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A Polyphonic Adaptation: Noir Sensibilities in Naguib Mahfouz and Salah Abu Seif's Take on Émile Zola's Thérèse Raquin

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A POLYPHONIC ADAPTATION:

Noir Sensibilities in Naguib Mahfouz and Salah Abu Seif's Take on Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*

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Abstract | En 1951, Salah Abu-Seif réalise *Lak Yūm yā ẓālim* (*Ton jour viendra*), en adaptation de *Thérèse Raquin* d'Émile Zola (1867), d'après un scénario de Naguib Mahfouz. Pour leur troisième collaboration, Abu-Seif et Mahfouz ne se contentent pas d'adapter le roman de Zola ; ils y intègrent également des traits et des techniques du film noir, créant ainsi ce que cet article qualifie d'adaptation polyphonique, qui navigue librement entre plusieurs sources. Si leur partenariat est avant tout reconnu pour avoir posé les bases du réalisme cinématographique égyptien, cet article propose de nuancer cette lecture en mettant en avant l'inscription du film dans le thriller criminel. Bien que l'adaptation de romans français ait été une pratique courante dans le cinéma égyptien avant 1952, le choix de *Thérèse Raquin*—roman central dans la sensibilité noir d'après-guerre—suggère que la connexion entre film noir et cinéma égyptien est plus ancienne et plus profonde qu'on ne le suppose généralement.

Mots-clés | Adaptation, Polyphonie, Réalisme égyptien, Film noir, Femme fatale, Crime et film arabe, Cinéma égyptien avant 1952, Roman français au cinéma égyptien, Naguib Mahfouz, Salah Abu-Seif, Émile Zola.

Abstract | In 1951, Salah Abu-Seif directed *Lak Yūm yā ẓālim* (*Your Day Is Coming*), scripted by Naguib Mahfouz and adapting Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867). In their third collaboration, Abu-Seif and Mahfouz go beyond merely adapting Zola's novel; they also incorporate film noir techniques, creating what this article terms a polyphonic adaptation that navigates multiple sources. While their partnership is primarily credited with pioneering realism in Egyptian cinema, this article argues that the film's crime thriller elements warrant a reassessment of this view. Although French novel adaptations were common in pre-1952 Egyptian cinema, their selection of *Thérèse Raquin*—a novel central to the post-WWII

transcultural noir sensibility—suggests that film noir's connection to Egyptian cinema is both earlier and more profound than generally assumed

Keywords | Adaptation, Polyphony, Egyptian Realism, Film Noir, Femme Fatale, Arabic Crime Film, Egyptian Film Before 1952, French Novel in Egyptian Film, Naguib Mahfouz, Salah Abu Seif, Émile Zola.

In 1951, Salah Abu-Seif released *Lak Yūm yā ẓālim* (*Your Day Is Coming*) whose script was written by Naguib Mahfouz.[1] Adapted from Émile Zola's 1867 novel *Thérèse Raquin*, *Lak Yūm* holds a significant place in the history of Egyptian film adaptations, Egyptian film depiction of crime, and Egyptian realism in film and literature.[2] For Abu Seif, *Lak Yūm* was his "first realist movie" and the first feature film of his own initiative after six works commissioned to him by film producers. Considering *Lak Yūm* a turning point in his career at several levels, in 1978, Abu Seif released a remake titled *al-Mujrim* (*The Criminal*), maintaining the first screenplay but altering the title.[3] With two adaptations of the same script, Abu Seif and Mahfouz contribute to a substantial world filmography depicting Émile Zola's naturalist novel[4].

Thérèse Raquin has been a source of contention since its first publication. On January 23, 1868, Ferragus (penname of the critic Louis Ulbach) wrote the opening

1- Arabic proper names are not transliterated unless they are names of fictional characters. *Lak Yūm yā ẓālim* is abbreviated hereinafter as *Lak Yūm*. The English title (*Your Day Is Coming*) is the translation of SHAFIK Viola, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity*, Cairo, New York, American University of Cairo Press, 1998, p. 133. The references to *Lak Yūm* are scattered in the bibliography concerned with Mahfouz and Abu Seif. Cf. AL-ARIS Ibrahim, "*Lak Yūm Yā ẓālim li-Salah Abu Seif: Mādhā Tabaqqā min* Émile Zola?", *Independent Arabia*, May 2, 2021, [online], https://www.independentarabia.com/node/224076/ثقافة/لك-يوم-يا-ظالم-لصلاح-أبو-سيف-ماذا-يبقى-من-إميل-زولا؟, last visit Dec 18, 2023. For an introduction to Abu Seif's filmography, Cf. AL-NAHHAS Hashem, "Salah Abu Seif wa-Tajdhīr l-Wāqiʿiyya wa-l-Tanwīr fī l-Cinema l-Miṣriyya", *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 15, 1995, pp. 6–21 ; MEJRI Ouissal, "Salah Abu Seif and Arab Neorealism", *Wide Screen*, vol. 3, no. 1, June 2011, [Accessed: Dec 18, 2023]. Available at: https://widescreenjournal.org/archives/wide-screen-vol-3-no-1/; FAWZI Nagi, *Cinema l-Shʿab*, Cairo, *al-Haiʾa l-Miṣṣriyya l-ʾĀmma lil-Kitāb*, 2017. On Mahfouz's filmography, Cf. QASSIM Mahmoud, *Naguib Mahfouz bain l-Film wa-l-Riwāya.* Cairo, *Hindāwī* Publications, [online], [Accessed Dec 18, 2023]. Available at : https://www.hindawi.org/books/38269262/38/. On the collaboration between Mahfouz and Abu Seif, Cf. Al-NAHHAS Hashim, *Naguib Mahfouz ʿala l-Shāsha*, Cairo, *al-Haiʾa l-Miṣṣriyya l-ʾĀmma lil-Kitāb*. 1975. FARID Samir, "*Kitābān 'an Naguib Mahfouz wa-l-Cinema*", *al-Qāhira*, No. 92, Feb, 1989, pp. 118-121 ; FARID Samir, *Naguib Mahfouz Kātiban lil-Cinema*, *Almasry Alyoum*, 2011. According to Abu Seif's memoirs, Wafiqa Abou Gabal, his assistant editor and spouse undertook the adaptation before Abu Seif and Mahfouz embarked on developing the screenplay. Cf. HAMMOUDA Adil, *Mudhakkirāt Salah Abu Seif*. Cairo, *Rīsha* Publications, 2011, (e-pub Edition), pp. 220 – 221. I limit my reference to Mahfouz and Abu Seif because Abu Gabal's name only appears as an assistant editor in the film credits. Another contributor I do not mention in this paper is al-Sayyed Bedeir, the film dialogue author. Although Bedeir formed a trio with Mahfouz and Abu Seif, my paper focuses only on this latter tandem to avoid extra length.

2- For an overview of adaptation in Egyptian film, cf. QASSIM Mahmoud, « al-Iqtibās: al-Maṣādir l-Ajnabiyya fī l-Cinema l-Miṣriyya », Giza, *Wikālat l-Ṣaḥāfa l-ʾArabiyya*, 2018. The most concise presentation of this history is in EL-KHACHAB Walid, "*Les adaptations d'œuvres littéraires dans le cinéma égyptien : transferts de la modernité, réalisme et valorisation culturelle*", in : BEDJAOUI Ahmed, SERCEAU Michel (dir.), *Les cinémas arabes et littérature*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2019, pp. 113-120.

3- Cf. ABU SHADI Ali, « Waqāʾiʿ l-Cinema l-Miṣriyya fī l-Qarn l-ʿIshrīn », Cairo, *al-Haiʾa l-Miṣṣriyya l-ʾĀmma lil-Kitāb*, 2004, p. 239.

4- Listing the movies bearing the same title of the novel by 1969, Leo Braudy mentions Einar Zangenberg's (1911 Denmark,) Nino Martoglio's (1915 Italy,) Jacques Feyder's (1926, France - USA title: *Shadows of Fear*,) and Marcel Carné's (1953 France - USA title: *The Adulteress*.) Cf. BRAUDY Leo, "Zola on Film: The Ambiguities of Naturalism", in *Yale French Studies*, no. 42, 1969, pp. 68-88. More recently, in 2021, Kate Griffith and Andrew Watts overview several films and TV renditions of Zola's novel worldwide. Cf. GRIFFITH Kate, WATTS Andrew, *The History of French Literature on Film*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021 p. 7, 17 & 225–261. For recent theatre musicals and operatic adaptations, cf. JORDAN PRITCHARD Laura, *Operatic Adaptations of Émile Zola's Thérèse Raquin: A Study and Comparative Analysis*, Dissertation, Musical Arts, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama, 2022, pp. 67. p. 9-16.

article of *Le Figaro* under the title "*La littérature putride*" ("Putrid Literature"), labeling *Thérèse Raquin* the "residue of all previously published horrors."[5]. Considering Thérèse a spectral figure, Ferragus asserted the impossibility of adapting the novel for the stage. Zola, in defense, responded not only in the preface to the second edition but also through his own stage adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin*[6].

Yet, Zola's adaptation of his novel was only the first. Before the Egyptian adaptation, the novel's plot – which revolved around two lovers murdering a husband before tearing each other apart with hatred – had been intertextual in several film traditions, including French poetic realism, Italian neorealism, and, more connected to this article, Hollywoodian film noir. *Lak Yūm*, I argue, not only adapts Zola's novel but also incorporates film noir techniques.

To navigate the multiple layers and sources involved in this process, I propose the concept of "polyphonic adaptation"[7]. This concept highlights how, within the framework of *tamṣīr* (Egyptianization), the film creates a hybrid structure that surpasses conventional interpretations of adaptation as merely a shift from text to film or from European to Egyptian cinema. Although the choice of Zola's novel as the source for *Lak Yūm* aligns with the trend of adapting French novels in pre-1952 Egyptian cinema[8], I contend that the selection of *Thérèse Raquin*, with its rich history of hard-boiled noir adaptations, suggests a deeper connection between pre-1952 Egyptian film and post-WWII film noir sensibilities than current scholarship has acknowledged[9].

This understanding could contribute to the more recent and more nuanced readings of Egyptian film and literature history, moving beyond the 'nationalist paradigm' that marks 1952 as the start of the Golden Age of patriotic realism toward a narrative that recognizes a pre-1952 golden age of the vernacular, the

5- FERRAGUS, « Lettres de Ferragus III : La littérature putride », *Le Figaro,* Paris, January 23, 1868.

6- ZOLA Émile, *Thérèse Raquin.* Paris, Librairie internationale, 1868, pp. i-ix.

7- Cf. STAM *Robert, François Truffaut and Friends: Modernism, Sexuality, and Film Adaptation*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2006, p. xiii.

8- Works of Alexandre Dumas (father and son), Marcel Pagnol, Victor Hugo and Émile Zola have been adapted in Famous Egyptian movies of the 1930s and 1940s. Cf. SERCEAU Michel, « Iqtibās l-Adab al-Gharbī fī l-Cinema l-Miṣriyya: Dharāʾiʿ thaqāfiyya am Istilhām Namādhij Aṣliyya? », trans. EL-KHACHAB Walid, in MUBARAK Salma, EL-KACHAB Walid, (eds.) *Al-Iqtibās min l-ʾAdab ʾIlā l-Sinima: Maḥṭṭāt fi Tārīkh Mushtarak, op. cit.*, pp. 25– 44.

9- Mahmoud Qassim claims that "If the French novel was the mother of Egyptian adaptations, Hollywood was their 'illicit father." Despite the moralized language of Qassim, his formula indicates how Egyptian film in its first three decades was proud to admit (or pretend) a French novel source of their movies whereas they relied heavily on Hollywood cinema without admitting it as such. Cf. QASSIM Mahmoud, *al-Iqtibās, op. cit.*, p. 1.

popular, the local, and the entertaining[10]. According to the "nationalist paradigm," Egyptian film and novels evolved from a dependence on European and notably French sources to a perpetuated authentic and nationalized expression of identity[11]. By adding the *film noir* element to the debate about this history of Egyptian realism, I aim to show that neither the French nor Hollywoodian influence can be seen as a "pure" source of inspiration for this realism, nor could this latter pretend "pure" authenticity.

Adaptation and Polyphony

Originally developed within the context of Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin's concept of "polyphony" describes the coexistence of multiple and independent voices within a single text. Rather than being subordinated to a single narrative authority, these voices exist in dialogue, creating a layered texture of meaning[12]. Applied to adaptation, Bakhtin's concept provides a framework for understanding how different source voices—be they textual, visual, or cultural—interact within a single work.

Within the framework of adaptation as a multifaceted process, Geoffrey Wagner categorizes adaptations into three types: transposition, where a novel is *faithfully* rendered on screen; commentary, where the source material is deliberately or inadvertently modified; and analogy, which transforms the source text to such an extent that it becomes largely unrecognizable[13]. Deborah Cartmell expands on this framework, emphasizing how commentary and analogy adaptations often

10- Walter Armbrust points out this distinction between the standard (novel) and the (vernacular) film. See ARMBRUST Walter, "New Cinema, Commercial Cinema, and the Modernist Tradition in Egypt", *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics,* No. 15, 1995, pp. 81-129. For a critical reading of the realism/nationalism narrative, see EL-KHACHAB Walid, "*Les adaptations d'œuvres littéraires dans le cinéma égyptien : transferts de la modernité, réalisme et valorisation culturelle*", *op. cit.* For a critical reading of the same narrative in the history of Egyptian novel, see SELIM Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt (1880–1985)*, London, New York, Routledge Curzon, 2004, p. 19-21 ; COLLA Elliott, "Revisiting the Question of the Novel/Nation," *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. XLVI, No. 2, Winter 2017, pp. 76 – 82. For a most recent view of *Nahda* as entertainment see AUJI Hala, CORMACK Raphael, MAHMOUD Alaaeldin, "Introduction: The Nahda And Popular Entertainment", in *The Arab Nahda As Popular Entertainment: Mass Culture and Modernity in the Middle East*, (eds.) AUJI Hala, CORMACK Raphael, MAHMOUD Alaaeldin, London, I. B. Tauris & Company, 2023, pp. 1-14.

11- Cf. SELIM Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt (1880–1985)*, *op., cit.* ; COLLA Elliott, *op. cit. ;* EL-KHACHAB Walid, "*Les adaptations d'œuvres littéraires dans le cinéma égyptien : transferts de la modernité, réalisme et valorisation culturelle*", *op., cit.*

12- Bakhtin's use of the term polyphony suggests that cultural phenomena are characterized by a dynamic interplay of diverse voices and perspectives, emphasizing the dialogic nature of artistic expression and interpretation. See BAKHTIN Mikhail M., *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed., and trans., Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 21. Furthermore, Michael M. Bakhtin asserts that culture cannot be conceived as a cohesive entity with fixed boundaries; rather, it permeates the boundaries themselves, extending its systematic unity into the very fabric of cultural existence. Cf. BAKHTIN Michael M., "Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art (1924)," in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, eds. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Kenneth Brostrom (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 257–326.

13- WAGNER Geoffrey, *The Novel and the Cinema.* Cranbury, Associated University Presses, 1975, p. 220 – 223.

Figure 1: Advertisement of Lak Yūm yā ẓālim, Salah Abu-Seif, 1951

reshape our understanding of how canonical literature is disseminated through subtle or indirect cinematic reinterpretations[14].

Robert Stam extends the Bakhtinian conception of dialogism, hence *polyphony*, with an admixture of Derridean *dissemination* to rethink the debates about adaptation. Moving from the language of "fidelity" and "infidelity," Stam enriches the realm of adaptation studies with his concept of "transtextuality"[15]. Encompassing the intertextual relationships that connect texts across different media, this framework encourages us to view adaptation as an act of cultural and artistic re-creation rather than mere replication[16].

Building on these distinctions, Julie Sanders differentiates between adaptation and appropriation. According to Sanders, adaptations maintain a discernible relationship with the source text, often signaled by titles or embedded references[17]. In contrast, appropriation represents a more transformative process, creating a new cultural product through interpolation, critique, or shifts in genre. This practice often reflects the director's vision, involving cultural relocation or modernization[18]. Sanders also highlights that while the intertextual connection in appropriations may be less overt, they are frequently driven by political or ethical motivations to reinterpret the source material[19].

Similarly, Linda Hutcheon further proposes that "there are many and varied

14- CARTMELL Deborah, "Introduction" in CARTMELL Deborah and WHELEHAN Imelda, (eds.) *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 23-28.

15- Cf. STAM Robert, *op. cit.*, p. 179; STAM Robert, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," in NAREMORE James (ed.), *Film Adaptation*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2000.

16- *Ibid.*

17- SANDERS Julie, *Adaptation and Appropriation*. London/New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 3.

18- *Ibid.*

19- *Ibid.*

motives behind adaptation, and few involve faithfulness"[20]. Hutcheon considers adaptations not as static reproductions but dynamic acts of re-interpretation that engage with their sources in transformative ways[21]. Emphasizing the need for a theoretical perspective that is at once formal and 'experiential,' she distinguishes between adaptation as a formal entity and a performative process[22]. The experiential aspect of this argument sheds light on how the process from an adapted text to film entails complexities of appropriation. For Hutcheon, "the intertextual relationship may be less explicit, more embedded, but what is often inescapable is that a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer's, director's, or performer's decision to reinterpret a source text"[23]. As such, the work of an adaptation analyst entails uncovering the syncretism of both the explicit and implicit intertexts between a source novel and a target movie while interrogating the commitments shaping the adaptation process.

Building on Hutcheon's perspective, Samah Selim applies the concept of adaptation within Arab Nahda studies in two distinct ways. First, she describes it as "a procedure of writing [to which we may add filmmaking] that mobilizes both genre and the conventions and strategies of translation to produce an 'authorless,' and hence intensely mobile text […]." Second, she defines it as "a concept of culture formation that breaks down theories of difference" [24]. For Selim, this approach moves beyond framing adaptation debates in terms of "authenticity and imitation"[25]. Instead of viewing Egyptian popular fiction as "defective" or "immature" novels that signify Arab subalternity, Selim highlights how translations, seen as adaptations, engage in radical and complex forms that disrupt and challenge these binaries.[26]

In my view, Selim's shift from translation to adaptation could also operate in reverse: while the translation of popular fiction can be understood as a form of adaptation, the adaptation of a French novel into an Egyptian film, such as *Lak Yūm*, can similarly be read as a form of translation that inherently involves syncretism. In this light, polyphony encompasses not only the multiplicity of sources integrated during the adaptation process but also the hybridization that embeds these sources within a distinct cultural framework.

In studies of Arab film adaptations, Salma Mubarak and Walid El-Khachab succinctly emphasize film adaptation as "a complex set of transformations that permeate text, genre, [medium], and context. This allows for perceiving adaptation as a collection of intricate shifts, continually reshaped through

20- HUTCHEON Linda, *A Theory of Adaptation*. London/New York, Routledge, 2006, p. xiii.
21- *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
22- *Ibid.*, p. xv.
23- SANDERS Julie, *Adaptation and Appropriation*. London/New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 3.
24- SELIM Samah, *Popular Fiction: Translation and the Nahda in Egypt*. Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 17.
25- *Ibid.*
26- *Ibid.*, p. 30-31.

ongoing journeys across different artistic [and cultural] realms"[27]. According to the two authors, these artistic and cultural realms should not be read only in terms of nationalism, looking at a "French" novel and an "Egyptian" movie as respective "representations of nations"[28].

In *Lak Yūm*, this polyphony is evident in the simultaneous presence of Zola's naturalist themes, the stylistic and thematic conventions of film noir, and the moral and communal ethos of pre-1952 Egyptian cinema. In this sense, my question is not whether *Lak Yūm* accurately represents Zola's novel. Instead, it is how *Thérèse Raquin's* plot has been a subject of conversation between a broader network of texts and films that stand between the novel and its adaptation by the Egyptian duo. By proposing a layer of *noir* sensibility within these "intricate shifts and journeys" between *Thérèse Raquin* and *Lak Yūm,* the realm of adaptation exceeds political borders, genre conventions, and the distinction between novels as high culture and movies as popular culture. More specifically, in the historicization of Egyptian film, the adaptation from Zola's novel to Abu Seif's movie—infused with noir sensibility—highlights the influence of Hollywood cinema, particularly film noir conventions, alongside the French novel, on Egyptian film before 1952[29].

Shadows of *Thérèse Raquin* in the Era of Film Noir

The first film adaptation of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* was introduced by Einar Zangenberg in Denmark in 1911[30]. In 1915, Nino Martoglio released his version in Italy.[31] Jacques Feyder added another adaptation in France in 1928, with the film later distributed in the USA under the title *Shadows of Fear*.[32]. In 1934, James M. Cain published *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, followed by *Double Indemnity* in 1936, both featuring a similar plot of two lovers conspiring to kill

27- Cf. MUBARAK Salma, El-KHACHAB Walid, « *L'adaptation au cinéma égyptien : enjeux théoriques et historiques* », *Regards*, No. 25, 2021, pp. 3 - 21. For the Arabic version of the same text, MUBARAK Salma, EL-KACHAB Walid, "*Muqaddima: al-Iqtibās fī l-cinema l-Miṣriyya – Maḥṭṭāt Tārīkhiyya wa-Mafāhīm Taʾsīsiyya*", in MUBARAK Salma, El KACHAB Walid, (eds.) *Al-Iqtibās min l-ʾAdab ʾIlā l-Sinima: Maḥṭṭāt fī Tārīkh Mushtarak,* Cairo, *al-Marāyā*, 2019, pp. 9 – 21.

28- *Ibid.*

29- Mahmoud Qassim claims, "If the French novel was the mother of Egyptian adaptations, Hollywood was their 'illicit father." Despite the moralized language of Qassim, his formula indicates how Egyptian filmmakers in its first three decades were proud to admit (or pretend) a French novel source of their movies. In contrast, they relied heavily on Hollywood cinema without acknowledging it as such. Cf. QASSIM Mahmoud, *al-Iqtibās, op. cit.,* p. 1.

30- COUSINS Russell, "A chronological survey of screen adaptations of Zola's fiction and his influence on early realist film aesthetics", *The Emile Zola Society*, 2022, [Accessed Feb 2, 2025], Available at : http://www.emilezolasocietylondon.org.uk/about-zola/screenadaptations.html, last visited:

31- *Ibid.*

32- *Ibid.*

a husband[33]. As James Naremore notes, "the plot of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is lifted from Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*"[34]. According to Naremore, Cain's innovation in both *The Postman* and *Double Indemnity* was to abandon the heavy prose of the naturalists and tell the story in a first-person, hard-boiled style reminiscent of Hemingway[35].

Figure 2: Le Dernier Tournant, Pierre Chenal, 1939

Cain's debut novel's first adaptation did not occur in Hollywood; the French poetic realist filmmaker Pierre Chenal adapted it in *Le dernier tournant* (The Last Turning, France, 1939). In 1943, Luchino Visconti released *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, 1943)[36]. This film heralded the neorealism movement and "constitute[d] a mediation between neorealism and American noir [...] via the French cinema

33- CAIN James M., *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. New York, Alfred Knopf, 1934 ; CAIN James M., *Three of a Kind*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1943. For the connection between Cain's two novels and Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* ; cf. NAREMORE James, *More than Night: Film noir in Its Contexts*. Berkeley, Los Angeles London, University of California Press, 2008, p. 279 ; NAREMORE James, *Film Noir: Very Short Introduction*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 66-72, and *Film in the Realm of Adaptation*, Bloomington, Indiana, Institute for Advanced Studies, Indiana University, *Distinguished Lecture Series,* no. 10, 1999. Other scholars find more similarities between Cain and naturalism, cf. PICHON Florian, "James M. Cain and the Naturalistic Hardboiled", *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry*, no. 6.2, May 2020, pp. 36-49. For the place of film noir in this connection ; ORR Christopher, "Cain, Naturalism and Noir", *Film Criticism*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Fall, 2000, pp. 47-64 ; JONES Mathew, *Becoming Film Noir: Film Noir Adaptations of Hard-Boiled Fiction 1944–46*, Doctoral Dissertation, Lampeter, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2017, p. 207; cf. pp. 42–44, 106, 129.

34- Cf. NAREMORE James, *More than Night: Film noir in Its Contexts*. Berkeley, Los Angeles London, University of California Press, 2008, p. 279.

35- *Ibid.*

36- PICHON Florian, *op. cit.* For Visconti's connection to naturalism, cf. VOGEN Magali**,** « Ossessione de Luchino Visconti : sur les lieux du crime », *Cahiers d'études romanes*, no. 17, 2007, pp. 161-171. Cf. NOWELL-SMITH Geoffrey, *Luchino Visconti.* London, Palgrave Macmillan, The British Film Institute, 2003, pp. 16, 13-28.

of the 1930s," where Visconti had indeed collaborated with Renoir[37]. Catherine O'Rawe notes that Visconti "was given a copy of Cain's novel by Renoir and may have seen Pierre Chenal's 1939 adaptation"[38]. It is, therefore, reasonable to argue that Cain's novels, later adapted by Billy Wilder and Tay Garnett, establish a connection between Zola's naturalism and the noir sensibility through French poetic realism and Italian neorealism.

While this chronology does not establish a direct connection between all these films and novels, nor later adaptations of Zola or Cain, it suggests that distinguishing what belongs to Zola's plot from what belongs to Cain's is not a straightforward task. Rather, each adaptation draws from multiple sources, creating its own polyphony. For instance, although Visconti's film is more an adaptation of Cain's noir novel than of *Thérèse Raquin*, his blending of noir and naturalism supports a reading of *Ossessione* as a polyphonic adaptation.

Regarding crime thriller as a genre[39], perhaps the most enduring narrative element in *Thérèse Raquin*'s journey from Zola's time to the film noir era, is the representation of the femme fatale[40]. It is, thus, worthwhile to compare how this central theme is depicted, as a reflection of the syncretism inherent in these adaptation processes. The rest of this section will explore this comparison.

In Visconti's *Ossessione*, Giovanna Bragana's desire for sex and money drives her to orchestrate the murder of her husband with her lover, Gino Costa. Gino, however, is portrayed as less involved in the crime act and quickly turns against

37- Cf. O'RAWE Catherine, "Gender, Genre and Stardom: Fatality in Italian Neorealist Cinema", in HANSON Helen, O'RAWE, Catherine (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 127 – 142.

38- *Ibid.*

39- Nicole Rafter defines crime film in the *noir* sensibility as "tales of underworld life, beginning with the assumption that criminality is a normal condition, [which] often do not bother to explain how their characters went astray." RAFTER Nicole, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films & Society,* New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 146. For a critical view of Rafter's classification of crime film and *film noir*. see SCRUGGS Charles, "'The Power of Blackness': *Film Noir* and Its Critics", *American Literary History*, vol. 16, no. 4, Winter, 2004, pp. 675-687. For a social-class-based analysis of crime in *film noir*, cf. BROE Dennis, « Class, Crime, and *Film Noir*: Labor, the Fugitive Outsider, and the Anti-Authoritarian Tradition », *Social Justice*, vol. 30, no. 1 (91), 2003, pp. 22-41.

40- Despite, or perhaps *because* of, its ambiguities, the *femme fatale* figure has been controversial in feminist film studies. Helen Hanson, for example, eschews a reading of the *femme fatale* as male-dominated "woman toughness" as a sign of female resistance to patriarchy. Cf. HANSON Helen, "The Big Seduction: Feminist Film Criticism and the Femme Fatale" in: HANSON Helen, O'RAWE, Catherine (eds.), The *Femme fatale*: *Images, Histories, Contexts*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 214-228. Reading *femme fatale* subjectivity and ambitions, Julie Grossman contends that the narratology of *film noir* is more complex than its reception by both academic and popular readings rendering the *femme fatale* figure an anti-feminist cliché. For her, "*[f]ilm noir* movies present women as varied, complex, and responsive to social changes that empowered and victimized them. These films reflect anxieties that help us to see how limited cultural discourse about empowered and empowering women remains." Cf. GROSSMAN Julie, "'Well, Aren't We Ambitious,' or 'You've Made up Your Mind I'm Guilty': Reading Women as Wicked in American Film Noir," in HANSON Helen, O'RAWE, Catherine (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 199-213.

Giovanna's manipulation after the murder is committed[41]. While Giovanna could be seen as a version of the femme fatale, Visconti's focus on her genuine love with Gino aligns his adaptation more closely with Zola's naturalism than with the noir sensibility. Moreover, assuming Visconti had seen Chenal's *Le dernier tournant*, the neorealistic aesthetics of *Ossessione*—particularly Gino's escape from Giovanna—highlight a greater emphasis on Giovanna's love for Gino compared to Chenal's poetic realist version, which centers more on the legal dilemma of the plot.

Figure 3: Ossessione, Luchino Visconti, 1943

In Billy Wilder's masterpiece *Double Indemnity* (1944), Phyllis Dietrichson, the archetypal *femme fatale*, plays a more active role in her husband's murder compared to *Thérèse Raquin.* She is also less in love with her Walter Niff than Giovanna Bragana was with Gino Costa. Unlike Thérèse, who only witnesses the orchestrated drowning of her husband, Phyllis, like Giovanna, actively participates in the murder. Instead of drowning the husband as happens in Zola's plot, the crime is committed in a car, as it is in Cain's novel. While Phyllis is driving, Walter, concealed in the back seat, strangles the broken-legged husband sitting in the front seat of the car[42]. To stage the crime as a train accident and secure a double indemnity insurance payout, Walter passes himself off as the husband

41- For length purposes, I will not mention actors' names in this paper. For connections between *Ossessione* and *film noir*, cf. IANNONE Pasquale, "The Roots of Neorealism", *Sight and Sound*, vol. 23, issue. 5, May 2013, [online], [Accessed Dec 20, 2023]. Available at: https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/deep-focus/roots-neorealism. On the connection between Zola and Cain's novels, see *supra note* 26.

42- Cf. ORR Christopher, *op. cit.*; NAREMORE James, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-72.

Figure 4: Double Indemnity, Billy Wilder, 1944

and throws himself from a train. Following the murder, the mutual suspicion and even the hatred between the two lovers keep growing. Thanks to information conveyed by his unsuspecting business partner and by the young and innocent, anti-*femme fatale* type, Ms. Dietrichson, Walter soon understands how Phyllis had pulled the proverbial double-cross on him. Closer to Zola's plot than Cain's ending in both his novels and their adaptations, the two lovers murder each other at the same time. In contrast to Zola's more psychological depiction of punishment, the end of *Double Indemnity* involves the mutual shooting of the two lovers, emphasizing the fatality of the noir sensibility[43].

In Tay Garnet's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), as Christopher Orr proposes, Cora Smith "is more similar to Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* than the *femme fatale* heroine of Wilder's *Double Indemnity*. Like Zola's protagonist, much of her behavior is determined by her petit bourgeois aspirations and, like Thérèse, she is capable of feeling guilt."[44] However, unlike Visconti's Giovanna or Chenal's Cora, Garnet's Cora displays no loyalty to her husband or lover, withholding the information on the former's life assurance from the latter. Unlike Zola's plot, all versions of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* end with the male lover accidentally killing Cora. Justice, thus, is served, as he is punished for her murder despite having been acquitted of the deliberate homicide he initially committed[45].

In 1953, Marcel Carné released his adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin*, collaborating with Charles Spaak, the scriptwriter of Pierre Chenal's 1939 adaptation of *The*

43- Cf. ORR Christopher, *op. cit.* ; NAREMORE James, *Film Noir: A Very Short Introduction*, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–72.
44- ORR Christopher, *op. cit.*
45- PICHON Florian, *op. cit.*

Figure 5: The Postman Always Rings Twice, Tay Garnet, 1946

Postman Always Rings Twice[46]. Carné's film undeniably qualifies as an adaptation of Zola's work featuring evident intertextual connections to *Double Indemnity*[47]. For one instance, including a train during the crime scene in Carné's film reinforces the intertextuality between Zola's source novel and Wilder's noir classic. In Carné's version—aligning more with film noir conventions than with

Figure 6: Thérèse Raquin, Marcel Carné, 1953

46- On Carné's rendition of the crime, cf. BRAUDY Leo, *op. cit.* ; BLOOM Michelle E., "The Æsthetics of Guilt: Crime Scenes and Punitive Portraits in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*", *Dalhousie French Studies*, vol. 58, Spring 2002, pp. 26-38.

47- Cf. BRAUDY Leo, *op. cit.* ; BLOOM Michelle E., *op. cit.*

Zola's naturalism—Thérèse is complicit in establishing the alibi, a theme essential to the crime thriller genre. Moreover, Carné takes significant liberties with Zola's narrative to heighten the thriller suspense and the sense of fatality, akin to both naturalism and film noir. As the sixth arrondissement of 1953's Paris becomes no longer as sinister as that of Thérèse Raquin, Carné relocates the entire story to Lyon[48]. He moves the murder scene from the Seine to a train, introduces a witness character, and reveals that Camille (the husband) had discovered the lovers' affair and confronted Thérèse about it before he was murdered[49].
This narrative displacement between the source text and its novelistic and filmic adaptations underscores the polyphonic nature of a process too complex to be understood merely in terms of authenticity and fidelity. Historically, this polyphony reflects the influence of film noir sensibility on European adaptations of *Thérèse Raquin*. Thus, my argument is that a similar process was at work in the Egyptian film industry after WWII, where the influence of film noir was inevitably present. I do not claim direct connections between *Lak Yūm* and the various other adaptations of *Thérèse Raquin* or their extensions in adaptations of Cain's novels. Instead, I aim to show that the production of this film in Egypt during that period unavoidably engaged the sensibilities of the globally dominant film noir trend[50]. By examining *Lak Yūm* within this context, we can better understand its significance as a work that bridges multiple literary and cinematic traditions. The film draws from both Zola's naturalism and noir's stylistic conventions while anticipating Egyptian social realism. This layered dialectic between the "global" and the "local" underscores the hybridity of Egyptian cinema during such a formative period, positioning *Lak Yūm* as both a product of its time and a work of enduring relevance.

Lak Yūm as a Film Noir

The reception of *Lak Yūm* at its release in 1951 and subsequent decades underscores its lasting significance in Egyptian cinema, even though it is less widely recognized than other collaborations between Abu Seif and Mahfouz. As a low-budget film financed by Abu Seif, the film's release was not accompanied by extensive paid publicity in the Egyptian press. Nevertheless, it garnered

48- DUBOILE Christophe, SONNTAG Jocya, « De Zola à Carné : l'adaptation cinématographique de *Thérèse Raquin* », *Les Cahiers naturalistes*, n° 75, 2001, pp. 255–264.
49- *Ibid.*
50- For film noir as a global trend, cf. NAREMORE James, *Film Noir: Very Short Introduction*, *op. cit.*, p. 47-48. In the context of Arabic literature, Katia Ghosn, Benoît Tadié define crime narratives (*récits*) as « *toute forme de récit où le crime est l'événement narratif prépondérant.* » [Every form of narrative where crime is preponderant.] Far from limiting these narratives to an imported form of crime representation, they compare Arab contemporary crime narratives with classical premodern Arabic literature in several characteristics. They also assert that due to the fluidity of Arabic book market, some works writers like Mahfouz and Tawfiq Al-Hakim might belong to the crime genre without pretending the etiquette. Cf. GHOSN Katia, TADIÉ Benoît, "*Introduction*," in : GHOSN Katia, TADIÉ Benoît (eds.) *Le récit criminel arabe*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2021, pp. 1- 16.

notable attention in the cinematic magazine *al-Kawākib*.[51] Coinciding with the film's release on November 19, the magazine's monthly issue featured the basic plot alongside stills. Departing from its standard practice of pairing stills with screenplay snippets, *al-Kawākib* published the whole "cinematic story" of *Lak Yūm*, an unsigned text whose stylistic elements strongly suggest Mahfouz as the author. In December, the magazine published a review celebrating the film, emphasizing Mahfouz's role in crafting the screenplay and advocating for greater involvement of Egyptian novelists in cinema[52]. Interestingly, the review did not reference the film's connection to Zola's novel or its noir influences[53].

Over time, the film has gained increasing recognition. A retrospective screening in the 1990s on Egyptian television featured commentary from critics and filmmakers who praised its innovative staging, aesthetics, and technical execution[54]. During the broadcast, Abu Seif described *Lak Yūm* as one of his favorite films among those he made, a view shared by Mahfouz in an interview with Youssuf al-Qa'id[55]. The film's lasting legacy was further affirmed in 1996 when it was ranked 47th on the Top 100 Egyptian Films compiled by the Cairo International Film Festival[56]. Given this significance in the history of Egyptian cinema, *Lak Yūm* invites broader conclusions about aesthetics, narrative innovation, and adaptation standards that extend far beyond the film itself.

Following *al-Muntaqim* (*The Avenger*, 1947) and *Mughāmarāt ʾAntar wa-ʾAbla* (*The Adventures of ʾAntar and ʾAbla*, 1948), *Lak Yūm* was Abu Seif's third collaboration with Mahfouz, who, by 1951, had already produced a substantial body of realist novels. For Abu Seif, *Lak Yūm* began the duo's shift toward film realism. This shift culminated in their collaboration on several classics of 1950s Egyptian cinema, including *Rayyā wa-Sakīna* (*Raiyya and Sakīna*, 1953), *al-Waḥsh* (*The Monster*, 1954), *Shabāb Imraʾa* (*Youth of a Woman*, 1955), and *al-Futuwwa* (*The Thug*, 1957)[57]. While Abu-Seif's series of films, created in collaboration with Mahfouz, are widely recognized for establishing Egyptian film realism, I argue that their exploration within the crime thriller genre invites a reexamination of this history. While I try elsewhere to delineate the meaning of realism in *Lak Yūm* within the context of these collaborations, my focus in the present article is adaptation sources and their connections to the crime thriller aspect of this movie[58].

51- Cf. al-Kawākib no.34, November 1951, p. 53 – 55, Available at : https://digitalcollections.aucegypt.edu/digital/collection/p15795coll22/search/searchterm/Al%20Kaw%C4%81kib%20no.34%201951/field/title/mode/exact/conn/and

52- Cf. Al-Kawākib, no. 35, 1951, *AUC Digital Collections* [online]. Available at: https://digitalcollections.aucegypt.edu/digital/collection/p15795coll22/search/searchterm/Al%20Kaw%C4%81kib%20no.35%201951/field/title/mode/exact/conn/and

53- *Ibid.*

54- Cf. TV broadcast, Available at: https://www.facebook.com/historicalage/videos/503368774203128/?idorvanity=2000361536680754

55- Cf. *Ibid;* AL-QA'ID Youssuf, "Naguib Mahfouz: *ḥikāyatī maʾa al-Cinema," Dawriyyat Naguib Mahfouz,* No 4, December 2011, p. 431 – 448.

56- Cf. the complete list, Available at: https://www.imdb.com/list/ls033161709/

57- Cf. SHAFIK Viola, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

58- Cf. ELSAID, F. Awad., "Egyptianizing Zola pre-1952: Realism, *Tamṣīr*, and Noir in Mahfouz and Abu Seif's Adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin," Khitabat,* n. 10, 2024.

Salah Abu Seif noted that several film studios initially refused to produce *Lak Yūm*, prompting him to to fund the film himself[59]. According to Abu Seif, the studios hesitated because it was "the first time the antihero (*al-Baṭal l-shirrīr*) and the *Ḥammām* as the theatre of events in the film was introduced in Egyptian cinema"[60]. His description of the antihero likely alludes to the film noir sensibility that pervades *Lak Yūm*. The male protagonist's portrayal as an antihero, isolated and morally ambiguous, exemplifies the dissemination of noir sensibilities in the film. This sensibility casts a polyphonic character on Abu Seif and Mahfouz's adaptation of Zola's novel, blending the naturalist narrative with the noir's dark aesthetic and thematic undertones.

Figure 7: Lak Yūm yā ẓālim, Salah Abu-Seif, 1951

According to Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, the French critics who introduced the concept of film noir, the defining trait of this cinematic tendency lies in its pervasive sense of "anguish or insecurity," stemming from "moral ambivalence, criminal violence, and the contradictory complexity of situations and motives"[61]. They argue that the essence of film noir is to evoke a "specific sense of malaise"[62]. This malaise is palpable throughout *Lak Yūm*, from Munīr's initial appearance to the climactic scene where, pursued by his neighbors, he meets his demise by slipping into the boiling water of the traditional *Ḥammām*. *Lak Yūm*, like film noir, extends this malaise into a critique of urban reality, capturing the anguish of life in the modern metropole. In James Naremore's interpretation of Borde and Chaumeton, he situates film noir as a form of critical modernism in cinema. He notes that it employs unorthodox narration, resists

59- Cf. Hammouda Adel, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

60- *Ibid.*

61- BORDE Raymond, CHAUMETON Etienne, *A Panorama of American Film Nair 1941-1953.* Trans. Paul Hammond, San Francesco, City Lights Books, 2002, p. 13. In the study of Egyptian film, the reference to film noir sensibility is quite rare.

62- *Ibid.*

sentimentality and censorship, explores the "social fantastic," and reveals the ambiguity of human motives[63]. These characteristics resonate in *Lak Yūm* through the development of Munīr's character, whose intrusion disrupts the peaceful *Ḥāra* community until this community makes an investigative effort within the modern state apparatus to expose Munīr's deceit and ambiguity of his criminal motives.

Naremore further highlights how a noir sensibility has shaped modernity since the post-World War I era, blending a pessimistic and romantic attitude with a critical yet commercially viable exploration of crime, sex, and violence[64]. A key feature of this sensibility is the inevitability of the criminal's downfall, reflecting the recurring motif that "crime does not pay." Film noir, while delving into the psychological and social motives of crime, consistently denies the possibility of a successful criminal act; the perpetrator is always doomed. In *Lak Yūm*, this theme is central to the film's narrative. The title itself serves as a warning, emphasized with the advertising material amplifying this message through the Egyptian saying: "Lak Yūm yā ẓālim, wa-li-kull ẓālim Yūm" ("Oh Villainy! Your Day Is Coming, and a Day of Every Villainy Should Come") (see figure 2). This phrase underscores the moral underpinning of noir and highlights the inexorable justice awaiting the transgressor.

As in the aforementioned adaptations of *Thérèse Raquin*, the portrayal of the femme fatale and the representation of crime and punishment in *Lak Yūm* reflect a dialogic interplay between Zola's naturalistic novel and film noir sensibility. In Abu Seif's rendition, Inṣāf (a name that, tellingly, means "justice") appears significantly less malevolent than Zola's Thérèse, Visconti's Giovanna, Wilder's Phyllis, Garnett's Cora, or Carné's Thérèse. Zola's version in which Laurent and Thérèse push Camille into the Seine during a picnic; here, Munīr, the lover, murders Zaghlūl, the husband, by drowning him in the Nile while hiding from Inṣāf. However, unlike Zola's narrative, where the crime is driven by feminine desire, *Lak Yūm* attributes all malevolence to Munīr (*al-Baṭal l-shirrīr*), referred to as *ẓālim* (unjust) in 1951 and *Mujrim* (criminal) in the 1978 version. Salah Abu Seif justified this choice, explaining that such a portrayal of a villainous woman "does not suit our social codes" (*lā yatanāsab ma ʿa ṭabi ʿatinā*)[65]. Despite this, Inṣāf, who initiates the treachery to escape with her lover before changing her mind and leaving her sick husband behind, retains the essential characteristics of a femme fatale trope.

The polyphonic adaptation in *Lak Yūm* extends to its portrayal of punishment, navigating between Zola's version and film noir sensibility. As is the case for the *Raquin* family in Zola's narrative, the family depicted in *Lak Yūm* gathers with friends for evenings of entertainment, establishing a strong social, communal dimension within the drama. Diverging from Zola's novel though, in Abu Seif's film, the eventual punishment is administered by this gathering of neighbors.

63- NAREMORE James, *Film Noir: Very Short Introduction*, *op. cit*.
64- *Ibid.*, p 47-48.
65- Cf. Hammouda Adel, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

Lak Yūm not only presents a nuanced, albeit subdued, portrayal of Inṣāf as a femme fatale and the fatal consequences of Munīr's illicit desires for sex and money, but it also incorporates several formal conventions of film noir. Elements such as hard lighting, chiaroscuro effects, shadowy interiors, and oppressive urban spaces contribute to the film's noir sensibility, further enhancing the polyphony of its adaptation of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. These stylistic choices underscore the tension and malaise central to the noir tendency and establish the film as a dialogue between the global, the national, and the local storytelling. This polyphonic quality becomes even more apparent when examining Abu Seif's second version, *al-Mujrim* (1978), which the director later expressed regret over re-making. Despite minor changes in title, mise-en-scène, soundtrack,

Figure 8: Intertextuality and self-referentiality in al-Mujrim, Salah Abu-Seif, 1978

the representation of monetary value, and textual elements tagged in the streets within the ḥāra, the film retains much of the same scenario as Lak Yūm. The decision to essentially remake the same film, albeit with variations, highlights *al-Mujrim* as an adaptation of an adaptation, adding further layers to the polyphony. This dynamic is most striking in the sequence where Munīr and Inṣāf, after their marriage, take a train to Alexandria. In *Lak Yūm*, they go to the theater to watch a show depicting a triangular love story involving a lover who murders a husband. In *al-Mujrim*, however, they remain at their hotel and watch TV—a medium that had become more widely accessible by 1978—where they view the murder scene from *Lak Yūm* itself. This self-referential moment adds an intertextual layer to the film's noir sensibility, amplifying its sense of unease and the multiplicity of adaptation sources.

At the time of *Lak Yūm*'s release, Egyptian realism, embodied in the collaboration between Abu Seif and Mahfouz, was emerging as a cinematic

(and literary) movement focused on depicting social conflicts, particularly through representations of the lower classes within the *ḥāra* settings. May Telmissany's distinction between "society" and "community" in Egyptian realism is particularly relevant here[66]. She argues that this dichotomy effectively captures the connections and disconnections between individuals and the group[67]. In *Lak Yūm*, Munīr's intrusion as a representative of "society," through his seduction of Inṣāf and murder of Zaghlūl, ultimately leads to his punishment by the *ḥāra* community rather than the formal justice system. This communal retribution reinforces the exposure of "the underbelly of society," a central hallmark of film noir.

Figure 9: Affendiyya and Me'allimin in Lak Yūm yā Ẓālim, Salah Abu-Seif, 1951

Simultaneously, the film's release in 1951 coincided with a period when the liberalism of the 1919 movement neared its decline. Mahfouz's writing, a prolonged homage to this liberalism, captured the lingering debates of the *Nahda* discourse, particularly around tradition versus modernity and the role of the intellectual (*effendi*) towards the masses, often portrayed as illiterate. This tension is vividly embodied in the film through two contrasting narrative axes: one centered on the conflict between Ḥassūna and Munīr, who both carry the title of *effendi*, and the other focused on the perception of this conflict by Shiḥāta and Abu Srīʿ, identified as *miʿallimīn*. Furthermore, nationalism, more embodied by Abu Seif than Mahfouz this time, peaked in the struggle for independence from European colonial powers in 1951, interrogating the relationship between the global and the local. Abu seif's later reflection that, despite being based on a European novel, *Lak Yūm* was a "100% Egyptian film"

66- TELMISSANY May, *Al-Ḥāra fi l-Cinema l-Miṣriyya* (1939 – 2001), trans. FATHI Rania, Cairo, *al-Markaz l-Qawmī lil-Tarjama*, 2014, pp. 111-112.
67- *Ibid.*

underscores this interplay. By interweaving these layers of realism, nationalism, and social critique, *Lak Yūm* is a remarkable articulation of the collaboration between Abu Seif and Mahfouz. It is within this intricate matrix of themes that the film's polyphonic adaptation achieves its most profound expression. What ultimately defines *Lak Yūm* as polyphonic is thus its ability to weave diverse sources into a rich tableau of Egyptian cultural markers. The streets of Paris in Zola's narrative are transformed into the Cairotic *ḥāra*, the Raquins' mercery business becomes a traditional *ḥammām*, the Seine is reimagined as the Nile, the narrative unfolds between two *ʿEids* (Muslim feasts), and the noirish shadows of Venetian blinds are recast as the shades of arabesque windows. This process of appropriation, or Egyptianization, seamlessly integrates Zola's narrative and noir elements into layers of Egyptian cultural, cinematic, and literary traditions crafted by Abu Seif and his crew.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the noir elements in *Lak Yūm yā ẓālim* offer a lens through which the film can be seen far more than a straightforward adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin*. This recognition reorients our understanding of post-WWII Egyptian cinema, particularly in the collaboration between Abu Seif and Mahfouz, challenging prevailing conclusions about the period.

First, Abu Seif's explanation, *"lā yatanāsab ma'a ṭabiʿatinā,"* for why he did not portray his adaptation of Thérèse Raquin as complicit in her husband's murder appears inconsistent with both his films and the broader history of Egyptian cinema in the 1940s. While "social codes" may have restricted certain depictions, they did not preclude the inclusion of femme fatale figures in Abu Seif's earlier and later works, or in the wave of thrillers produced during the era[68]. Notable examples include the *al-Muntaqim* (the Avenger, 1947,) the earlier collaboration between the Egyptian duo. Furthermore, beyond Mahfouz and Abu Seif's concern with realism, tens of melodramatic Egyptian 1940s movies included depictions of film noir female archetypes. Evidence of this claim could be found in *Qataltu Waladī* (I Killed My Son, 1945), *al-Nāʾib al-ʿĀmm* (The Public Prosecutor, 1946,) *Ḍaḥāyā al-Madīna* (Victims of the City,) *ʿAduww al-Mujtamaʿ* (The Public Enemy, 1947), ʿAdl al-Samāʾ (Divine Justice, 1948,) *al-ʿIqāb* (The Punishment, 1948,) or even in a comedy like *al-Marʾa Shaitān* (A Woman is a Devil, 1949.)

Second, this tendency persisted into Abu Seif's later collaborations with Mahfouz, including *Rayyā wa-Sakīna* (1953), *Shabāb Imraʾa* (1955), and *al-Futuwwa* (1957). Scholars like Viola Shafik and Carolina Bracco interpret these films' female anti-

68- For the reference to Hays code and censorship in film noir, cf. BIESEN Sheri Chinen, "Censorship, Film Noir, and Double Indemnity (1944)", *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 25 no. 1, 1995, pp. 40-52. *Project MUSE*, https://doi.org/10.1353/flm.1995.a395849.

heroines as femme fatales shaped by the 1952 Free Officers Movement[69]. While I concur with their assessment of the trend's frequency and connection to film noir, my reading of Lak Yūm situates this phenomenon earlier, as an extension of 1940s noir thrillers. This reframing invites a reconsideration of Egyptian cinematic historiography, which often posits a rupture between pre- and post-1952 films, focusing on nationalist themes.

Figure 10: Advertisement of Lak Yūm yā Ẓālim, Salah Abu-Seif, 1951

Third, recognizing the noir sensibility in *Lak Yūm* challenges specific recent claims about Egyptian adaptations of European novels in the 1940s and 1950s. For instance, the selection of *Thérèse Raquin* cannot merely be attributed to its previous stage adaptations as some scholars argue[70]. Instead, the film noir aspect in the polyphony of adaptation in *Lak Yūm* shows that the selection of *Thérèse Raquin* can't be seen away from the fascination exerted by this novel on the film noir (or noirish) adaptations in European and Hollywoodian film in the 1940s and 1950s. Like James M. Cain, Pierre Chenal, Luchino Visconti, Billy Wilder, Tay Garnett, and Marcel Carné, Mahfouz and Abu Seif engaged with Zola's plot through a polyphonic adaptation process, merging global cinematic trends with local cultural contexts.

Fourth, the prevalence of vocabulary related to injustice and revenge in the titles of Egyptian adaptations does not merely suggest an artist's "conservative *adherence* to the audience's desire for themes of injustice and revenge," as suggested by Michel Serceau. Instead, with the noir sensibility in mind, it's safe to argue that disseminating revenge themes in these titles could be seen as an alignment with the spread of the same themes in noir thrillers' titles[71].

69- Cf. SHAFIK Viola, *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation*. Cairo, New York, The American University in Cairo Press, 2007, p. 145-146. Cf. BRACCO Carolina, "Creation of the Femme Fatale in Egyptian Cinema", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, November 2019, pp. 307–329.

70- SERCEAU Michel, « Les transferts de la littérature occidentale. Alibis culturels ou réception d'archétypes ? », *Regards*, no. 25, Mars 2021, pp. 23 – 38 ; SERCEAU Michel, "*Iqtibās l-Adab al-Gharbī fī l-Cinema l-Miṣriyya: Dharāʾiʿ thaqāfiyya am Istilhām Namādhij Aṣliyya*?" *op. cit*.

71- Article (1-1-c) of The The Motion Picture Production Code (1930), famously "Hayes Code", promulgates: "Revenge in modern times shall not be justified." Cf. CHINEN BIESEN Sheri, *op. cit.*

Fifth, the claim that these 1940s Egyptian adaptations merely retain the main storyline of the "original" European novel while "Egyptianizing" the rest implies subalternity by reinforcing a nationalistic reading of an international form of popular culture.[72] In my reading, however, maintaining the core plot while reimagining its form within the adapted film reflects a polyphonic adaptation process that aligns with an international trend in popular culture.

Finally, the noir elements in *Lak Yūm* signal a broader shift in Egyptian cinema—from French literary sources to Hollywood cinematic influences—even within this adaptation of a 19th-century French novel[73]. In this context, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* not only serves as a cultural valorization of the film medium by annexing it to a canonical literary text, as Walid El-Khachab rightfully argues, it could also be read as a way of contributing to an ongoing international trend of adapting this novel within a dominating *noir* sensibility[74]. By appropriating Zola's novel into an Egyptianized melodramatic thriller, *Lak Yūm* is far from using Zola as a "cultural alibi;" it is also far from being an "opportunist" practice, as Michel Serceau labels the endeavor of adapting European novels in Egyptian black-and-white film[75]. In fact, Zola's name is mentioned nowhere in the film credits, posters, or booklet (see Figure 10). Indeed, Salah Abu Seif himself saw his adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin* as his participation in a generalized *noir* tradition of antihero (*al-Baṭal l-Shirrīr*) and saw his film as "100% Egyptian"[76].

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73- For a concise description of this shift from French literary sources to Hollywood sources, cf. EL-KHACHAB Walid, *op. cit.*

74- *Ibid.*

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ملخّص | في عام ١٩٥١، أخرج صلاح أبو سيف فيلم لك يوم يا ظالم، مقتبسًا رواية تيريز راكان لإميل زولا (١٨٦٧) عن سيناريو لنجيب محفوظ. في فيلمهما الثالث، لا يتوقف أبو سيف ومحفوظ عند اقتباس رواية زولا، بل يدمجان أيضًا تقنيات ودوال الفيلم نوار، ليصنعا ما تسميه هذه المقالة اقتباسًا متعدد الأصوات يتنقل بحرية بين مَصادره. بناءً على هذا، وبينما يرتبط التعاون بين أبو سيف ومحفوظ بريادتهما للاتجاه الواقعي في السينما المصرية، يدفع هذا المقال بأن انتماء هذا الفيلم إلى نوع الإثارة والجريمة يستدعي إعادة النظر في هذه القراءة. فعلى الرغم من أن اقتباس الروايات الفرنسية كان ممارسة شائعة في السينما المصرية قبل عام ١٩٥٢، فإن اختيار الثنائي المصري لرواية تيريز راكان ـ بما لها من شهرة وتأثير في حساسية النُوار التي صارت لغة عابرة للثقافات بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية - يشير إلى أن العلاقة بين الفيلم نوار وبين السينما المصرية أقدم وأكثر عمقًا مما يُفترض عادةً.

كلمات مفتاحية | فيلم الجريمة العربي، الاقتباس، تعدد الأصوات، الواقعية المصرية، الفيلم نوار، المرأة الفاتنة، السينما المصرية قبل عام ١٩٥٢، الرواية الفرنسية في السينما المصرية، نجيب محفوظ، صلاح أبو سيف، إميل زولا.

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