owner promise that no alcohol would be served while his daughter was performing. Danielson, *The Voice*, 29.

139 Danielson, *The Voice*, 83.

Danielson argues that the image of the fellah in and being min al-mishayikh, were “close to the heart of the self-image of thousands of Egyptians in the twentieth century.”

The 1952 revolution inspired Egyptian artists to compose works that addressed the revolution. Both Danielson and Gordon note that Umm Kulthum and other performers almost immediately began to compose patriotic songs extolling the virtues of the revolution. Danielson also says that in the years between 1952 and 1960 “Umm Kulthum sang more national songs than at any other time in her life; they constituted almost 50 percent of her repertory.” The fact that films of the era address revolutionary ideologies, nationalism, peasantry and Egypt’s “traditional roots,” and particularly in the case of the next chapter on Tamr Hinna which I argue is a metaphor for the revolution, is not unusual, and was in keeping with a large body of artistic work that did so.

The contrast between Umm Kulthum, Samia Gamal and the other dancers addressed later in this thesis, is partly a matter of reputation and virtue, factors that define respectability. Many dancers garnered their fame early in their careers in large part because of their display of sexuality, and often the characters in their films could be incredibly sexual, as is the case of Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul. Conversely, Umm Kulthum garnered respect for her voice and restraint of her sexuality, as evidenced by the boy’s

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142 Danielson, The Voice, 191. Danielson also notes that while Umm Kulthum drew on the positive qualities of these stereotypes, there were also negative ones associated with them, such as stubbornness ignorance, and that these stereotypes are complex. I will address this in more detail in the next chapter.
143 Gordon notes that in the weeks and months following the revolution nearly all Egypt’s poets and composers collaborated to create songs about the “new era.” See Gordon, Nasser: Hero, 9. Danielson says that Umm Kulthum was on vacation when the revolution occurred and immediately rushed back to Cairo to commission composers to create a nationalist song. See Danielson, The Voice, 161.
144 Danielson, The Voice, 164.
clothing she wore in her early years. While the media may have presented Samia as charismatic and a good wife and mother, it is unlikely that her audience would forget that she had begun her career as a nightclub dancer, and that in most of her films she appeared in stomach and leg baring costumes, dancing in a seductive manner. Umm Kulthum, on the other hand, always appeared modestly dressed, restraining her sexuality rather than displaying it.

Conclusion

Films that feature dancers either as, or juxtaposed to, wives and mothers further complicate depictions of the working woman and the ideal wife and mother as well as the concept of the New Woman. The presence of a dancer immediately calls into question notions of morality and respectability. As mentioned, dancers have been known to play “the other woman” or the femme fatale in Egyptian films. In these cases the dancer is cast off in favour of the modest woman with traditional values, therefore heightening and enforcing proper values for women. While in *Maw’id ma’ al-Majhul* Nana the dancer is rejected in favour of Nadia, the modest wife and mother, it is Nana who Magdy watches at the end of the film. The implication that Nana is a woman worthy of esteem is enigmatic and ambiguous. It seems to reflect a more lenient attitude towards women who operate in the public sphere, and women of a supposedly lower moral and social classes, than other films that contrast modest women with immodest women or that uphold a type of “virgin-whore” dichotomy.\(^{145}\)

Ultimately, what I am suggesting is that the ambiguous policies regarding the status of women, as well as the increasing appearance of women in the public sphere,

\(^{145}\) For examples see previous notes on films such as *Shore of Love* and *Layla the Schoolgirl*. In both these films a sexually aggressive women is rejected in favour of a more modest woman who stays home, manages the household help and takes care of her husband.
created an atmosphere in which women’s roles in public and private life were in question. Furthermore, the policies of the state encouraged the abolition of class divisions, and promoted the elevation of the lower classes. All this combined with Samia Gamal’s unusually esteemed status as a dancer-actress and her services to the nationalist cause in the film appear to indicate that in 1958 the status of public and private women, or independent women who appear alone in public spaces on a regular basis and women who are primarily in the home, was ambivalent and complicated.
Chapter 2: *Tamr Hinna* and the Girl of the Country

Ghaziya, or *ghawazi* in the plural, is a term used to refer to the lowest class of public dancers in Egypt, also sometimes translated more simply as “gypsy.” In contrast to the ‘*alima* (singular), or ‘*awalim* (the plural referring to someone who is knowledgeable), who performed inside for private functions and weddings, the *ghaziya* were historically considered too shameful to be allowed into the homes of the elites. *Ghaziya* is often synonymous with prostitute as a result of the public displays of their bodies and history of making use of public dancing to solicit customers for paid sex.\(^{146}\)

In the 1957 film *Tamr Hinna* (*Henna Flower*) the circus performer-turned-dancer-turned-actress Naima Akif plays the role of a *ghaziya* who dances in a roving *mulid* (festival) with a group of *ghawazi*, or gypsies. Her low social class status is made much of throughout the film and she is consistently and contemptuously referred to as a *ghaziya* by members of the social elite.

Despite her supposedly disgraceful status as a *ghaziya*, *Tamr Hinna* ultimately denounces the upper class for its immorality. However, her own moral status is complicated by her complicity in deception, and her acceptance of gifts from both a rich father and son despite her love for another man. Class-crossed romance and the status and morality of the classes are ambiguous matters in *Tamr Hinna*.

In order to understand how *Tamr Hinna* addresses concepts of class, I suggest that the film may be construed as a loose metaphor for the 1952 Free Officers’ Revolution.

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\(^{146}\) See Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, Volume 1* (London: John Murray, 1871), 240. Karin van Nieuwkerk relates that dancers in Egypt in the twentieth century were considered suspect for exposing themselves unveiled to the male gaze. Karin van Nieuwkerk, ‘*A Trade Like Any Other*’ Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 27 and 155.
and the first few years of their rule. *Tamr Hinna* was released in 1957, five years after the 1952 Egyptian Revolution led by a group of military men known as The Free Officers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a variety of socio-economic and political frustrations led to the revolution. One of these factors was the perceived complicity of Egyptian elites in the British occupation of Egypt, and the suppression of the masses, as the elites stood to gain financially as well as in positions of power and status from the British. The revolutionary regime moved swiftly, if not entirely successfully, to eliminate social stratification.

Tamr Hinna’s condemnation of the elites of the film may be considered a condemnation of the complicity of the corrupt elite landowning class with the British occupation of Egypt. While Tamr Hinna is a *ghaziya*, she also represents the Egyptian peasantry in various ways. In *Tamr Hinna* the Egyptian peasantry are contrasted with the *effendiya*, or the pre-Revolutionary Westernized elite. Many films of the post-revolutionary period made use of class-crossed romance and class struggle as a metaphor for the revolution and the new ideals of equality. Joel Gordon has written on this in his article “Class-Crossed Lovers: Popular Film and Social Change in Nasser’s New Egypt,” and argues that musical films with class-crossed romance can be considered, on occasion, as social realism, as they “visually represent the dramatic social and cultural transformations propagated and inspired by Nasserism and its dreams of a new progressive, independent Egypt.” The plot of *Tamr Hinna* follows a trajectory similar to that in many of the films Gordon provides as examples, and he even makes use of one of Naima Alif’s earlier films, *Four Girls and an Officer* (1954), to portray the ambiguity


present in films with class-crossed romances. In this film, Naima does not play a dancer, but an orphan in a girls’ school who falls for the officer who is supposed to watch the girls. Eventually Naima’s character is adopted into an elite family after initially pretending to actually be a family member, and is able to reconcile with her love. In *Tamr Hinna*, the dancer also pretends to be a member of the elite, but subverts the reconciliation with her elite love by returning to her low-class lover.

In order to understand the class conflict and Tamr Hinna’s condemnation of the upper-class on moral grounds, I suggest that Naima Akif’s character was constructed as the *bint al-balad* (literally girl of the country, also used to refer to peasantry, lower and lower-middle class people), both on screen in *Tamr Hinna* and her other films, and off screen in the media. As a bint al-balad, Naima symbolizes the morality of the *awlad al-balad* (children of the country, also known as the peasantry, or *fellahin*), generally contrasted by the morality – or immorality – of the *awlad al-zawat* (children of the elite) and the *effendiya* (a term that fluctuates as I will explain later in this chapter). As noted in the previous chapter, in the first half of the 20th century, and in the early years of Nasser’s rule, the *awlad al-balad* were often seen as representatives of Egypt’s traditional past, as well as elevated as symbols of the true Egyptian values, the “salt of the earth.” In the 1940s and 1950s the peasant classes were elevated in newspapers and cinema as a symbol of Egypt’s “authentic” identity. The famous singer Umm Kulthum built her image on her *fellahin* roots, as noted in the previous chapter. Although Nasser’s government glorified the “peasant” as well, they were to be drawn towards modernity, and “peasant culture” was something to be transcended.

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149 Kholoussi, *Fallahin*, 288.
Tamr Hinna represents Nasser’s ideal of a new, progressive, independent and egalitarian Egypt through a class-crossed struggle and romance. In the process, the morally questionable dancer is raised from ghaziya to bint al-balad, thereby becoming a representative of the Egyptian masses. However, throughout the film the idealized image of a traditional Egyptian peasantry with good moral values as defined by elites is called into question. The morally questionable dancer and her kin are used to complicate the image of the ideal Egyptian peasant and the dancer becomes an ambiguous representative of Egypt’s “traditional” past. Any notion of a dichotomous moral divide between the classes in Tamr Hinna is complicated by Tamr Hinna’s own questionable moral status as a ghaziya who accepts expensive gifts from both rich father and son. As in the film Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul, in Tamr Hinna a dancer is used to portray ambiguous and complicated social issues in 1950s Egypt.

In order to make my argument that Naim a Akif’s character is constructed as a bint al-balad, and that Tamr Hinna is a commentary on the class divide, I will first provide an explanation of the bint al-balad, and how both Tamr Hinna and Naima Akif were constructed as bint al-balad. Tamr Hinna is similar to many of Naima’s other film roles, and just as we saw with Samia Gamal in the previous chapter, her credibility as a dancer-actress was built up through a series of film roles and in the media. I will consider the importance of the Egyptian star system in the development of the film’s characters, and through a close examination of the film I will consider the ways in which the mulid workers and Tamr Hinna interact with the concept of the awlad al-balad and what this means for the nation.
Overview of the Film

Tamr Hinna performs with a group of singers and musicians in a *mulid*, amongst a group that appears to be landless and nomadic. The *mulid* workers live in tents and the property they operate on belongs to a rich landowner. Tamr Hinna is in a relationship with Hassan, played by the well-known actor Rushdi Abaza. Hassan runs the *mulid*’s muscleman game, and essentially acts as Tamr Hinna’s fiancé / protector / procurer. The son of the landowner, Ahmed, is in love with Tamr Hinna, and wants to marry her, despite the fact that his father has arranged a marriage for him and his cousin, a wealthy young woman whom Ahmed does not want to marry. Ahmed attempts to rendezvous with Tamr Hinna on several occasions, and comes to watch her dance in the *mulid*. Hassan’s jealousy of Ahmed eventually causes Tamr Hinna to run to Ahmed for protection.

Ahmed’s father has great contempt for the lower classes and in particular the *ghawazi* who operate on his land. Ahmed, for whom social class is less important, makes a bet with his father that rich and poor are equal, and it is only in clothing and mannerisms that the classes differ. When Tamr Hinna arrives at Ahmed’s doorstep, class conflict ensues when Ahmed and Tamr Hinna trick Ahmed’s father into thinking Tamr Hinna is really upper class. Unaware of the bet between father and son and prodded by Ahmed and her own friend, Tamr Hinna agrees to the deception. Taken in by the ruse about Tamr Hinna’s wealth and by her beauty, Ahmed’s father desires to marry Tamr Hinna himself. Ahmed’s cousin, his fiancé, discovers Tamr Hinna’s true identity as a *ghaziya* at the same time that Hassan plots to kill Tamr Hinna for having left him. The two conspire to reveal Tamr Hinna’s deception, which they accomplish at the end of the
film. Tamr Hinna learns of the bet between Ahmed and his father, and she denounces them for using her as a pawn.

In order to understand how Tamr Hinna can be considered a representative of the Egyptian peasantry and the lower class juxtaposed to the upper class, I will explore in what ways she is a bint al-balad.

The Bint al-Balad and Naima Akif

The terms bint al-balad (feminine), ibn al-balad (masculine) and awlad al-balad (plural) are often used to describe a woman, man or people who embody a variety of attributes that as a whole comprise characters often considered to represent the “true” Egyptian. In 1978 Sawsan Messiri explored these characteristics in Ibn al-balad: a concept of Egyptian identity and her description provides a broad overview and a place to begin the exploration of the awlad al-balad.151 Messiri says the term has

...no direct equivalent in English and therefore to accept only its literal meaning is misleading because the phrase conveys nuances that are perhaps understood best in specific contexts. .. in everyday usage it can have a variety of referents, such as a person who is usually dressed in a galabiyya (flowing gown), or who comes from a baladi (popular quarter), or someone who cannot be hoodwinked, or one who is never punctual, or one who is knowledgeable about folk traditions.152

Significantly, Messiri notes that during the British occupation of Egypt, and particularly in the early 20th century, the divide between the awlad al-balad and the effendiya and awlad al-zawat widened. After the 1952 revolution, led by the ibn al-balad, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the awlad al-balad came to be seen as the true

152 Messiri, Ibn al-Balad, 1.
representation of Egypt, and folk art, music and dance came to be the symbols of
Egyptian identity.153

Lila Abu-Lughod explores the character of the *ibn al-balad* in Egyptian television
and serials in her book *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt.*154
She says they are “the local guy, the salt of the earth, the poor but authentic Egyptian –
who had long stood for a set of admired behavioural traits and values in drama, literature,
film, and everyday life.”155 The figure of the *ibn al-balad* is also used in serials to deal
with issues of cultural identity. The *ibn* is “someone of modest or poor background and
rooted in what are known as the popular neighbourhoods, the crowded urban ‘traditional’
neighbourhoods, in older parts of the city where the rich do not live.” Abu-Lughod notes,
as does Messiri, that the *ibn al-balad* is usually contrasted with the *ibn al-zawat.* She
points out that the *ibn al-zawat* is portrayed in films of the ‘50s and ‘60s, “as corrupt and
inauthentic, because Westernized.”156

Karin van Nieuwkerk examined the role of the *bint al balad* as described
by Messiri in comparison to dancers in general. van Nieuwkerk found that dancers were not
generally perceived to be *banat al-balad* (plural form of *bint al-balad*) by Egyptians
because they exposed their bodies to the male gaze. They do, however, embody certain
characteristics of the *bint al-balad*, such as belonging to the lower-middle class, living in
popular quarters and working in independent nongovernmental jobs.157 van Nieuwkerk
found that, in general, the *awlad al-balad* “are perceived as highly knowledgeable about

154 Lila Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (Chicago: The University
155 Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood*, 138
156 van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade*, 139.
everyday life. They are *midarahin* – that is, alert, intelligent, and educated in the ways of the world – and *fahlawiyya*, clever and shrewd.\(^{158}\) The *abnaa al-balad* (the men) are generally assumed to have total control of their households, and their women do not go out without their husbands’ permission.\(^{159}\) Furthermore, *banat al-balad* (the women) generally wear the *melaya leff*, “a square of black cloth wrapped sari-like around the body, a multicolored headkerchief, high-heeled slippers, and, if possible, many golden bracelets.” They combine “coquetry and glamorous attire with a concern for reserve and modesty.”\(^{160}\)

While dancers seem to embody many of the characteristics of the *bint al-balad*, they are generally not afforded the level of respectability of a *bint al-balad*. van Nieuwkerk found that it was difficult for a dancer to be accepted as a *bint al-balad* because she exposes her body to men, is often assumed to be “spoiled” by the “lure of money,” and in the case of the nightclub dancer, she is considered to be “interested only in earning money.”\(^{161}\) I will come back to the matter of the *ibn al-balad* in contrast to the *ibn al-zawat* later in this chapter, but at present I will consider how Tamr Hinna and Naima Akif, as dancers on and off-screen, may be considered as *bint al-balad*.

**Tamr Hinna as a bint al-balad**

There are several examples from *Tamr Hinna* that demonstrate the ways in which Tamr Hinna is presented as a *bint al-balad*. Prior to becoming a member of the elite, if she is not in a dance costume Tamr Hinna always appears dressed as a *bint al-balad* and often makes use of her head scarf to modestly cover her face, yet this very gesture is

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\(^{158}\) van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade*, 111.
\(^{159}\) van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade*, 112.
\(^{160}\) van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade*, 112.
\(^{161}\) van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade*, 113.
often coquettish. Her ability to support those around her financially (as I will explain throughout this chapter) and her ability to manage the attentions of several men (albeit with detrimental results) suggest that she is also clever and shrewd, attributes of the *awlad al-balad*.

As for her dress, Tamr Hinna wears generally wears a flounced dress and headscarf with pompoms or flowers and when outside the *mulid* she makes use of her head scarf and *melaya leff* to cover her face periodically in modesty, and coquetry. For example, in order to warn Ahmed that Hassan plans to kill him, Tamr Hinna sneaks into Ahmed’s barn to steal a chicken. The security guards raise the alarm and wake Ahmed and his father. Ahmed’s father orders that she be locked in the barn until morning, when he will call the police. Ahmed sets her free, extracting a promise from her that she will meet with him and when she does, she dresses and behaves as a *bint al-balad*. She wears a flounced dress and head scarf, and although she often uses the scarf to cover her face modestly, it is done in a coquettish manner. Later, when Tamr Hinna and her friend, a tambourine player, flee Hassan, they are dressed as *bint al-balad*. Each time she sees Ahmed, Tamr Hinna periodically turns her face from Ahmed and draws her veil over her face. This recalls van Nieuwkerk’s description of the *bint al-balad* wearing the *melaya leff*, a square of black cloth wrapped sari-like around the body and a multicolored headkerchief, and the *bint al-balad’s* ability to combine coquetry and concern for reserve and modesty.\(^{162}\)

However, Tamr Hinna seems to be subject to the same problematic desires attributed to her profession by society that prevent a dancer from being viewed as a *bint al-balad*. Tamr Hinna does appear to be lured to an extent by Ahmed’s money, and gifts.

\(^{162}\) van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade*, 112.
Several times throughout the film Tamr Hinna argues with her friend from the *mulid* about Ahmed and his money. Tamr Hinna’s friend, played by the well-known actress Zeinat Sidqi, regularly reminds Tamr Hinna that Ahmed has money, and that he loves her, so she should be with him. She even at one point encourages Tamr Hinna to marry Ahmed’s father, as he is rich and wants her. For Zeinat, it is the money that is important. Each time Tamr Hinna hesitates, saying the she loves Hassan. However, this does not prevent her from accepting a gold watch from Ahmed and a ring from his father.

Not only does Tamr Hinna dress like a *bint al-balad*, she is clearly of a low economic status like the *ibn al-balad* of lower – middle class to lower class background. Although Tamr Hinna and the *mulid* workers are not farmers, they are landless peasants, aligning them with the *fellahin* (*fellahin* literally translates as peasants, but is also used to refer to city peasants and rural Egyptians). As noted in the previous chapter, prior to the revolution, the *fellahin* were often seen as representatives of Egypt’s idealized past, and portrayed in the media as symbols of Egypt’s “authentic” past. The peasants were held in contrast to the *awlad al-zawat*, Egypt’s Westernized and modern elite. Samia Kholoussi says the idealized *fellahin* were significant in developing Egyptian nationalism in the years leading up to the 1952 revolution. It was believed that “the unsullied goodness of the peasant ideal was aligned with true nationalist sentiments,” and the “peasant apathetic attitude was interpreted as steadfastness and a moral strength to deal with hardship.”

Walter Armbrust notes that although Nasser’s government glorified the “peasant” as well, they were to be drawn towards modernity, and “peasant culture” was something to be

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While some members of the elite glorified the fellahin, others viewed the peasant and rural culture as so far removed and isolated from “the civilized world,” and the “coarse hell of the countryside” was like a “ghoul waiting to ambush” the bourgeoisie and “swallow them up.”

Clearly there are conflicting views of the fellahin, and as both bint al-balad and shameful ghaziya, Tamr Hinna seems to represent the ambiguity surrounding the symbolism of the fellahin. Her status as a ghaziya is stressed throughout the film, setting her up as one of the lowest classes of society, socially, economically and morally. For example, when we first encounter Ahmed he pulls up to the mulid in a convertible car, steps out and announces to his companions that he is in love with a ghaziya. One of his associates, played by Istifan Rosti, warns Ahmed that ghawazi will take your heart and your money. Another of Ahmed’s compabions wears a tarbush, a gun slung over his shoulder, an oversized military jacket and a comically large moustache reminiscent of the Ottoman elite, continues to talk about thieves at the fair as the camera pans away. Later, when Ahmed and Tamr Hinna rendezvous, the two flirt and chase one another and Tamr Hinna pushes Ahmed out into the street, where he is almost run over by the very cousin that he is supposed to marry, Kawsar. Kawsar stops and contemptuously asks Ahmed who the dirty ghaziya is. There are several other references to Tamr Hinna as a ghaziya, but these are in reference to the gap between ghawazi and the elites, which I will address later in this chapter. I will now turn to the construction of Naima Akif’s character as a bint al-balad in the media and in her film roles.

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166 A tarbush is also known as a fez, a red hat with a tassel that sits atop of the head, typically worn by effendiya, or educated men, in the early half of the 20th century.
Naima Akif as a bint al-balad

Lila Abu-Lughod has noted the intimate knowledge that many Egyptians have of popular film stars, and that memories and feelings for an actor’s previous film roles are carried over into new roles. This works particularly strongly when directors and writers use the same actors over and over. The level of intimacy felt towards certain long-lived stars is immeasurable. The audience would have been well aware of Naima’s history as a performer and actress, all of which contribute to her ability to be recognized as a bint al-balad despite being a nightclub dancer.

While Tamr Hinna is called a ghaziya in Tamr Hinna, Naima Akif was actually an ‘alima, one of the highest classes of performers. As mentioned in the introduction, ‘alima is derived from the root ‘alim, which means knowledge. Historically, ‘awalim (plural), or alima (singular), refers to a female performer who was educated and trained in performing arts, such as singing, dancing and music. These women were considered more respectable than the ghawazi, who performed unveiled in public and were generally regarded as too shameful to be allowed inside the residences of the elite. Unlike the ghawazi, the ‘awalim performed indoors for women only in elite homes. In the first half of the 20th century, they began performing in public at weddings and sometimes at festivals. Those who classified themselves as ‘awalim, van Nieuwkerk found, usually did not perform in nightclubs.

While Naima did perform in nightclubs for a time, she was a highly trained performer, an ‘alima. Mustafa Darwish, the famous two time Egyptian film censor and long term film critic, relates that Naima’s father owned the famous Akif Circus, and that

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167 Abu-Lughod, Dramas of Nationhood, 229-231.
168 van Nieuwkerk, A Trade, 26.
169 van Nieuwkerk, A Trade, 52.
“at the age of four, she began her training as a trapeze artist. Growing into a beautiful young woman, she became an oriental dancer at Casino Badia Masabni.”

The media also likely played a role in the creation and dissemination of the idea of Naima as a *bint al-balad*. In the article “Prostitute for a Good Reason: Stars and Morality in Egypt” Viola Shafik considers the on and off screen representations of Egyptian film stars and how Egyptian movie stars’ “appearance and perception should be understood as a contradictory process of writing and reading.”

Shafik suggests that film stars’ characters were both “written by the industry and his/her consecutive film roles along with other mass-mediated texts and images such as press reviews,” while cautioning us against assuming that the images that were presented in the media and film were taken up wholesale by the entire viewership.

Like Samia Gamal, Naima was presented favourably in the media, and in Naima’s case, as a *bint al-balad*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the editor of *Al-Kawakib* wielded a significant amount of power in developing the personae of the stars, and Naima was no exception. For example, in 1949 *Al-Kawakib* reviewed Naima’s second film, *Lahalibo*. These reviews, one pre-release and one post-release, represent Naima as a *bint al-balad*, a respectable young actress and performer. The May 1949 issue of *Al-Kawakib* featured a full two-page article with photos of the filming of Naima’s second movie, *Lahalibo*. The article discusses the brilliance of the writer and director, Hussein Fawzy, Naima herself, the success of their recent film together, *al-ʾish wa al-Malh* (*Bread and Salt*) and the plotline of *Lahalibo*. The article praises *al-ʾish wa al-Malh*.

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172 Shafik, “Prostitute,” 712.
released in January of 1949, and says that Naima’s debut in it created “a bang that continues to resonate.” Furthermore, the writer says Naima is “attractive to look at, is elegant on screen, and compounds these attributes with a humility which lures the hearts of all the workers of the studio.”

We are told that when asked about her opinion of the new film, *Lahalibo*, “Naima answers in innocence, naivety and fun that it will be a brilliant surprise.” The adulation of Naima continues in another two-page review of *Lahalibo* after its release in Alexandria and Port Said in September of 1949. This description of Naima recalls van Nieuwkerk’s findings that the *bint al-balad* is considered to combine “coquetry and glamorous attire with a concern for reserve and modesty.” She is beloved by all, modest, and with a cheeky sense of humour.

The fact that the film received two reviews, both extremely lengthy, is rather exceptional, given that many Egyptian film releases received only a brief paragraph in the movie release section of *Al-Kawakib*. Naima also appeared on the cover of *Al-Kawakib*’s December issue as well as July 1951’s cover, clearly making her a favorite.

Naima’s husband, Hussein Fawzy, was also a significant factor in the construction of her character. While Naima’s performance career began long before she met Fawzy, it was he who wrote and directed eleven of her fourteen films, including *Tamr Hinna*. As noted in the previous chapter, van Nieuwkerk found that, in general, it was expected that dancers quit dancing after marriage, even if they married another entertainer. It was only acceptable to marry a dancer if she “repented,” that is, stops working. Even then, she...
is still suspect, as it is generally believed by the people van Nieuwkerk interviewed that she may decide to go back to work if her husband does not make enough money to keep her in the lifestyle she is accustomed to as a dancer, or that she is somehow unable to stop herself from dancing. This issue is also addressed in Tamr Hinna, as we will see, when the dancer’s fiancé is reluctant to marry her because it means she will stop dancing and stop earning money to support their band of performers.

It is possible that in order to combat the attitude that dancers must “repent” in order to be respectable, Fawzi cast Naima as a bint al-balad in several films. This would also enable Fawzi to maintain his own respectability for marrying a dancer. In many of the films in which Fawzy cast his wife, such as Lahalibo (1949), Four Girls and an Officer (1954), Tamr Hinna (1957) and I Love You Hassan (1958), she plays an orphan who must dance and perform in order to make a living. She is often pursued by a rich old man who attempts to convince her to “sell herself” in exchange for gifts and money. She vehemently rejects their offers, thereby maintaining her virtue. Generally the dancer is found to have an elite relative who finally takes her in, forgiving her past as a performer, as she has been virtuous all along. Her acceptance into the elite usually enables her to marry her true love, a man from the upper class.

Naima’s films represent a type of Cinderella story that likely would have appealed to her audience. Viola Shafik suggests that the rags to riches stories of dancers of the 1950s, along with their high standard of performance, may have “temporarily added to the positive evaluation of their profession, at least in some narratives.” Naima’s on and off screen Cinderella stories may have added to her capacity to be seen positively. Tamr Hinna follows a similar plotline to Naima’s other movies, but the typical love

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180 Shafik, Popular Egyptian Cinema, 165.
triangle becomes a love hexagon that involves Tamr Hinna, Hassan, Ahmed, his father and his cousin/fiancé. In Tamr Hinna the class-conflict is not resolved at all because the dancer returns to her low-class fiancé and continues dancing.

Naima is not the only actress of note in the film whose character the audience would know. In fact, almost all of the characters in the film had long theatrical and cinematic histories that used in the film. While they did not always play the same role, they often played a particular type of character more often than others.

The Egyptian Star System

The other actors and actresses of Tamr Hinna act as an homage of sorts to Egypt’s star system. Almost all of the actors and actresses that appear in the film were prominent in Egyptian theatre and cinema of the time, and the audience would have been aware of their histories, as they would with Naima Akif. Furthermore, their characters in Tamr Hinna draw on their previous roles. This is not unusual, as early Egyptian cinema relied on a core group of actors who had transitioned from theatre to cinema, and films often made use of an actor’s fame to add to their particular character in a film.\(^\text{181}\)

Rushdi Abaza plays Hassan and would have been well-known for his roles as a masculine man, one which he certainly plays in Tamr Hinna. Mustafa Darwish notes that prior to playing the lead role in Bahr al-Gharam (Sea of Love, 1955), also with Naima Akif, because of his muscles and good looks, Abaza had been relegated to being cast as

\(^{181}\) For a good example of this, see the film The Flirtation of Girls (Ghazal al-Banat, 1949). The film stars popular actors Layla Murad and Naguib al-Rihani. In one scene they knock on a random door, only to have it answered by the famous actor Youssef Wahby, playing himself. He happens to have the famous singer-actor Muhammad Abdel Wahab recording with his band in his house. Wahab also plays himself. Naguib’s character comically addresses the famous actors. Layla’s love interest is played by Anwar Wagdy, her real life two-time husband.
either a “playboy or villain.” In real life, he had aspired to become a body-building athlete—which may explain his masculine roles.

The mulid singer who sings while Tamr Hinna dances, and who plays Hassan’s sister Maissa, is Fayza Ahmed, a very popular singer of Syrian-Lebanese origin who arrived in Egypt in the 1950s. She came to Egypt along with many other popular artists from the Arab world in the wake of Nasser’s Arab nationalism, linking her to Egyptian nationalism and the ideology that all Arab nations should support one another in the struggle against imperialism.

The tambourine player, and the woman who plays Tamr Hinna’s close companion throughout the film, is Zeinat Sidqi, a famous theatre and cinema actress. Both Zeinat Sidqi and Fayza Ahmed appear in the film predominantly dressed in the style of banat al-balad, wearing crescent necklaces and head scarves. Tamr Henna herself is generally seen to be wearing a crescent moon necklace, and the clothing of a bint al-balad. While many of the other actors, including Rushdi Abaza, Istifan Rosti and Fayza Ahmed, came from mixed European and Arab descent, Sidqi was of the Egyptian lower class. The audience may well have made a connection between Zeinat’s role as a girl of the country and her own life. Her father pulled her from school after she had completed her primary education, and she was married off at the age of fifteen. She eventually divorced, and started her performance career as a belly dancer. Her family disapproved of her performing, and she ran away to Syria, only to return and begin working at Badia

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182 Darwish, *Dream Makers*, 35.
184 For example, in the 1956 *Struggle on the Nile* Abaza’s character is consistently referred to as manly and strong, and capable of single-handedly beating up groups of men at a time.
Masabni’s club, the same club in which many famous actors, singers and dancers got their start, including all the dancers featured in this thesis – Samia Gamal, Naima Akif and Tahiya Karioka. Zeinat’s own past connects her to that of other dancers and stars who rose from poverty to fame (as mentioned in the previous chapter) and, in particular, to Naima and her character Tamra Hinna.

Ahmed Ramzy, who plays Ahmed, the son of an elite landowner, was a fairly new actor in comparison to the heavyweights mentioned above, and this is made note of early in the film, when he is referred to several times as a “young man.” Not only is he of a new generation of actors that appeared in Egyptian cinema in the 1950s, but he is of a younger generation in comparison to most of the other actors in the film.

In contrast to Ahmed Ramzy are Istifan Rosti, who plays a down-on-his-luck elite and Ahmed’s companion, and Sirag Munir, who plays Ahmed’s father. Both actors were deeply entrenched in Egyptian cinema, as both were involved in the development of Egypt’s first full-length feature films. Istifan Rosti directed Layla in 1929 and Sirag Munir starred in Muhammad Karim’s Zaynab in 1930. Joel Gordon notes that most consider Zaynab to be the first “true” full-length Egyptian film by a native-born Egyptian, while others consider Rosti’s Layla (1929) to be the first. Rosti is also rumoured to have at one time worked as a nightclub performer and dancer during an affair with a ballet dancer, before working in theatre and eventually cinema, something he has in common with Naima Akif. Both Rosti and Munir often played comical

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187 Istifan Rosti is also known as Estefan, Stephan or Stefan Rosti.
188 Gordon, Revolutionary Melodrama, 49, n11 and 30.
conspirators\textsuperscript{189} and evil-doers,\textsuperscript{190} and their characters in Tamr Hinna would be easily recognizable by the audience.

I will now turn to the film in order to determine how Tamr Hinna addresses the ideal of the awlad al-balad and the class conflict between the awlad al-balad and the awlad al-zawat.

**Awlad al-Balad versus Awlad al-Zawat**

If Tamr Hinna is a representative of the bint al-balad then it is possible Hassan, who is from a similar background to Tamr Hinna, is an ibn al-balad. The opening scene of the film sets him up as such, as well as linking the film with Nasser, the revolution and the 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal, one of Nasser’s greatest acts. In the opening scene of Tamr Hinna the camera pans across a large fair with multiple acts such as fire jugglers, clowns and various vendors. Many of the people in attendance are dressed as peasants, in the ankle-length long-sleeved shirts known as galabiya and knit caps. The camera settles on Hassan, who is running a muscleman game in which men try to push a heavy set of weights up a ramp to hit a board at the end. He is dressed in a vest half buttoned up over a sleeveless undershirt, with a knitted skull cap. Hassan leaves the management of the game and walks through the crowd. He encounters a man he knows, and they hug and laugh. As the man walks away Hassan checks his pocket, and then runs after the man, they argue and eventually Hassan retrieves his wallet. The men laugh and Hassan goes on his way. He enters a tent, shows a man inside a photo, and asks for a

\textsuperscript{189} For example, in the 1955 Samia Gamal film Sigara wa Kas (Cigarette and a Glass) Munir plays a playboy who comically attempts to seduce women.

\textsuperscript{190} For example in the Samia Gamal film Don’t Tell Anyone (Mataqulsh lahad, 1952) Rosti plays a rich man who conspires to lure the character of Samia Gamal from her love, played by Farid al-Atrash, with promises of money and gifts.
tattoo of it. The man recognizes it as Tamr Hinna, the dancer, and asks Hassan when the marriage will be. Hassan becomes irritated and tells him it will be “after the fair.”

A man carrying a young boy enters the tent and stands in the doorway, discussing what tattoo for the man to get. The boy suggests he get two jet planes, and Hassan agrees this is a good choice. He says this is an era of tanks and bombs and planes. Another man enters and asks for a tattoo of the canal on his arm (by this he means the Suez Canal) and asks for it to be nationalized.

The opening scene is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it establishes Hassan as a muscle man of a low economic class. He is dressed poorly, and somewhat sloppily, and his associates are pickpockets and tattoo artists. Secondly, the conversation in the tattoo parlour is revealing in its reference to the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956. The nationalization of the canal was a major point in Gamal Abdel Nasser’s presidency. Although it led to tripartite aggression from France, Britain and Israel, the U.S. intervened and ultimately the whole situation was hailed by the regime as a triumph against the forces of imperialism. Nasser had initially chosen to nationalize the Canal in response to the refusal by the U.S. to assist in funding the construction of the Egyptian High Dam. The U.S. refusal came, in part, because of Nasser’s own refusal to choose sides in the midst of the Cold War. As noted in the previous chapter, the early years of Nasser’s rule were marked by hope and enthusiasm by many Egyptians, and the triumph of the nationalization of the Suez Canal contributed to the zeitgeist of the time. Tamr Hinna was released only one year after the Suez crisis, and the reference to the nationalized Suez Canal would be immediately recognizable to the audience, linking the film to state nationalism and Nasser himself.
The next scene sets Hassan up in opposition to Ahmed, creating the tension between the *awlad al-balad* and the *awlad al-zawat* mentioned earlier by Messiri and Abu-Lughod. Ahmed drives into the *mulid* with Istifan Rosti and the man with the long moustache dressed in a fashion reminiscent of the old order of the pre-revolutionary period. Rosti asks Ahmed for some money, and it is clear that although he is well-dressed, he himself does not have his own money, and eventually we learn that he is a member of the elite who has frittered his money away and is now dependent on Ahmed and his father. Here the men discuss the dangerous *ghawazi* who will take men’s money and their hearts. Ahmed goes to watch Tamr Hinna dance.

Hassan and his sister watch Tamr Hinna dance and talk, and Fayza says this young man is not like others. The other men who want Tamr Hinna are peasants, this man is young, rich and handsome, and they could lose Tamr Hinna to him, thereby losing the money she makes. Tamr Hinna dances in the midst of a group of fairgoers, an audience of mostly men. This performance is different from many other dance performances in Egyptian films. In many films dancers perform at weddings, parties, nightclubs or cabarets. Often they are on a stage or platform, their audience members are seated at tables or chairs in a semi-circle around the dance space. There is a distance between the dancer and those watching her. That is not quite the case in *Tamr Hinna*. In *Tamr Hinna* she performs in the enclosure of a tent draped with the highly decorated sheets that are common for fairs, so she is in an enclosed space, but the men are very close and they are not seated.

The song Tamr Hinna performs to is very suggestive, more so than many other songs from musicals of the 40s and 50s. Dancers often perform to songs in which the
singer extols the beauty of the dancer, or the love between a man and a woman, and their longing to return to one another from a separation. The song Tamr Hinna dances to is much more evocative and sexual. The song depicts the moonlight as a lover, thirsty and looking in through the window, and the temptation to let him in. It is easy to imagine the moon as a thirsty lover, as the singer questions if she should “give him water or close the door?” The closeness of the audience and the contents of the song locate the dancer as an object of desire in a raw and earthy fashion.

The men’s behaviour after Tamr Hinna’s dance emphasizes the class divide. While Tamr Hinna is dancing, Hassan walks over to Ahmed, and Tamr Hinna dances between the two men, increasing the tension between them as Ahmed watches her dance and Hassan watches Ahmed. When Tamr Hinna finishes dancing Hassan is clearly angry, but the other women tell him to wait until Tamr Hinna gets the tips from the audience, as the young man is rich. Once again we are reminded that her dancing money is important to the rest of the performers. The two men argue after Ahmed flirts with Tamr Hinna, Hassan throws a proffered tip at Ahmed, and Ahmed punches Hassan in the gut. Hassan lunges at Ahmed and the women yell for Hassan to stop, as Ahmed can have him sent to jail. The divide between the lower class street performers and the upper class Ahmed, the son of a rich landowner, is more than just economic, it is also about power. Although Ahmed is the one who starts the fight, he can have Hassan sent to jail for fighting with him.

This class divide is reinforced the next morning when Rosti tells Ahmed he gave Hassan a good beating, and that Ahmed and his men taught Hassan not to raise his hand to his masters. This scene is contrasted with the next one of Hassan, who calls Ahmed a
coward, and plots to kill him while Tamr Hinna rubs his back. He plans to “strangle him with [his] own bare hands,” and has clearly not learned not to question his “masters.” Tamr Hinna, Hassan’s sister, and Zeinat Sidqi warn him that Ahmed’s family is almighty and powerful and he risks hanging. Hassan does not appear to consider the long-term consequences of his actions, nor other non-violent methods of battling Ahmed.

The contrast between the classes is also emphasized by their environments. In Ahmed’s case, Rosti, dressed in a suit, and the comical man with the gun and tarbush, serve Ahmed breakfast in a lush bed in a Western style spacious room. Conversely, Hassan lies on the ground in a tent draped in fabric and surrounded by women dressed as banat al-balad.

Hassan’s hyper-masculine behaviour throughout the film adds to his depiction as an ibn al-balad. He is controlling of Tamr Hinna, aggressive and physical. When Tamr Hinna and Ahmed plan to rendezvous after she steals a chicken from his property, Hassan grabs her as she leaves. He has been hiding by the barn window listening to her conversation with Ahmed. He drags her down the road while the two squabble and smack at one another. This recalls van Nieuwkerk’s findings that the ibn al-balad was a man who ruled his house, and his women do not leave the house without his permission. It is clear that although the two are not married, Hassan acts as if Tamr Hinna belongs to him and should behave according to his demands. This also enhances his image as a hyper-masculine figure.

Hassan’s aggressive character is further reinforced in the following scenes. The next morning, we see Tamr Hinna sitting with a group of women, roasting the chicken Ahmed gave her. The women rather gleefully ask her to tell them again how she stole the
chicken from the rich landowner. The ghawazi seem to appreciate a small act of defiance against the rich landowner who owns the property on which they operate, positioning them in the same dichotomy as that of the awlad al-balad and the awlad al-zawat. Hassan insists Tamr Hinna not go to meet Ahmed. Hassan’s sister tells Tamr Hinna that she should obey Hassan, but Zeinat Sidqi argues, saying they should let Tamr Hinna “earn her bread,” again stressing the importance of her ability to make money. Tamr Hinna assures Hassan that Ahmed will not get anywhere with her. Meanwhile Ahmed waits for Tamr Hinna to meet him as arranged the previous evening and when she does not come, he goes to the fair at night to watch her dance again.

The second dance scene is similar to the first. Fayza Ahmed, Hassan’s sister, sings of a waiting lover. Ahmed comes through the crowd and takes a position in front of the circle of men. He clearly stands out from the rest of the audience in their galabiyyas, skull caps and turbans. Ahmed is wearing a collared shirt and bare head, and next to him Istifan Rosti wears a suit. In contrast to their modern clothing, Hassan wears an undershirt and skull cap, another shirt draped around his shoulders. When she is finished, Tamr Hinna collects tips. Ahmed tells her he will buy her a gold watch if she meets him, and before Hassan comes over she agrees. While after the first dance scene we saw Ahmed and Hassan physically fight, after the second dance scene we see them do battle over who is physically stronger at the muscle machine. Although both men are equally strong, Ahmed appears as the winner as he walks away after adding more weight and successfully pushing a weighted trolley up a ramp.

Later we see Tamr Hinna and Zeinat Sidqi discussing the love triangle of Tamr Hinna, Ahmed and Hassan. Zeinat Sidqi reads Tamr Hinna’s future in some rocks, and
tells her she sees a rich man. She tells Tamr Hinna that Ahmed loves her, but Tamr Hinna says that she is from a big family and is a *ghaziya*. The implicit meaning here is that because of her low-class status, and Ahmed’s position as the son of a wealthy landowner, they would be incompatible. Sidqi responds by telling her that before love and death all are equal. Hassan’s sister overhears and repeats this to Hassan.

Later that night as Tamr Hinna is lying in her tent Hassan comes to her and opens the tent flaps. She appears to lament her life as a poor dancer, saying her ribs hurt from sleeping on the ground, and some women stay at home while their men work. She tells Hassan she wants to live like a lady. He says she is tiring herself, and he is sorry for her, but he loves her. She responds rather sharply that he loves the fruits of her labour. He smacks her shoulder and tells her they all work hard. She tells him to leave and he grabs her, shaking her and saying that she is his, again showing himself to be aggressive and possessive.

Not long after this, Tamr Hinna and Ahmed meet alone, and Hassan discovers afterwards that Tamr Hinna has accepted a gold watch from Ahmed. Hassan physically strips Tamr Hinna of her new watch, telling her that he is her master, and knocking her to the ground, prompting her later to run to Ahmed for protection. Hassan then accosts Ahmed while he is riding horses with his cousin and the two men fight. Once again, although Hassan is the more hyper-masculine of the two, Ahmed is the winner of the physical altercation.

Hassan is not only contrasted with Ahmed, but with Ahmed’s father, a member of the pre-revolutionary old order. He is an *effendi*, similar to the *awlad al-zawat*, and represents the corrupt elite.
The Effendiya

Ahmed’s father is an effendi, or effendiya in the plural. Effendiya is a term that, according to scholar Lucie Ryzova, fluctuated in meaning over time. Effendiya are generally considered to represent the western-educated town-dwellers of Egypt in the first half of the 20th century. It came to refer to a type of new middle class in the 1930s, a secular elite typified by those who wore the tarbush, or fez, rather than the turban or skull cap of the religious elite and peasants. While the effendiya were considered the champions of Egypt’s independence and “modernity” in the early 1900s, and leaders of the 1919 Revolution, by the 1940s they came to stand for corruption and opulence.

The effendiya were increasingly portrayed as symbolic of complicity with British colonialism, and of corruption and immorality, in films in the 1940s and 50s. While Ryzova examines films of the 1940s that subtly address this, Viola Shafik observes a temporary ‘revolutionary’ tendency after the 1952 coup to vilify bourgeois characters and those associated with them. “Indeed after 1952 the pasha and his allies were increasingly pictured as greedy, unscrupulous, despotiv villains in stories set in the royal past - a vilification, however that took place mostly on moral grounds and not because of any ‘analytical’ political concepts.”

At one point we see Ahmed’s father insisting that Ahmed must, by duty, obey his father and marry his cousin. He tells Ahmed he must woo his cousin so they can add her land to theirs, as she is wealthy. Ahmed’s father is clearly a greedy man who is

191 Lucie Ryzova, “Egyptianizing Modernity through the ‘New Effendiya’: Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy,” in Re-Envisioning Egypt, 124-125
194 Shafik, Popular Egyptian Cinema, 269-279.
concerned about the money and land that he and Ahmed would gain through the marriage. Although Ahmed and his cousin are arranged to be married, he seems more concerned with getting past his father to meet with Tamr Hinna.

This scene would resonate with Egyptians, as many films of the era began to address the issue of love marriages versus arranged marriages, and it was certainly an issue in the media. Love marriages were often considered the more “modern” of the two. By rejecting the convention of an arranged marriage, Ahmed demonstrates that he is modern. In rejecting the wealth of his cousin, he also demonstrates that he is not materialistic or concerned with class, qualities associated with the elites of the old order prior to the revolution. Ahmed’s attitude is in keeping with the revolutionary, egalitarian spirit of the 1950s.

Ahmed leaves his father and goes to meet with Tamr Hinna. He tells her if she marries him she will have clothes and a car. Despite her earlier assurances to Hassan, she flirts with Ahmed, and accepts his gift of an expensive gold watch. This takes us to the scene mentioned earlier, in which Tamr Hinna pushes Ahmed into the street and encounters his cousin, Kawsar. The cousin, who constantly says “ya ya ya” when she speaks, a way of speaking associated with the Westernized elite, gets upset with Ahmed for taking Tamr Hinna’s side when the two exchange insults. The cousin goes straight to Ahmed’s house, and informs Ahmed’s father, her uncle, that she has been abused by a ghaziya. Ahmed’s father, also indignant, tells his men to go to the fair and kick all the mulid workers off his land. Ahmed’s father tells Ahmed, who has just arrived alone, that even if his cousin Kawsar had beat the ghaziya with her shoe she has the right, because

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195 Lisa Pollard notes that from the late 1800s onwards the pros and cons of arranged marriages were debated in the press. See Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*, 144.
she is from a good family. Ahmed asks what gives her the right? Kawsar is appalled that Ahmed would put her and the ghaziya on the same level.

Ahmed, in a progressive and egalitarian fashion, argues with his father that all people are equal. His father argues that they are not, because he and his family are educated. Presumably, he means they are educated in the sense that they have undertaken formal Western-style education, achieving higher education, rather than the manner in which the awlad al-balad are educated in the ways of the world. Ahmed tells his father these ideas are old fashioned, and that everyone has their dignity. His father questions angrily, “What of family and ascent?” “Nonsense,” responds Ahmed. Ahmed makes a bet with his father that all people are equal. At stake is his inheritance. His father accepts, and tells him that if he loses he can work with the gypsies as a fortune teller.

Ahmed’s comments here on the equality of the classes may be a reflection of Nasser’s ideals, which aimed to eliminate the division of the classes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Nasser, himself the son of a lowly postal clerk, set in motion policies that attempted to eliminate the social stratification which he says “split Egypt into hostile camps, title and honors – princes, pashas and beys, marks of the privileged class – were abolished.”196 In the early years of the revolutionary regime, land reforms were enacted that were aimed to redistribute land to impoverished peasants. These land reforms entailed seizing approximately one-tenth of Egypt’s arable land from roughly 1700 landowners for the use of state agriculture and redistribution amongst the lower and middle classes in order to help rectify the major discrepancies in land ownership that contributed to landlessness and poverty.197 We see the vulnerability of the peasants to

corrupt, rich landowners in *Tamr Hinna* when Ahmed’s father’s men arrive at the *mulid* to remove the workers. A fight ensues and the gypsies’ tents are set on fire.

This scene also suggests Ahmed’s father is both an *effendi* (educated, greedy and despotic) and one of the *awlad al-zawat*, a member of the landowning elite who has nothing but contempt for the peasantry. Ahmed’s father, a tarbush wearer, is certainly greedy, and throughout the film we find that he is despotic and immoral.

The actual time period that the film is supposed to represent is unclear, as the first scene refers to the nationalized Suez Canal of 1956, yet the power the corrupt landowner wields is clearly an allusion to the old ruling order. However, it should also be noted that within a few years of the land reforms, the regime faced criticism (from outside and within) for their “failure to break with the classes and forces that worked to undermine progress and social justice.”

Ahmed’s father as a corrupt *effendi* may simply be a mechanism to drive the plot, or it may be a subtle criticism of the regime’s inability to break down the stratification of the classes.

Ahmed gets his chance to prove his father is wrong when Tamr Hinna and Zeinat Sidqi flee Hassan and Ahmed finds them in his barn. He insists the women stay with him. Initially Tamr Hinna is reluctant to stay in the house, but Zeinat Sidqi encourages her to stay and become accustomed to luxury. In the morning, Ahmed professes his love, and Tamr Hinna says, “but I’m a *ghaziya.*” Ahmed does not care, and says he wants to marry her. Ahmed, Istifan Rosti and the two women all plot to fool Ahmed’s father. They will introduce Tamr Hinna to Ahmed’s father as a rich heiress and the niece of the poor *effendi*, in order to convince Ahmed’s father of her high status so Ahmed can marry her without his father knowing the difference.

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198 Gordon, *Hero*, 70.
We then see Tamr Hinna and Zeinat Sidqi, presumably at a later date, driving a convertible car, dressed in modern clothing. As mentioned in the previous chapter on *Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul*, driving a car was something that rich, elite women did. Kawsar, Ahmed’s cousin, drives a convertible earlier in the film, as does Ahmed. For Tamr Hinna, a street performer, to be driving a convertible is an indication of her transformation from low class street dancer to member of the elite.

Tamr Hinna is introduced to Ahmed’s father as “Yasmine,” the niece of Rosti. Later, we see Ahmed’s father and one of his men in a discussion of Tamr Hinna, or Yasmine, and Ahmed’s father wonders how he can make use of her wealth. The man with him suggests he marry her for himself. Ahmed’s father worries about their age difference, as well as her “uncle’s” approval. The other man says that if he is concerned about the age difference, he should try dying his hair to look younger, and as for the “uncle,” if he refuses to allow his “niece” to marry, he can have him ruined. Ahmed’s father is pleased with the suggestion, and at the thought of both he and his son marrying wealthy women. His lack of concern for the wishes of both “Yasmine” and her “uncle,” as well as his willingness to force Yasmine to marry him by means of her uncle is evidence of his corruption and despotism.

Later, when the two are alone, Ahmed’s father hints to Tamr Hinna of his intentions to marry her. He also tells Tamr Hinna that Ahmed is set to marry his cousin Kawsar the following week. Tamr Hinna is clearly distressed at both the prospect of marrying the old man and at Ahmed’s upcoming marriage. Unbeknownst to Tamr Hinna, the father goes to Rosti, Tamr Hinna’s “uncle,” to ask for her hand in marriage. Rosti is reminded of the debts he owes, and does not refuse the marriage.
Later that night Tamr Hinna goes to meet Ahmed privately in the garden. She blames Ahmed for her situation, lamenting that she no longer knows who she is anymore, Tamr Hinna or Yasmine. He consoles her and professes his love for her. We discover that not only is his cousin, Kawsar, hiding in the bushes, but so is Hassan. Hassan, recently released after several months in prison for fighting with Ahmed’s father’s men, has learnt that Tamr Hinna has been staying with Ahmed. Upon discovering her betrayal, he vows not to rest until he drinks her blood. We are again reminded of Hassan’s need to control her behaviour, as is expected of an *ibn al-balad*. Hassan and Kawsar find each other in the bushes as Hassan is about to strike Tamr Hinna and convinces him to work with her to expose Tamr Hinna.

The final scene, and final confrontation between the classes, is at a party at Ahmed’s house. The male guests and the band are all dressed in suits, and the women all wear Western style evening gowns. The band plays a Mambo, and the atmosphere represents a type of Western modernity in stark contrast to the thoroughly Egyptian *mulid* and the Egyptian music that has been played throughout the film. Ahmed’s father and Tamr Hinna dance, and he gives her a ring, “a token of love” which she accepts. Her acceptance seems to imply some sort of acquiescence to him.

Suddenly from the bushes a group of peasant performers appear. A man performs *tahtyib*, a type of mock fighting dance performed with a stick, from Upper Egypt. Kawsar insists that Tamr Hinna dance, and gets the crowd chanting for her. At first Ahmed’s father refuses, and says it would be bad for the family honour. Eventually though, Tamr Hinna defiantly agrees to dance.
It is interesting here to note that Ahmed’s father had no objection to Tamr Hinna dancing with him in a Western fashion to non-Oriental music. However, his objection seems to be to her performing solo to traditional music with a band dressed in *galabiyya*. It is clear that to him there is a differentiation between the styles of dance. The one is associated with the upper class elite, while the other is shameful, or *ghaziya*.

Tamr Hinna performs in her western style evening gown with a scarf tied around her waist. Ahmed looks upset, and gives his cousin a dirty look, but she smiles at him. Part way through, Hassan enters the dance floor with a long cane. Tamr Hinna at first appears to ward him off, but he dances around her with the cane, performing a brief cat and mouse mock fight, and then they dance around one another in unison. Hassan’s stick twirling becomes more aggressive towards the end of the dance, and Tamr Hinna runs back inside the house when the music ends.

Tamr Hinna then overhears Ahmed and his father speaking. Ahmed’s father says he will marry “Yasmine,” prompting Ahmed to reveal that he has won the bet with his father, as Tamr Hinna is the same *ghaziya* his father imprisoned for stealing chickens. Tamr Hinna is upset, and leaves before hearing the rest of the conversation in which Ahmed insists he will marry Tamr Hinna. He denounces his father’s wealth and says Tamr Hinna is all he needs.

We skip to Tamr Hinna’s entrance into a room where Ahmed’s father is alone, and he insults her for pretending to be a pasha’s daughter. She tells him she is proud to be the *ghaziya* who stole his chickens, and that they are from a different caste, but hers is a cleaner one. Ahmed and the party-goers enter, and Tamr Hinna yells at him for allowing her to leave her family and spoiling her reputation. Rosti insists Ahmed loves
her, but she smacks him and tells him he sold her dignity. She says she is leaving to take off the clothes Ahmed gave her, and to put on cleaner ones. Presumably she means the old clothing of a *bint al-balad*, which she cast off in order to wear the modern clothing of the *awlad al-zawat*.

She runs to her room but finds Hassan hiding there. She insists she kept her virtue and never lied to him. She tells him she loves him and hugs him. He holds her and then stabs her in the back with a knife he is holding. When Ahmed calls for her and the party comes running to her room, Tamr Hinna tells Hassan to hide in the bathroom. Ahmed runs to her and insists he loves her and wants to marry her. She tells him to marry Kawsar, as they are of the same caste, and she will go with Hassan. He says Hassan is poor and cannot make her happy. She repeats that before love and death all are equal. Hassan comes out from his hiding place, and picks her up. She hugs him and they exit the house with Hassan carrying her. Ahmed walks with them out the door while Hassan and Tamr Hinna gaze lovingly at each other. The final scene is a clip of one of the earlier dance scenes, in which Tamr Hinna dances and Hassan watches her happily.

**Conclusion**

Naima Akif’s character developed over the course of her career, through her films and through the media. The development of Naima’s character as a *bint al-balad* in a time when the Egyptian peasant was elevated as a symbol of Egypt’s independence and freedom enabled Naima to play a dancer of some esteem. Her film characters often find acceptability by the upper classes, propagating the state ideal of the elimination of the class divide. As a *bint al-balad* who refuses to be used as a pawn in *Tamr Hinna*, Tamr
Hinna/Naima Akif also represented a newly independent Egypt, one that refused to be “bought” by Western imperial and colonial powers as evidenced in the Suez Canal crisis.

However, this image is complicated in *Tamr Hinna* by the dancer’s own complicity in deception, and her acceptance of gifts from both Ahmed and his father. These are characteristics that are associated with immoral dancers, and the traits that make them unacceptable as *banat al-balad*. Furthermore, if Tamr Hinna is a *bint al-balad*, Hassan represents the *ibn al-balad* and the traits associated with him are negative ones that have been taken to the extreme. He is overbearing, over-protective, aggressive, abusive and lives off the immodest work of Tamr Hinna. Despite the elevation of the *fellahin* and the *ibn al-balad* in the 1940s and 50s as a symbol of the Egyptian nation, the status of the social class is ambiguous in *Tamr Hinna*. In the film the characters are not the moral “salt of the earth,” but complex and flawed.

The *effendiya*, or *awlad al-zawat* of the old order are also portrayed negatively in *Tamr Hinna*. Ahmed’s father is corrupt, greedy, and has nothing but contempt for the peasants of his country. It is Ahmed, a young man and the son of a new Egypt, who emerges as one who propagates an ideal of a new order in which class is “nonsense.” He is not concerned with Tamr Hinna’s supposedly shameful status as a *ghaziya*. Ahmed’s egalitarian ideals are in line with those of the new Egyptian state. However, the fruition of this ideal is hindered by the reluctance of the people of the old class system to engage in the new ideology. Tamr Hinna returns to Hassan and her old way of life, and the ending of *Tamr Hinna* does not resolve the class conflict, leaving the status of the *ghawazi* murky and questionable.
Chapter 3 Pay Attention to Zuzu: The Decline of Dancers and Societal Change

The 1967 Egyptian defeat in the war with Israel marked the end of an era in more ways than one. It was the definitive end of the hopeful years of the Revolutionary regime and the discrediting of Nasser’s ideals of Pan-Arabism and Arab socialism as a means to “modernization.” It is often credited as an element in the rise of conservative Islamism.199 In 1972, Tahiya Karioka, whose career had already lasted over 30 years, appeared as an aged and overweight dancer in Pay Attention to Zuzu (Khalli Balak min Zuzu). Pressed to perform at a wedding reception, the aging dancer was received with ridicule and mockery by her audience in the film. The ’67 defeat marked the end of an era of ideals and the end of the era of dancers as popular cinematic icons.

Prior to 1972, Tahiya had long since stopped dancing in her films, as she began to put on weight in the late 1950s and took on roles that cast her as a mother of adult children.200 The only two dancers whose cinematic fame can be said to have rivalled Tahiya’s, Naima Akif and Samia Gamal, had passed away and retired from the cinema

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200 Mustafa Darwish notes that in the 1960s Tahiya began to put on weight, reaching more than one hundred kilos. See Darwish, Dream Makers, 27. For example, in The Shore of Love (Shati al-Hub, 1961) Tahiya plays the long lost mother of an innocent village girl of marriageable age. The girl had been told her mother was dead, only to discover that her father had lied to her because her mother had scandalously moved to Cairo to become a nightclub performer after the girl’s birth. Tahiya’s character is overweight, drinks too much, and is stuck with a younger man who takes her money. We never see Tahiya actually dance in the film, it is only implied. In 1964 she played the comical role of a mother of a brood of noisy children, and a daughter about to marry, in Mother of the Bride (Umm al-Aroussa).
respectively. No other dancers rose up to take their places, and even today no dancer can be said to have achieved the level of cinematic stardom as these three women.

_Zuzu_ is a story about a university student who comes from a family of Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers, the traditional home of musicians and performers in Cairo. Zuzu’s mother, played by Tahiya Karioka, is an _usta_, a woman who leads a _firqat al-arousa_ (a wedding procession troupe of performers who sing, play music and dance). Zuzu leads a double life in which she goes to university by day and dances with her family at weddings by night. Zuzu’s family is symbolic of the “backwardness” of what Walter Armbrust refers to as Egyptian “colloquial heritage,” such as we saw in _Tamr Hinna_. Zuzu’s life in the university is the path to Egypt’s modern future.

Walter Armbrust has suggested that _Zuzu_ represents a fantasy world far from the reality of university students in the 1970s and the student uprisings against the lack of democracy and economic problems in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which are not

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201 Naima Akif retired in 1964 and passed away in 1966, while Samia Gamal had stopped appearing in films in the early 1960s.

202 Marjorie Franken has argued that Farida Fahmy of the folkloric dance troupe, The Reda Troupe, achieved a level of fame like no other dancer, but she only appeared in starring roles in two films in 1963 ( _Igazit nos al-Sanaw, Mid-Year Vacation_ ) and 1965 ( _Gharam fil Karnak, Love in Karnak_ ) whereas Naima Akif starred in fourteen films, Samia Gamal in over eighty films, and Tahiya Karioka is estimated to appear in well over two hundred films and television shows (see Darwish, _Dream Makers_, 27). Few other dancers have appeared in starring roles, and certainly not in the numbers that Naima, Samia and Tahiya starred in. For Franken’s work on Fahmy, see Marjorie A. Franken, _Daughter of Egypt: Farida Fahmy and the Reda Troupe_ (Glendale, California: Vassiliandsdepot.com, 2001). Few dancers, other than Fahmy, Naima, Samia and Tahiya appeared more than once, but the trio of solo dancers (Naima, Samia and Tahiya) all had more presence in film and media in the 50s and 60s than Fahmy. I have already noted the popularity of Samia and Naima in _Al-Kawakib_ in the previous chapters, and would like to note that Tahiya Karioka was also very popular during late 1940s through to the early 1970s in the same magazine. The fame of these three was certainly enduring, as Samia and Tahiya continued to appear regularly in _Al-Kawakib_ in 1964, and Naima appeared on the cover of the May 19 issue. Tahiya appeared at least seven times throughout 1964 in January 7 (page 10), January 21 (page 16 and 17), February 8 issue (page 18), September 22 (page 51), October 6 (page 7), November 17 (page 75 and 95). Samia was in _Al-Kawakib_ at least four times, in March 17 (page 12), May 19 (page 4), October 6 (page 8) and on the cover of the December 1 issue. Tahiya’s continuing fame in the 1970s is evident given her long-standing appearances in films and magazines. For example, the year after _Zuzu_ was released, in January of 1973 alone Tahiya appeared in at least three issues of _Al-Kawakib_ – January 7 (page 31), January 22 (page 17) and January 30 (page 36).
really addressed in the film.\textsuperscript{203} In the end of the film, a balance is struck out of the blending, and repudiation, of Egypt’s colloquial heritage with the “transformative offices of higher education.”\textsuperscript{204} Furthermore, Armbrust says the film’s message is that while the “backwards” folk dance cannot be transformed, the dancer is not necessarily irredeemable.\textsuperscript{205} This is because Zuzu desires to better herself by looking to her future, one that involves continuing her education.

I do not intend to dispute Armbrust’s valuable assessment of the film. Rather, I would like to redirect it to the ways in which the film may represent reality, rather than a fantasy world. The film may not portray the reality of university and political life in the early 1970s, but the turn away from the “backwards” past of colloquial heritage is symbolic of the decline of cinema dancers in Egypt in the 1960s and early 70s. The heyday of nightclub dancers-turned-cinema celebrities was over. Several shifts in society contributed to the decline of dancers in cinema. A new type of dancer began to emerge in the 1960s, one that was arguably more “respectable” than the former nightclub dancers, and more in keeping with the blend of folkloric heritage and modernity that came to typify elite visions of Egyptian identity. The contrast between the various types of dancers is clear in Zuzu, as the respectable and “artistic” folkloric theatre is held in opposition to Zuzu’s family, while beneath them all lay the class of the shameful nightclub dancer – prostitute.

The Egyptian defeat in the 1967 war with Israel left many people disheartened with the ideals of the revolutionary regime and in order to appease the increasingly popular

\textsuperscript{204} Armbrust, \textit{Mass Culture}, 123.
\textsuperscript{205} Armbrust, \textit{Mass Culture}, 125.
Islamists and quell pro-Nasser groups, the new president, Anwar Sadat, made concessions that further put limits on women’s rights, as well as dancers’. The types of behaviour associated with public dancers, such as public displays of sexuality, drinking, and tip giving, were at odds with the rise of conservative Islam, something also hinted at in Zuzu. Furthermore, new systems of licensing and registration required dancers to prove their eligibility to perform in nightclubs. These systems would have made it difficult for certain performers of the old order, such as Zuzu’s family and the most famous dancers such as Badia Masabni, Tahiya Karioka, Naima Akif and Samia Gamal, to rise to the heights of fame they had in the 1940s and 50s.

I will provide a brief overview of the film, and then through analysis of various scenes from Zuzu I will explore each of the above elements in detail.

Overview of the Film

The film opens with a track and field race. Zuzu, played by Suad Hosni, runs in short shorts and a tight, low cut tank top with her long, full hair tumbling down her back. She wins the race and the camera provides a long, slow assessment of her bare thighs and calves as they work back and forth to keep her muscles warm. This immediately sets the tone for the film as we watch the camera appraise her exposed body, and we quickly encounter Umran, another university student, who has written a poem on the shamefulness of her revealing outfit. He recites this poem in a quasi-Classical Arabic accent as if he were reciting the Quran. Zuzu and her friends laugh off Umran’s poem, and her friends (part of a group self-titled the positive movement) dance around her and extol her virtues and her victory, crowning her with a paper crown and the title of “exemplary young woman.” Zuzu walks home from school in a low-cut, tight red mini-
dress. Along the way she banters with musicians sitting in front of a coffee shop in her neighbourhood of Muhammad ‘Ali Street. Upon entering her house, chaos ensues as two women in the house dance and ululate when they learn of Zuzu’s win on the track field. Zuzu tells them her friends are throwing her a party, but her mother, played by Tahiya Karioka, insists that she cancel her attendance at the party as there is a wedding for them to perform at that night and Zuzu must dance. Zuzu, crying, has to call her friends and tell them her mother is sick.

Later that evening we see Zuzu and a group of performers, including her mother and step-father, singing and dancing at a wedding. Zuzu is wearing a revealing two piece dance costume, a bra and skirt with slits high up the side and a bare midriff. Notably, her mother does not dance, and we learn later that she has long since retired from dancing as she has grown old and it is shameful for her to dance at her age. In addition, she is an usta, the head of the troupe, and typically the usta does not dance. A commotion occurs when a man gets on stage and grabs Zuzu and kisses her. The performers have to fight to get the man off Zuzu. Later, Zuzu and her mother argue when Zuzu threatens to run away and refuses to dance again. She insists that she wants to go to school and get a job rather than following in the footsteps of the Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers.

At school, Zuzu meets Dr. Said, a professor from an elite family who has recently returned from studying abroad and runs his own theatre company. The two fall for one another. However, his previous fiancée from an arranged set-up is jealous and has a hard time letting Said go. She plots with her mother to expose Zuzu. She hires Zuzu’s family

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206 An ululation is a type of trilling noise made with the tongue in the roof of the mouth that is commonly done in celebration in the Middle East and parts of Africa. It is often seen in Egyptian films when a wedding is announced, or a joyous occasion. It is usually associated with the lower-middle and lower classes and colloquial culture.
to perform at Said’s sister’s wedding celebration, insisting that Zuzu’s mother lead the profession and dance, and offering her a considerable amount of extra money to do so. Said has invited Zuzu to the wedding to meet his father and sister for the first time. When Zuzu’s mother begins to dance, the ex and her friends laugh and make fun of her. Zuzu is humiliated and outraged at the treatment inflicted on her mother. Zuzu replaces her mother on the dance floor despite Said forbidding her. When she goes to school the next day she finds a large poster on the community wall of her dancing, and Umran preaches against her again. Her friends defend her and assault Umran, but she stops them. She decides to drop out of school and stops seeing Said. She tells her mother she is going to work in the nightclubs and make more money. Initially, her mother is excited at the prospect of the money and fame she will garner, but in a dream sees the potential harm this could bring, and insists Zuzu not work in the cabarets. Said appears at Zuzu’s house and demands she return to school. The next day she returns in the midst of a student-teacher discussion about her behaviour. She convinces all of her right to take part in education, by explaining the colloquial history all Egyptians share and that Egypt must look to the future (and education) in order to move forward. Umran the Islamist acknowledges the worthiness of her speech, everyone cheers for her and Zuzu and Said reunite.

**Degrees of Dancers**

*Zuzu* portrays three different categories of dancers, the folkloric theatre performers that are associated with Said, the ‘*firqah al-zaffah* (wedding procession troupe) to which Zuzu’s family belongs, and the nightclub dancer. While there have historically been different categories of dancers, as noted in the previous chapter in the case of the ‘*awalim*
and the ghawazi, in the late 1950s and early 1960s a new type of dancer began to emerge, the folkloric dancer. While all of these styles fall under the broad term of raqs (dance), and each of those women who perform the dance are often known asraqisa, or dancer, the different styles, and types, of dance were viewed differently. This is not to say that each category had a clear line drawn between them, and that a dancer could only do one style, but simply that broad categories emerged.

**Muhammad ‘Ali Street**

Zuzu’s family is part of the Muhammad ‘Ali Street group of performers, and as such are a type of ‘awalim. Zuzu has been informally trained to perform by her family. Zuzu’s family, her mother and step-father, and several other dancers and musicians, comprise a firqat al-zaffah, or a wedding procession troupe. These types of performers specifically perform at weddings, rather than at mulids (such as the ghawazi of Tamr Hinna), or in nightclubs. In Egypt the wedding procession was very important in the transfer of the bride from her family to her husband. In films of the 1950s and 60s it is not uncommon to see the bride’s procession come down a set of stairs from the seclusion of an upper room to the wedding party, preceded by dancers and women playing the deff (a type of hand drum) and ululating. Not all Egyptian weddings adhere to the tradition of an actual procession from the bride to the groom’s home, or to the wedding party,

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207 Karin van Nieuwkerk notes that a change took place in the 1940s in which the ‘awalim, who generally performed in wedding processions and women’s parties, began to slowly disappear as wedding processions became very expensive while parties became less segregated. However, many dancers who she interviewed in the 1980s continued to identify themselves as ‘awalim. See van Nieuwkerk, ‘A Trade,’ 53-55. The word ‘awalim continued to be used in films in the 1950s and 60s to refer specifically to wedding dancers. For example, in The Open Door (al-Bab al-Maftuh, 1964) and Mother of the Bride (Umm al-Aroussa, 1964) the mothers of the brides insist on the necessity of having ‘awalim at the wedding. Subsequently we see scenes of the wedding parties with dancers.

however, to have a troupe of professional performers at a wedding was, and remains, common in Egypt.

Zuzu’s mother is referred to as an *usta*. An *usta*, an experienced performer, was a woman who ran her own troupe and trained family members and new girls.\(^\text{209}\) This was traditional in the ‘*awalim* system, and Badia Masabni, who taught dancers such as Tahiya Karioka, Naima Akif and Samia Gamal, was one of the most famous of the ‘*awalim*.\(^\text{210}\) It would be no surprise to the audience of *Zuzu* that Tahiya Karioka would play the role of an *usta*, given her long history as a performer. Significantly, in 1936, she danced in King Farouk’s wedding procession,\(^\text{211}\) and in 1941 she led the wedding procession of the daughter of Egyptian Prime Minister Hussein Sirri Pasha, as well as other members of the Egyptian elite.\(^\text{212}\) In 1962 Tahiya also opened her own theatre company in the same manner as her first *usta*, Badia Masabni, known as the Tahiya Karioka Theatre.\(^\text{213}\) The high profile weddings, along with her regular appearances in magazines and long history of films and theatre performances would make her a ready candidate to play the role of *usta* in *Zuzu*.

*Zuzu* is played by Suad Hosni, and like Tahiya Karioka, her previous roles and history are relevant to her character in *Zuzu*. Hosni catapulted to fame in her first film *Hassan and Naima* (1959), a Romeo and Juliet type story. Suad played the starring role of Naima, a sweet village girl and the daughter of a wealthy village man. She falls in

\(^{209}\) Van Nieuwkerk, ‘*A Trade*,’ 50.
love with Hassan, a wedding singer. However, her father arranges a marriage for her with an older, greedy man from the village, who does not care for Naima but wants her money. He bullies her and is abusive. Naima runs away to be with Hassan, but is tricked into returning by her father, who promises she can marry Hassan. A fight ensues when it is discovered that Naima’s father has planned a real wedding for Naima with the greedy man, and that the man has attempted to kill Hassan. Both Hassan and Naima’s villages almost turn against each other, but in the end the two lovers are reconciled. Suad continued to play roles that cast her as a “Cinderella,” garnering her the title of the Cinderella of Egyptian cinema. She herself was not a dancer in real life, and this fact combined with her previous film roles likely enabled her to carry over her good reputation into her character in Zuzu. Zuzu’s refusal to continue performing also allows her the possibility of “redemption,” as Armbrust suggests.

Zuzu’s mother expects her to follow in the tradition of the family, or at least to aid in making money for the family. When Zuzu is forced to give up attending the party in her honour, her mother cites the necessity of the money she makes as a primary reason. Zuzu is the star performer of their troupe and like Tamr Hinna, she supports the rest of the troupe. This is because up until the 1970s, when changes in the entertainment market occurred, performance groups tended to share the overall profits from parties, rather than receive individual salaries.\textsuperscript{214} When Zuzu insists she will no longer dance after being assaulted on stage, her mother and step-father discuss strategies to convince her to continue dancing, as they fear losing the money she will make. This is not to say that her mother does not care for her, and towards the end of the film she has a change of heart.

\textsuperscript{214} Van Nieuwkerk, ‘A Trade,’ 56.
when she dreams of the dangers Zuzu will face if she gives up school and turns to dance in earnest.

Throughout Zuzu much is made of Zuzu’s family as Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers. Early on we see her walking home through the run-down neighbourhood, scenes within her house are often chaotic, filled with dancers and musicians and noisy people, and in her arguments with her mother Zuzu often brings up that they are from Muhammad ‘Ali Street. Nicolas Puig, in his article “Egypt’s Pop-Music Clashes and the ‘World-Crossing’ Destinies of Muhammad ‘Ali Street Musicians”215 examines the Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers and their reflection of the dynamics of urban Cairo society and the subculture of Muhammad ‘Ali Street. This is the neighbourhood where many of Cairo’s musicians and dancers have lived and operated since the early 20th century. Puig notes that the performers are “quite stigmatized by the rest of Cairo inhabitants as a group of outsiders with very low social status.”216 However, from the early 1900s until the 1970s the street was also home to the “classiest” musicians.217 In order to gain a reputation and garner work, musicians had to come to the street and frequent the cafes regularly.218 It is the traditional home of the ‘awalim, although it is not considered proper for the dancers to hang around the cafes as the men do, as these are still “predominantly gendered as male spaces.”219

In particular, Puig notes that the people who reside there develop a strong sense of solidarity. People from outside the neighbourhood have mixed feelings about the

218 Puig, “Egypt’s,” 519.
Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers as they seem to enjoy a type of freedom as entertainers, and with the close mixing of men and female entertainers, but they are also despised because of their supposedly licentious way of life.\textsuperscript{220} It is clear from Zuzu’s encounters with others, such as Umran the Islamist and Said’s ex-fiancée, that some people felt this way about Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers, and in particular dancers, in the 1970s. Armbrust argues that, based on the intentionally dilapidated look of Zuzu’s neighbourhood, the point of Zuzu’s character is to represent “decadent traditional life trying hard to modernize.”\textsuperscript{221}

Zuzu’s character in many ways represents the “New Woman” of Egypt, as described in the first chapter, or at least she strives to be. She is educated and desires to work, and in scenes in which she appears with Said the two talk philosophy, indicating that she is intelligent and capable of being an intellectual match for him. After meeting Said, she has a conversation with one of the women in her house and they discuss men and romance. The woman says that she was once in love with a pickpocket, reminding us of Zuzu’s low-class family life, while Zuzu questions why a woman is expected to wait for a man to come to her. She determines that she will pursue Said, asserting her personality, just like the “New Woman” was said to do.

\textbf{Dr. Said and “High Art”}

The questionable respectability and acceptability of the Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers are prominent throughout the film, and are often contrasted with Said’s “high art.” While Zuzu and her family represent the “traditional life” of Egypt trying to modernize, and of entertainers who lived, studied, and worked together since the turn of

\textsuperscript{220} Puig, “Egypt’s,” 522.
\textsuperscript{221} Armbrust, \textit{Mass Culture}, 119.
the century, Zuzu’s love interest, Dr. Said, represents a new type of performer that began to emerge in opposition to the traditional performers in the late 1950s and early 1960s, educated “artistes.” Said is a new professor in the theatre department, and has just returned from studying abroad. Armbrust notes that Said is played by Husayn Fahmi, who in real life had just returned from studying in the UCLA film program. As noted in the previous chapters, Western education and arts were often equated with “modernization.” Said is from a wealthy family and has been educated abroad, returning home to take up teaching and run a theatre company. He is the essence of the ideal Egyptian modernity, particularly as his theatre company blends “traditional” Egyptian culture with modern, Western elements. I will come back to this later in the chapter, but it is apparent that Said’s theatre work is viewed differently from Zuzu’s wedding performances. Part of the difference is the space between the performer and the audience, as the dancers perform on a stage, removed from their audience, rather than a ghaziya dancer like Tamr Hinna who performs in close proximity to her audience. Further in this chapter I will return to other elements, such as the costuming, training, and state sponsorship.

Said’s modern style theatre company contrasts with the chaos of Zuzu’s life as a traditional performer. After Zuzu determines to pursue Said, she sneaks into Said’s theatre to see one of his practices. The practice is quite unlike the chaotic scenes of Zuzu’s family at the wedding party, and later scenes inside her house. In Said’s theatre, a group of performers practice on a large stage with sets in the background. They are dressed in modern clothing, performing to a quasi-Egyptian piece of music. It has an Oriental rhythm but the singing is comically operatic. The song is a blend of

222 Armbrust, Mass Culture, 120.
“traditional” Egyptian and “modern” Western music. At one point, Said, who is directing them from the audience, stops them and complains to the stage manager that they should be performing the song with more Egyptian style singing and music.

They continue, but it is a comical farce as the stage director vibrates his hips in an unintentionally humorous fashion when the music reaches a crescendo. Said says that while they are presenting “high art” and other theatres are common, the other theatres are packed and theirs has no audience. Art must move people, and represent their will and be performed with enthusiasm. He threatens to cut the scene if it does not improve, and if it cannot elicit some emotion from the audience. Later in the film we see the troupe practicing to the Oriental / modern music. They wear costumes that are a rendition of folkloric outfits, reminiscent of paintings from the 1800s in which the dancers wear large pantaloons, or harem pants, loose blouses, vests and long head scarves.223

Said’s theatre is directly contrasted with Zuzu’s own “backwards” life when she returns home. Oriental music plays as she climbs the numerous stairs up to her apartment. Inside her apartment women and children sit at the dining room table while musicians play accordions and drums and guitars, and Zuzu dances around, singing of Said’s handsomeness. Dancers in leg and belly baring outfits shimmy in the living room and her step-father serves tea in his traditional *galabiyya* and cap, then drums on the back of the serving tray and dances around the dancers. Zuzu changes from her Dutch style mini dress into a sailor outfit and the performers converge in a chaotic group in the living room. Zuzu then changes into a green dress and the performers disappear and she dances

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223 See, for example, the painting *The Ghawazee of Cairo*, by David Roberts, inspired from his travels in Egypt from 1838 – 1840. See also Edward Lane’s various illustrations of women, especially “A Lady in the Dress worn in private” in *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, Volume I* (London; John Murray, 1871), 52. From Travellers in the Middle East Archive (TIMEA). [http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/19585](http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/19585). Accessed September 12, 2010.
around the dining room table where her mother and step-father sit, eventually sitting cross legged on the table while her step-father drums on the table. Her mother and step-father get up and dance through the living room.

Zuzu’s private life is contrasted again with Said’s in the next scene when she meets Said and the two go sailing and out for a meal on a waterfront restaurant. They kiss and Zuzu returns home. There, Zuzu finds one of the dancers has tried to kill herself over the loss of a lover. She was supposed to marry the son of a carpenter, but his mother did not want her son to marry a Muhammad ‘Ali Street performer. Zuzu realizes that this is a lesson for them, that as Muhammad ‘Ali Street entertainers they should know their place, and not strive for men above their social class. With this understanding, she avoids Said for a time. Distressed and missing Said, Zuzu tells her mother that she has always loved singing and dancing, and as a little girl she loved to watch her mother perform. She also says it is in her blood. Her mother asks where all this pain she is suffering comes from. Zuzu says it comes from people who are “different” from them.

Said, however, has broken things off with his fiancée. In contrast to Zuzu, his cousin does not understand his desire to work in the theatre, and wants him to get an office job so he can stay home with her more often. While Zuzu is able to match Said intellectually, his cousin is always shown as whining and flirting. Said is upset he cannot find Zuzu anywhere, and finally a friend of his says he knows how to reach her. His friend, Suleiman, goes to Zuzu’s mother and it is clear the two know one another. He tells her he wants to make her and Zuzu into television stars and they could have their own show. Zuzu’s mother says she wishes Zuzu would acquiesce, listen to her, quit
school and dance more. If she did, she could own her own Mercedes and be rich.  Suleiman offers to speak with Zuzu and her mother agrees.

Once alone, he reveals his true purpose, he has come to tell Zuzu that Saïd has been depressed without her and wants her to return to him. Zuzu says, “Listen, my mother and I are dancers from Muhammad ‘Ali Street. What’s to become of our relationship?” Suleiman tells her that there is nothing wrong with being from Muhammad ‘Ali Street. He himself, now a famous Maestro, was once a clarinet player from the street. Furthermore, she and Said are both “artistes” and Said knows where she comes from and does not care. Excited, Zuzu goes to Said, who says he followed her home once before and has known all along where she lives, and that it does not matter.

However, when his ex-fiancée and her mother scheme to expose Zuzu’s background to Said’s father at a wedding party, his response to her profession is less accepting. The ex-fiancée and her mother hire Zuzu’s group to perform at Said’s sister’s wedding party, insisting (and paying extra) to get Zuzu’s mother to dance. Said wants to introduce Zuzu to his father at the party in order to make their relationship official and prove he is serious about her. In the midst of their meeting, ululation rings out, and the sounds of a zaffah (wedding procession) play. Zuzu sees her mother, dressed in a long dress, leading the procession of dancers and wedding participants down the stairway. She then dances in a semi-circle with the dancers and musicians around her, and Zuzu’s step-father singing beside her. Said and his father laugh when Said’s father says “Who is this old lady dancing?” He then asks Zuzu what she thinks of it. Zuzu gives a sick looking smile in response and half-hides behind Said’s back. Said’s ex-fiancé then tells his father that the dancer is Zuzu’s mother. Zuzu accuses Said of setting her up for this
humiliation, saying “What else does a girl like me deserve?” Said denies it, and conjectures that his ex must have arranged it.

The young people surround Zuzu’s mother, dancing around her in a ring and singing a silly song in Arabic and English, “I Love You Baby.” She looks confused, attempting to dance along, but eventually stops and sits down. When she does, the young people grab her and pull her up. Zuzu yells at them to stop, saying “Have you no pity?” Zuzu takes her mother to a chair and tells her that she should not be alone in this. Her mother tells her that weddings bring all kinds of people, and you have to please everyone, it is the rule of the professional. Zuzu tells her that she is a great *usta*, and should not be dancing, and Zuzu will replace her on the dance floor. She places a scarf around her hips. When Said tries to stop her, forbidding her to perform, Zuzu asks if her performing could be worse than the insult to her mother. Zuzu tells him to go and sit with the “gentlemen” and watch quietly. Defiantly, she orders the musicians to play and dances around the floor briefly. She then calls for them to stop, and she and her mother stand and sarcastically dedicate the performance “for high society, the well-bred and polite people who never harm anybody.” She then dances to a slow Egyptian song of wounded love.

Despite Said’s acceptance of Zuzu’s family’s profession, it is clear that it is something that is ridiculed by many of the elite, including his own family, whereas his work is generally accepted as “art.” This idea is made clear in a conversation between Zuzu and her mother after the party. Zuzu’s mother says that “we are like toys in the hands of those people” and “no matter how butter and honey mix, they cry when it is taken from them, but they never consider it part of them.” By this she indicates that the lower class entertainers are at the mercy of the rich people who hire them and use them
for sport without considering what other people have to suffer and their own privileged lives.

**Nightclub Performers**

After the party, Zuzu drops out of school and announces to her mother that she will become a nightclub dancer. Her friends try to convince her to stay in school, but she says that some people do not want to see others try to better themselves. She tells her mother she is going to work in the nightclubs on al-Haram Street (also known as Pyramid Road). Al-Haram Street is the home of many of Cairo’s nightclubs, and is where the dancer who attempted suicide went to work after her fateful romance. It is clearly a place of danger and shame, but also a place where a dancer can achieve money and fame. Initially, her mother is excited. Later, she falls asleep on the couch and has a dream in which Zuzu appears as a glamorous nightclub performer. The dream shifts and Zuzu is drinking alcohol and smoking while men wave money at her. Sexy music plays, and then we see Zuzu on a bed, blowing smoke and beckoning to a man whom she draws towards her. Her mother wakes, screaming “la la la” (no no no) and tells her husband that Zuzu will not work in nightclubs.

Clearly, the nightclub dancer is of a different caste from the *firqat al-aroussa*, the wedding procession troupe. The woman who earlier attempted suicide is said to have gone to Al-Haram Street to dance in the clubs and now has no shame and does not care what anyone thinks of her. In real life, nightclub dancers were often associated with prostitution, as some prostitutes really did work as dancers in order to boost their clientele. Even if some dancers were not prostitutes, they would sometimes give men the impression they were by leaving them with room keys that would not work, or
encouraging men to compete for a dancer by buying more alcohol. This way they could make more tips and get men to drink more. Nightclub dancers were expected to encourage men to drink, as the nightclub profited from alcohol and dancers made commission based on the amount of alcohol customers consumed.\textsuperscript{224} Van Nieuwkerk found that many dancers from the wedding and festival circuit were insulted when asked if they would dance in nightclubs, as they felt this was beneath them.\textsuperscript{225}

In \emph{Zuzu} three distinctive classes of dancers are evident. The highest class of these is Said’s theatre art, art that is derived from his foreign education and interpretation of Egyptian heritage. Below this is Zuzu’s family, the Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers, Egypt’s “backwards” and “traditional” style of dance. The lowest and most disreputable class of dancer, and least likely to be eligible for redemption or rehabilitation, is the nightclub performer. However, changes in the profession in the late 1950s and 1960s began to drive some of the dancers of the wedding and festival circuit into the nightclubs, and wipe out the small amount of esteem afforded to the Muhammad ‘Ali Street dancers.

**The Decline of Dancers as Popular Cinema Stars**

The mid 1960s marked the decline of the big name dancers in Egyptian cinema. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Samia Gamal no longer appeared in films, and Naima Akif retired in 1964, passing away in 1966. Tahiya Karioka had stopped dancing, and \emph{Zuzu} was her first and only dance performance in many years. This decline is hinted at in \emph{Zuzu}. Zuzu must defend herself against Umran the Islamist, who accuses her of shameful behaviour, an indication of the rise of conservative Islamism in Egypt. Said’s own theatre company is “high art” of the kind that the state began to

\textsuperscript{224} Van Nieuwkerk, ‘\emph{A Trade},’ 44-45.
\textsuperscript{225} Van Nieuwkerk, ‘\emph{A Trade},’ 60.
sponsor in the late 1950s and early 60s, a style that began to be seen as more indicative of the state ideology of Egyptian identity and modernity. Furthermore, changes to the system of licensing and regulations made it increasingly difficult for performers of the old order to operate in their traditional fashion.

**The Rise of Islamism**

Towards the end of the film, after Zuzu is revealed as a Muhammad ‘Ali Street dancer, a poster of her dancing in a skimpy outfit is up on the community board at school and Umran the Islamist stands next to it. Early on in the film, Umran had written a poem on the shamefulness of Zuzu running in shorts on the track field, and he now has more to say. Zuzu asks him if The Straight Path, his group’s magazine, has become an arts magazine with dancers in it. Umran preaches against her, saying that liquor leads to dancing, and stadiums (which include girls such as Zuzu running in shorts) leads to cabarets. Umran says he wants to cleanse the country of evil. Zuzu’s friends tell Umran he is not living in the modern age, and that the government supports dancers, such as Farida Fahmy. At one point, a girl in hijab stops to look at the poster, but wanders off in the midst of the argument.

Zuzu says that she is different from Farida, as her mother is a Muhammad ‘Ali Street dancer. She says she dances because her mother is a dancer, and if her mother owned a bakery, or sold cigarettes, she would take her place to relieve her. Zuzu’s friends try to defend her, and get her to dance, but she refuses. A fight breaks out between them and Umran, but Zuzu stops them just as Umran has his shirt nearly ripped off and they beat him. The encounter hints of the rise of conservative Islamism that had begun to develop after the 1967 war with Israel.
Also known as the Six Day War, the 1967 war with Israel was a crushing defeat for the Arab world, with Israel capturing the Golan Heights from Syria, the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan. It was also perceived as the failure of the Nasser’s ideals. Zachary Lockman says that the defeat discredited the ideology that the “authoritarian-populist… pan-Arab nationalist ideology and policies which both [Egypt and Syria] espoused were leading to a modernized, united Arab world which could not only achieve economic development but also successfully confront Israel and secure justice for the Palestinians.” 226 Saad Eddin Ibrahim notes that even though Egyptian socialism was reasonably effective in the 1950s, the 1967 war was blamed on Nasser’s entire system, including socialism. The Soviet Union was equally blamed for letting the Arabs down in that war and therefore socialism, Marxism, and the Soviet Union gradually acquired negative reputations. 227

After Nasser’s death in 1970, Anwar Sadat became president, and in order to distance himself from Nasser’s policies and quell the pro-Nasser faction of society, Sadat made concessions to the Islamist organizations that Nasser had persecuted. Mervat Hatem notes that although the new constitution stated the “commitment of the state to providing the means to reconcile the obligations women have in the family, their work in society, and their equality to men in the political, social and cultural arenas," it added the important qualification "provided that [the above] did not infringe on the rules of Islamic sharia." 228 This signifies an important parting from Nasser’s secular and egalitarian policies as noted in the previous chapters.

226 Lockman, Contending Visions, 159.
In response to the 1967 failure, people began to turn to conservative Islamism, which offered a means of explaining and aiding Egypt’s economic problems. In his study of Islamic militants in the late 1970s, Ibrahim found that the militants perceived Egypt's economic problems as the outcome of the corruption of top officials, conspicuous consumerism, the mismanagement of resources, the application of imported policies, and low productivity.  

Mervat Hatem notes that Islamists provided a means of “self-help” to manage these economic issues. A conservative mode of dress for women was suggested as a solution for consumerism, and they urged women to do without the “financially cumbersome obligations that discouraged men from entering into marriage. They argued in favor of symbolic dowries (mahr) and shared dwellings, usually with one's in-laws.”

While only one of the female students in Zuzu appears in hijab, this was fast becoming a reality in Egypt in the 1970s. By the late 1970s the hijab was adopted by most female Islamist university students, and then in the 80s by lower middle-class women as a means of showing that they could hold jobs in the public sphere and still be good wives and mothers. Umran and his “Straight Path” magazine indicate the early development of Islamist organizations in Egyptian universities. While dancers had long been considered immoral and shameful, they were still prominent elements of Egyptian culture in the 1950s. However, the fact that increasingly vocal Islamic elements in society coincided with the decline of the popularity of Muhammad ‘Ali Street dancers was likely no coincidence, although it was not the only factor.

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231 Eickelman, Muslim Politics, 91.
The Rise of “Educated and Modern” Dancers

Another factor in the decline of Muhammad ‘Ali Street dancers and dancers of the style of Naima, Samia and Tahiya was likely the rise of what I consider “educated and modern” dancers. Said’s troupe represents this style with their blending of “folkloric” and “modern” dance. In the late 1950s and early 60s Nasser’s state began to sponsor folkloric art and culture, but it was an art and culture that made use of select elements of an idealized Egyptian heritage and modern elements. A prime example of this is the Reda Troupe and its lead dancer, Farida Fahmy, referenced in Zuzu.

Mahmoud Reda, the son of a middle-class Islamic scholar, founded the Reda Troupe in 1959. As Zuzu mentioned, Fahmy was born to a very different family from Zuzu. Whereas Zuzu’s father is mentioned as having been a low level civil servant, and her mother of the Muhammad ‘Ali Street tradition, Fahmy’s father was a prominent lecturer in the Cairo University Faculty of Engineering and her mother was a British fashion designer. She danced not out of financial necessity, but out of choice, something that was arguably more respectable, as she did not take tips or encourage men to drink for commission.

The folkloric style of dance also differed greatly from the wedding circuit. Reda selected elements of Egyptian culture to incorporate into his dances, for example, costumes and movements from various regions, while eliminating elements that he felt were negative, such as the “superstitious” zar rituals associated with the lower classes.

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234 A zar is a trance-like state induced as a type of exorcism of bad spirits done by groups of women in various areas of Africa. It is often associated with superstition and the peasant classes.
Furthermore, Reda altered “movements he found sexually suggestive, by changing the way that they had been executed originally.” Reda fused the idyllic, and sometimes made-up, aspects of “traditional” Egyptian culture with ballet training and stage choreography in a fashion similar to the blending of Egyptian culture and Western modernity mentioned in the two previous chapters. In the early 1960s, the Reda Troupe came under state sponsorship, and was promoted as a representation of Egypt culture. For example, in 1960 Nasser utilized the troupe to entertain visiting foreign dignitaries, including the King of Afghanistan and the President of Pakistan.

This blend of folkloric and modern dance rapidly became popular in Egypt in the 1960s, and is evidenced in the space afforded to folkloric troupes in *Al-Kawakib*. In 1949 *Al-Kawakib* showed mostly dancers in costumes similar to Samia, Naima and Tahiya, either two piece costumes or tight dresses known as *baladi* dresses (or country dresses). By 1964, the height of the popularity of the Reda Troupe, *Al-Kawakib* was affording space to folkloric troupes and ballet companies. Several issues of *Al-Kawakib* featured folkloric troupes, including the Reda Troupe. This preference for folkloric troupes and ballet continued into the 1970s and today the state continues to support the Reda Troupe as their National Folkloric Troupe, although Fahmy and Reda are no longer involved.

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235 Fahmy, “Creative,” 68.
237 *Al-Kawakib* issues from 1964 with folkloric troupes and ballet dancers include February 4, 11 and 18, March 17, June 30, October 13, November 10 and 17, December 8 and 29.
238 Issues of *Al-Kawakib* from 1973, the year after *Zuzu* was released, feature photos and articles of various folkloric dance troupes from around the Middle East almost monthly along with photos of young and new *raks sharqi* dancers (dancers in the style of Samia, Tahiya and Naima) such as Suhair Zaki, Nagwa Fuad, Hayatim, Lebleba and Nehad Sabri.
In contrast to dancers like the film stars, these new troupes were often run by dancers who had some form of formal training in Western dance styles, and performed in troupes. They also wore more conservative costuming, something that would make them more acceptable and respectable in society. There was a distance between the dancers and their audience, as they often performed on stage. Furthermore, as noted, the sexual elements of the dance were removed, something clearly at odds with the very seductive form of dance of the Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers.

While in the 1930s and 40s, dancers such as Tahiya Karioka and Samia Gamal were patronized by the state, in the late 1950s and 1960s, it was the new “educated and modern” dancers who were supported by the state. As noted, Tahiya danced in King Farouk’s wedding procession, and Farouk proclaimed Samia as the “National Dancer of Egypt.” When Farouk travelled abroad to France, it was Samia Gamal who was flown in to perform for him.\(^{239}\) By the early 1960s it was the Reda Troupe that had become “Egypt’s National Folkloric Troupe” and was made use of to entertain visiting foreign dignitaries, rather than dancers of the “colloquial” or nightclub style.

**Regulations and Licensing**

Along with the shift towards favouring folkloric and ballet dancers came changes to the ways in which dancers were legally able to operate. Van Nieuwkerk notes that from the 1960s onwards a process of professionalization took place in the Egyptian arts scene. Many popular stars, once famous, stopped working in the “less prestigious popular performing arts circuit” and many “common entertainers have been barred from the state-

controlled radio and t.v.”

As a result of a growing number of art schools and institutions a division was created between the “educated” dancers and those without formal training, such as the Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers. Emerging nightclub dancers in the late 1950s and 60s, such as Nagwa Fouad, also began to train formally in ballet and with the national folkloric troupe. At first this was likely a matter of following the trend of state supported “modern” and “educated” dance, but over time this became a necessity.

The type of dance performed by Muhammad ‘Ali Street dancers and others such as Samia, Naima and Tahiya, or the solo dance that came to represent the “backwards” heritage in Zuzu, has gone unrecognized by the regulatory committees and trade unions. While dancers have a trade union, only folk and ballet dancers are allowed membership. The dance which has come to be known as *raks sharqi* (eastern dancing) in distinction from the folkloric styles which are generally simply referred to by their region of origin, is barred from theatres and is no longer allowed on state television because of religious opposition. In the late 1980s the agency that provides licensing to dancers to perform in public refused to give out licenses to dancers who did not belong to the dancers’ union and have at least five years of experience performing with a ballet or folk company.

Samia Gamal, Tahiya Karioka and Naima Akif all found their way to stardom not through formal training, but through a system similar to the Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers. Tahiya Karioka related in an interview in 1976 that she and Samia Gamal both applied to jobs in Badia Masabni’s club as young women, presumably not as

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240 Van Nieuwkerk, ‘*A Trade,*’ 62.


242 Van Nieuwkerk, ‘*A Trade,*’ 63.
dancers, but as workers. Tahiya relates that she would watch the dancers and try to learn from them. When she was finished her work and Badia was out of the club, Tahiya would put on music and try to imitate what she had seen. Badia caught her one day, and from then on trained her to perform. Like Zuzu, Naima Akif was raised as a performer, following in the footsteps of her family, the Akif Circus. Had these dancers appeared on the dance scene in the 1960s, rather than the 1940s, it is unlikely they would have been granted starring roles in films.

Ironically, the most famous dancers of the 20th century would not have met Sadat’s state’s criteria for new dancers. The year after Zuzu was released, in 1973, a new system of licencing and registration was established which required that dancers had to pass an examination in order to be granted a licence to work in nightclubs. A dancer’s artistic level, costume, and interaction with the audience was evaluated by a panel of judges. Furthermore, her records with the police and tax department were checked. This would eliminate many of the most famous dancers of the earlier era. For example, Tahiya had been arrested and jailed at various times by both Nasser and Sadat for political activism. Badia Masabni, who owned the casino that launched the careers of so many famous singers and dancers, is said to have left Egypt as a result of her heavy

\[\text{\textsuperscript{244}}\text{Van Nieuwkerk, 49.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{245}}\text{Edward Said, “Farewell to Tahia,” Colors of Enchantment:Theater, Dance, Music, and the Visual Arts of the Middle East, ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 228.}\]
tax debt, and Samia Gamal was barred from leaving Egypt at one point because of problems with tax collectors.246

The debates in Zuzu about the respectability of the Muhammad ‘Ali Street performers in relation to Said’s form of art, and the contrast between the two styles, hints at the growing tensions between the two forms of dance, and the changes that had begun to take place in the early 1960s with Nasser’s state sponsored “traditional culture and art.” Armbrust points out that the final scene of Zuzu provides an idealized reconciliation and acknowledgement of Egypt’s backward past, as symbolized by Zuzu’s mother and the performers, and the move towards “modernity.”

After Zuzu says she is dropping out of school to perform in nightclubs and refuses to listen to her friends, Said comes to her house to insist she return to her classes. Armbrust notes that Said turns into a “conservative *ibn al-balad*” as he smacks her and orders her to return to school.247 Zuzu listens, and returns in the midst of an assembly, comprised of teachers and students, regarding accusations against her supposed immorality. She says that the crime she has been accused of is that she walks the street of her mother, and that her mother carries the mark of the pathetic street, which in turn carries the mark of a past age, an age of backwardness. She says that her sin is that she hid this truth for fear of persecution, but that they all suffer from this. They are all children of an environment the world has left behind and every time they try to rise it weighs them down. The way to overcome this is to know oneself, and to look to their

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future, as she is trying to do by returning to school. Umran is impressed by this and says that anyone of this mentality deserves to be in school. Armbrust says that the colloquial heritage, “humbled by Zuzu’s repudiation of her former profession, joins with classicism through the transforming offices of higher education. Now that the ‘schizophrenia’ induced by the uneasy coexistence of conflicting cultural heritages is symbolically healed, Zuzu can be herself.”

Ultimately, however, this schizophrenia is only healed when the “backwards” past is acknowledged, then left behind. Zuzu does not seem to continue her double life of studying by day and dancing by night. The art of Said’s modern theatre is the acceptable art, not the firqat al-aroussa of Muhammad ‘Ali Street, although even Said’s modern theatre is subject to comical assessment as it appears his choreographic director strives too hard to incorporate what he considers to be progressive art.

Conclusion

While in the previous chapters, dancers have represented and questioned societal ideals of the “New Woman” and the class divisions, Zuzu is also symbolic of the tensions between the perceived old-fashioned way of life, and the movement towards “modernity.” Zuzu represents the growing tension between the older tradition of dancing, of which Samia, Tahiya and Naima were a part, and the new dancers that came into being in the late 1950s and early 60s, a way of life in transition. While an idealized compromise is reached in the end of the film, it does hint at the very real tensions and reason for the demise of what came to be known as raks sharqi dancers. From the late 1960s onwards dancers rarely appeared in starring roles in films. Those dancers who did appear were generally relegated to background entertainment, or acted as symbols of

248 Armbrust, Mass Culture, 123.
extravagance and immorality. These changes, brought on by a variety of factors, such as the rise of Islamism, the rise of professionalism and state supported dance troupes of a more “respectable” and “modern” nature, and new regulations and licensing, pushed out the type of dancer that had once been so popular. The backwards and traditional way of life that dancers of the old order were a part of was fast becoming an acknowledged piece of Egypt’s heritage, but one that, under a new system of social and political order, was best left in the past.

249 For example, in Abby Fowq al-Shagara (My Father is Up a Tree, 1969) the dancers and their domain symbolize the extravagance of a bygone era. Nadia al-Gindi, who was not a dancer by trade, plays a nightclub dancer who extorts money from male patrons who are often dressed as effendiya, in tarbush and suits. The men come to the nightclub to get drunk and watch the dancers. The dancers double as prostitutes who run a scam to take men’s money in order to pay their rent and expenses.
Conclusion

Samia Gamal, Naima Akif and Tahiya Karioka were three of the most popular and well-known dancers and actresses of the 1940s, 50s and early 60s. The reputations and personae that these dancers developed both on and off-screen through their roles and in the media contributed to their fame and vice versa. Despite their popularity, their dual status as dancers and popular cultural icons, or members of one of the lowest and most disreputable social classes as well as representatives of aspects of Egyptian culture, was not necessarily ignored or avoided by the directors and screen-writers with whom they worked.

The questionable morality and unusual social status of these three dancers enabled them, at times, to play complicated characters that addressed ideals of women and the social classes that were propagated by elites, the media and the state. For example, in the first chapter I attempted to demonstrate that Nana the dancer, while displaying some of the characteristics of the “New Woman,” also served to contrast the “ideal” woman of the state and elites of the media. The concept of the ideal woman was in itself unclear and the ending of the film suggests that both the dancer and the supposedly ideal woman are of ambiguous status and desirability. Samia’s ability to play the character of Nana hinged, in part, on her previous roles and frequent appearances in the media.

In Tamr Hinna the morally questionable character of the dancer brings to light the ambiguity of the status of the Egyptian peasantry as an ideal for Egyptian morality. On the one hand the peasantry passes moral judgement on the effendiya and awlad al-zawat of the old order, but they themselves represent a way of life that has difficulties reconciling with the new ideal of a progressive Egypt. Naima Akif’s real-life persona as
an ‘alima and a bint al-balad complicates the image of an immoral, “backwards” subculture of the peasantry.

*Khalli Balak min Zuzu* represents the shift away from Egypt’s “traditional” past, as embodied by Tahiya Karioka, the last of a small core of dancers who were frequently engaged by members of the old, pre-Nasser order. Zuzu, played by a non-dancer and an actress of the post-1952 revolutionary era, is able to acknowledge and move past her cultural history. Ultimately Zuzu’s mother, a remnant of Egypt’s “backwards” old order, recognizes that this is the best thing for the next generation. In each of these three films the dancer serves to embody the tensions between Egypt’s perceived cultural heritage and the state and elite ideal of a progressive and “modern” future.

The 1967 war and the subsequent film *Khalli Balak min Zuzu* six years later mark the end of an era in which low-class nightclub dancers became esteemed icons of Egyptian culture. While Samia, Tahiya and Naima began their careers and achieved cinematic fame before the 1952 revolution, it was in Nasser’s era that they were able to take on film roles that positioned them as representative of the Egyptian nation. The Nasser era was one in which a low-class officer was able to become the ruler of the Egyptian nation, an era of hopefulness and enthusiasm for change. Issues pertaining to the status of women and the peasantry were taken on by the state in a manner that gave many people optimism for a modern, egalitarian, democratic and open society free of foreign influence for the first time since the British occupation in 1882. This atmosphere likely contributed to the ability of low-class nightclub dancers to represent various aspects of Egyptian identity in the Nasser era. By the end of the Nasser era, with the apparent failure of various state policies and the failure of the 1967 war, this enthusiasm
had shifted to one of disillusionment, and dancers were relegated to cinematic roles that positioned them as clear symbols of corruption and immorality.

*Maw‘id ma‘ al-Majhul, Tamr Hinna* and *Zuzu* demonstrate the ability of dancers to not only achieve a level of fame and esteem in the world of entertainment, but also the ability of filmmakers to utilize this status to address complex ideals of women and the social order. Ultimately, as noted, there is little consistency in the ways that dancers are portrayed in films. However, their prominence in films from the 1940s – mid 1960s suggests that they were significant elements of Egyptian society and culture, and as morally ambiguous representatives of Egyptian culture they belie the very ambiguity surrounding the shifting ideals and identity of the 1950s and 60s. Whatever esteem and popularity Samia Gamal, Tahiya Karioka and Naima Akif achieved, this fame and popularity did not necessarily equate respectability. Unlike the figure of Umm Kulthum, these dancers were never able to fully shed the stigmas associated with their profession. Despite their fame, these dancers were not “morally or socially unassailable,” and their representations of various aspects of Egyptian identity and elite and state ideals suggest that these ideals were not either.

The study of the representations of dancers in Egyptian cinema reveals the relationship between lower levels of society, women, the state and the manufacturing of Egyptian identity and ideals. In the three primary films addressed in this thesis, the dancers’ ability to achieve some level of esteem, if not respectability, is in relation to several factors: the dancer’s previous film roles and representation in the media; the relationship between the dancer’s film character and “modernity;” and the concept of “modernity” being expressed, either the status of women in society, the status of the
peasantry, or the status of dancers themselves. Given that concepts of “modernity” and “tradition” fluctuate, and are often ambiguous, so then is the status of the dancer, who is at times both the embodiment of traditional and modern Egyptian identity. The murky status of the dancer at the end of these films suggests that the tensions between Egypt’s traditional heritage and ideals of a progressive modernity remained unresolved throughout the 1950s, 60s and early 70s.
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