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Carnets filmiques, carnets sonores : des essais intimes et collectifs

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cinema as post-revolution diary

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## DOSSIER THÉMATIQUE :

Carnets filmiques, carnets sonores : des essais intimes et collectifs

### THE PERSONAL IS COLLECTIVE: EGYPTIAN FIRST-PERSON

Documentary Cinema  
as Post-Revolution Diary

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**Abstract** | La révolution égyptienne de 2011 constitue une étape charnière dans la reconfiguration de l'individualité, de l'autonomie et des formes d'expression de soi au sein de la société égyptienne. En remettant en cause des cadres collectivistes profondément ancrés, ce moment initié de nouveaux espaces d'agentivité individuelle et de réflexion subjective. Cet article examine la manière dont ces transformations s'articulent avec l'essor du cinéma documentaire à la première personne, envisagé comme un médium privilégié de l'expression des subjectivités postrévolutionnaires en Égypte.

En se concentrant sur *The Past Will Return* (2015) de Dina Hamza, *Happily Ever After* (2016) de Nada Riyadh et Ayman El Amir, ainsi que *Little Eagles* (2016) de Mohamed Rashad, l'article analyse la manière dont les cinéastes négocient les tensions entre désirs personnels, pressions familiales et appartenances collectives dans l'après-2011. À partir d'analyses textuelles et formelles rapprochées, il interroge les notions d'autonomie, d'agentivité et la place de l'individu face au collectif dans le cinéma documentaire à la première personne postrévolutionnaire. L'article soutient que ce genre cinématographique ne se contente pas de refléter les transformations postrévolutionnaires, mais participe activement à la reconfiguration des subjectivités en instituant l'expérience personnelle et l'auto-réflexivité comme modes politiques et esthétiques pleinement légitimes.

**Mots-clés** | Cinéma égyptien postrévolutionnaire ; documentaire à la première personne ; révolution égyptienne (2011) ; carnets filmiques ; relations individu-collectif ; subjectivité postrévolutionnaire ; mémoire collective.

**Abstract** | The 2011 Egyptian revolution marked a watershed moment in the reconfiguration of individuality, autonomy and self-expression within Egyptian society. Challenging long-standing collectivist frameworks, the revolutionary moment opened new spaces for individual agency and subjective reflection. This paper examines how these shifts intersect with the rise of first-person documentary cinema as a powerful medium for articulating post-revolutionary subjectivity in Egypt.

Focusing on *The Past Will Return* (2015) by Dina Hamza, *Happily Ever After* (2016) by Nada Riyadh and Ayman El Amir, and *Little Eagles* (2016) by Mohamed Rashad, the paper analyzes how filmmakers negotiate personal desires, familial pressures, and collective belonging in the aftermath of 2011. Through close textual and formal analysis, the paper examines themes of autonomy, agency, and the individual vis-à-vis the collective in post-revolutionary first-person documentary cinema. The paper argues that this cinematic genre does not merely reflect post-revolutionary change, but actively participates in reconfiguring subjectivity by foregrounding personal experience and reflective self-questioning as legitimate political and aesthetic modes.

**Keywords** | Post-revolution Egyptian cinema, first-person documentary, Egyptian Revolution (2011), diary films, individual–collective relations, post-revolutionary subjectivity, collective memory

## 1. Introduction

It is important to recognize that the Egyptian revolution of 2011 constitutes a watershed moment not only in the country's political history, but also in its cultural and cinematic landscape. The uprising disrupted long-standing political, social, and cultural structures that had historically shaped subjectivity in Egypt, where notions of the individual were largely subordinated to communal frameworks. However, in the wake of the revolution, new questions emerged concerning individuality, agency, and self-expression, as Egyptians began to reconsider their relationship to society and the self. These new identities can be interpreted in multiple ways and are well exemplified by first-person documentary cinema.

First-person documentary cinema is fundamentally subjective and focuses primarily on the central role of the filmmaker, who foregrounds their life experiences on screen.<sup>1,2</sup> It might be fully or partly autobiographical.<sup>3</sup> Diaries, notebooks and self-portraits are forms of first-person documentaries.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the filmmakers and others are able to inform each other,<sup>5</sup> and although the cinema is personal, it is necessary to understand that the independent voice (the "I") must be seen to belong, to some extent, to the collective (the "We") as the "I" cannot exist in isolation from the collective.<sup>6,7,8</sup> In the Egyptian post-revolutionary context, this mode of filmmaking offers a particularly productive lens through which to examine shifting conceptions of individuality and collective belonging.

This essay is structured in two parts. The first examines notions of the self/individual in Egypt prior to the 2011 revolution, shaped by a blend of political, cultural and social factors, and traces how these ideas were reconfigured in its aftermath as new understandings of the self emerged. This section also establishes the revolution as a vital factor in the development of first-person documentary cinema in Egypt, a genre that is relatively new in Egypt,<sup>9</sup> as it only flourished after the revolution. As the revolution and accompanying socio-political changes gave impetus to first-person documentaries in Egypt, they developed as a genre rather than as individual productions. As this analysis will show, these films did not simply reflect social changes but actively participated in shaping post-revolutionary individual identity.

1- Lebow Alisa. *First Person Jewish*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 203 p.

2- Rascaroli Laura. *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*. London: Wallflower Press, 2009, 224 p.

3- Lebow Alisa. *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary*. London: Wallflower Press, 2012, 273 p.

4- Rascaroli Laura. *Op. cit.*, p. 106.

5- Renov Michael. *Domestic Ethnography and the Construction of the 'other' Self*. In: Gaines Jane, Renov Michael (eds.). *Collecting Visible Evidence*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 140-155.

6- Lebow Alisa. *First Person Jewish*. *Op. cit.*, pp. xi – xviii.

7- Lebow Alisa. *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-7.

8- Lebow Alisa. *First Person Political*. In: Winston Brian (ed.). *The documentary film book*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 257-265.

9- First-person documentary cinema did not arrive in Egypt until 2003, with Samir Ouf's *The Land of Heaven*.

The second part analyzes how this reconfigured notion of the Egyptian individual is reflected in three first-person documentary films (namely *Happily Ever After* نهاية سعيده (2016) by Nada Riyadh and Ayman El Amir, *The Past Will Return* جاي الزمان (2015) by Dina Hamza, and *Little Eagles* النسور الصغيره (2016) by Mohamed Rashad). Through close analysis, this section shows how these films negotiate the relationship between the “I” and “We”, and how questions of autonomy, agency and self-exploration are articulated through both thematic concerns and formal cinematic strategies.

## 2. Shifting Conceptions of the Individual in Egyptian Society

### 2.1 Pre-revolutionary configurations of the individual.

To explore the role of the first-person documentary cinema in shaping post-revolution individuality in Egypt, one must understand the pre-revolution individual and the forces shaping this identity. The first force is politics. Husayn Amin claims that the Egyptian individual had suffered from oppression by the authorities since the days of the pharaohs.<sup>10</sup> Under Nasser, and with the rise of socialism and Arab nationalism, oppression intensified, suppressing individuality.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Nasser’s rhetoric in support of individual liberation,<sup>12</sup> his policies moved in the opposite direction. The dissolution of all political parties in 1953 eliminated political participation,<sup>13,14</sup> while the Emergency Law of 1958 expanded state powers to suppress dissent. The nationalization of newspapers in 1960 consolidated censorship,<sup>15</sup> and the 1961 definition of “the people” as supporters of the socialist revolution excluded opposition from the national body,<sup>16</sup> criminalizing dissent through the discourse of “enemies of the people”.<sup>17</sup> The establishment of the Socialist Union in 1962 as the sole political organization reinforced a paternalistic model of governance, positioning the president as the symbolic father of the nation and confiscating civil and political freedoms.<sup>18</sup> This movement was accompanied by the arrest and detention of intellectuals,

10- Amin Husayn. *The crisis of the individual in Egypt*. In: Saghie Hazim. *The predicament of the individual in the Middle East*. London: Saqi Books, 2001, pp. 60-81.

11- Amin Husayn. *Op. cit.*, pp. 60-81.

12- Gamal Abdel Nasser articulated this view in a public statement in November 1959, framing individual liberation as a safeguard against domination by others.

13- All quotations and titles are translated by the author unless otherwise indicated.

14- Hilal Ali Al-Din. *The development of official ideology in Egypt: democracy and socialism*. In: *Arab Thought* [online]. 1978. Available at: “<https://search.mandumah.com/Record/415478>” (accessed July 2, 2025)

15- Farouk Atya. *Nasser and freedom of journalism*. In: *The Civilized Dialogue* [online]. 2022. Available at: “<https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=749129>” (accessed July 2, 2025)

16- Hilal Ali Al-Din. *Op. cit.*, pp.18-39.

17- Al-Atifi Jamal. *The Path to Democracy*. Cairo: Dar Al-Ma’raif, 1978, 131 p.

18- Fadel Khalil. *The Egyptian personality and the new era*. In: *Democracy Magazine* [online]. 2012. Available at: “<https://search.mandumah.com/Record/343157>” (accessed July 4, 2025)

silencing opposition both politically and artistically.<sup>19</sup>

Within this context, documentary cinema was recognized as a strategic tool for shaping national consciousness.<sup>20</sup> The nationalization of the film industry brought production and distribution under state control,<sup>21</sup> transforming documentary cinema into an instrument of propaganda.<sup>22</sup> During this period, documentaries adopted an expository mode,<sup>23</sup> with the filmmaker absent (not seen or heard on screen). While some filmmakers willingly embraced this vision in pursuit of a socialist renaissance,<sup>24</sup> individual subjectivity remained marginal.

Sadat's presidency marked a shift towards capitalism (a move that is framed as being associated with individual rights),<sup>25</sup> yet this transition did not result in genuine democratic reform.<sup>26</sup> Although political parties were reintroduced and detainees released,<sup>27</sup> constitutional amendments extended presidential power, and state security institutions were consolidated. Following the 1977 protests against rising living costs, freedoms were restricted,<sup>28</sup> dissenting intellectuals were imprisoned, and the paternalistic image of the president as the father of the nation persisted.<sup>29</sup>

In documentary cinema, however, Sadat reduced state control and encouraged private production houses. The stirrings towards independence that emerged after the 1967 Naksa<sup>30</sup> accelerated in the 1970s, producing a shift in themes and aesthetics. As a result, filmmakers moved away from the state achievements

19- Issa Salah. *Are they among the intellectuals who were subjected to Abdel Nasser's injustice?* In: *Alayam Newspaper* [online]. 2014. Available at: "<https://www.alayam.com/Article/courts-article/377448/Index.html>" (accessed July 5, 2025)

20- Shafik Viola. *Broken Narratives: Egyptian Documentary 1912-80*. In: *The Cinema Edition* [online]. 2018. Available at: "<https://rawi-publishing.com/articles/broken-narratives?lang=ar>" (accessed June 22, 2025)

21- Ibid.

22- Abdel Latif Nada. *The Use of Cinema in the Political Sphere and Its Impact on Political Awareness in Egyptian Society (2012–2018)*. In: *Democratic Arabic Center* [online]. 3 Aug 2019. Available at: "[https://democraticac.de/?p=61940#\\_ftn38](https://democraticac.de/?p=61940#_ftn38)" (accessed August 16, 2025)

23- The expository mode is a documentary form in which a film directly addresses the viewer through an authoritative commentary or "voice-of-God" narration, organizing images to support the argument or perspective advanced by the speaker. It aims to explain, persuade, or instruct by presenting a clear rhetorical argument about the world. This definition is based on Bill Nichols's discussion of the expository mode. See Nichols Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017, 280 p.

24- Al-Nahas Hashem. *The pillars of Egyptian documentary cinema in the twentieth century*. Ismailia: Ismailia International Film Festival for Documentaries and Shorts, 2019, 155 p.

25- Anwar Sadat assumed the presidency of Egypt in 1970 and ruled until his assassination in 1981.

26- Hilal Ali Al-Din. *Op. cit.*, pp.18-39

27- El Raggal Ali. *A revolution against the conventional pattern of revolutions ... an attempt to understand the nature of the Egyptian revolution and its pattern*. In: *Egyptian Revolution: Motives, Trends and Challenges*. Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2012, pp.63 - 78.

28- Elsayed Yassin. *The Arab Personality Between the Self-Concept and the Image of the Other*. Cairo: The General Egyptian Book Organization 2015. 274 p.

29- In a speech delivered to university students in 1977, Anwar Sadat addressed a student's intervention by invoking a paternalistic hierarchy, stating: "Today, my children, I come to remind you that values and respect are essential ... before the head of the family, the head of the country, who has allowed you to speak freely." This rhetoric reinforces the symbolic positioning of the president as the father of the nation.

30- The defeat of Egypt in the 1967 war against Israel, and the latter's subsequent occupation of Sinai.

toward addressing social problems. This moment marked an important step toward subjective documentary practice, as filmmakers exercised greater autonomy over form and content, experimenting with direct cinema and poetic documentaries. As Hashim Al-Nahhas notes, “after Naksa the Egyptian documentary turned from public to private and from non-personal to personal”<sup>31</sup>.

The Mubarak era largely perpetuated the structures inherited from Sadat.<sup>32</sup> While the first decade allowed limited freedom of expression,<sup>33</sup> the subsequent rise of corruption, neoliberal privatization, and the erosion of civil liberties.<sup>34</sup> Power concentrated among business elites aligned with the regime,<sup>35</sup> while emergency laws and restrictions on speech cultivated fear.<sup>36</sup> These reasons ultimately ignited the 2011 revolution.

In documentary cinema, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a decline in independent production, as Egyptian television became the dominant producer, favoring expository mode focused on heritage and official biographies. The digital revolution of the mid-1990s, however; lowered production costs and reduced dependence on professional equipment, enabling a new generation of filmmakers to revive independent documentary practice. From the early 2000s onward, filmmakers appeared on screen, foregrounding personal experience and individual perspective. As Al-Nahaas observes, with the new millennium, emerging filmmakers shifted from collective public concerns towards the lived experiences of the individual.<sup>37</sup>

The second shaping force influencing the pre-revolutionary individual is society. Egyptian society is collectivist,<sup>38</sup> with Saghie suggesting that in Arab societies the individual is forced to belong to the collective (whether a family, tribe or a sect) whose needs are privileged over individual concerns.<sup>39</sup> Egypt is also patriarchal;<sup>40</sup> the father in the nuclear family demands high respect and unquestioning obedience.<sup>41</sup> The father-figure, in return, represents the interests of those under

31- Al-Nahhas Hashem. *Op. cit.*, p. 115.

32- The Mubarak regime covered the 30-year period between 1981 and 2011, making it the longest rule in modern Egyptian history.

33- Amin Galal. *Egypt in the Era of Hosni Mubarak: 1981-2011*. Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2011, 273 p.

34- Yassin Elsayed. *The Arab personality between the self-concept and the image of the other*. *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

35- Amin Galal. *Whatever Happened to the Egyptian Revolution?*. Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2013, 296 p.

36- Arab Mohamed. *Documenting the Egyptian Revolution and Writing History*. In: *Egyptian Revolution: Motives, Trends and Challenges*. Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2012, pp. 157 – 182.

37- Al-Nahhas Hashem. *Op. cit.*, p. 108.

38- Ghurbal Mohamed. *Egypt's formation*. Cairo: Hindawi, 2015, 56 p.

39- Saghie Hazem. *Individualism in the Arab Middle East: An Overview*. In: *The predicament of the individual in the Middle East*. London: Saqi Books, 2001, pp. 51-60.

40- Sharabi Hisham. *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 224 p.

41- Alzokm Sami. *The crisis of trust and the knot of fear within the Egyptian society* [online]. Cairo: Dar Elkalma, 2009. Available at: “[https://ia803203.us.archive.org/18/items/elhilalymohamad\\_gmail\\_20170831\\_2121/المصري\\_أزمة\\_الثقة\\_٢٠٠٧\\_وعقدة\\_٢٠٠٧\\_والخوف\\_٢٠٠٧\\_داخل\\_٢٠٠٧\\_المجتمع\\_٢٠٠٧.pdf](https://ia803203.us.archive.org/18/items/elhilalymohamad_gmail_20170831_2121/المصري_أزمة_الثقة_٢٠٠٧_وعقدة_٢٠٠٧_والخوف_٢٠٠٧_داخل_٢٠٠٧_المجتمع_٢٠٠٧.pdf)” (accessed August 5, 2025)

him, who surrender the right of self-determination.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, criticism of the family - especially the father - is taboo.

However, by the year 2000, satellite television had emerged as a catalyst for cultural change allowing the infiltration of new ideas and viewpoints into the country. Moreover, by 2005, blogs had emerged as a popular platform for individual expression. Thus, the internet strengthened and encouraged the idea of individualism in Egypt. This democratic medium,<sup>43</sup> accessible to almost anyone, gave individuals opportunities to find their voice and express themselves. The simultaneous rise of social media encouraged this, connecting like-minded individuals and facilitating new introductions, thereby expanding their worldview.

In pre-revolution Egypt, politics, culture and society combined to pressure conform to a collective identity, denying individual expression. The accompanying repression led to fear and alienation. Dissent was out of the question; it would mean separation from the mainstream. Thus, the essence of what constituted a pre-revolution individual in Egypt has been moulded by these pressures.

## 2.1 Post-revolutionary reconfigurations of the self

After the 2011 revolution, demands for greater respect for individual freedoms and rights intensified,<sup>44</sup> enabling Egyptians to reconceive themselves and their relationships to one another. Now, the individual had a voice, rights, and agency.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, as new social norms and power structures evolved, and old ways were challenged, women became more empowered than before,<sup>46</sup> and

42- Elmahdy Mohamed. *Political psychology: An Egyptian Arab vision*. Cairo: The Anglo Egyptian Bookshop, 2007. Available at: "[https://ia801900.us.archive.org/24/items/elm\\_nfs\\_syassi/elm\\_nfs\\_syassi.pdf](https://ia801900.us.archive.org/24/items/elm_nfs_syassi/elm_nfs_syassi.pdf)" (accessed August 5, 2025)

43- While the internet and early digital platforms in Egypt initially appeared to offer expanded spaces for individual expression and political participation, the characterization of digital media as inherently "democratic" remains context-dependent. The democratizing potential of online spaces varies according to historical moment, political conditions, and structures of control. In recent years, scholars have increasingly questioned this assumption, pointing to intensified surveillance, platform regulation, censorship, and the uneven distribution of digital access as factors that complicate earlier narratives of digital democracy.

44- Moustafa Hala. *The Egyptian Revolution: Return of Awareness and Spirit*. In: *Democracy Magazine* [online]. April 2011. Available at: "<https://search.mandumah.com/Record/34093>" (accessed July 12, 2025)

45- Fadel Khalil. *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

46- Elraggal Ali. *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

the fourth wave of feminism, as a social movement, began to rise.<sup>47,48</sup>

This analysis demonstrates that the revolution encouraged a new awareness of the self as an independent and meaningful entity within the group and not as a faceless, interchangeable part.<sup>49</sup> This aligns with Raoudha Elguedri's argument that the Arab Spring revolutions and their accompanying social movements contained subjective characteristics,<sup>50</sup> giving rise to a form of individualism grounded in autonomy. Additionally, Elmahdy explained that the revolution inspired a new self-confidence, leading Egyptians to feel capable of change and self-expression.<sup>51</sup> This encouraged individuals to become more vocal and to openly question norms previously accepted passively, revisiting both personal and collective histories in search of new meanings and possibilities.

47- Kamal Hala. *Inserting Women's Rights in the Egyptian Constitution: Personal Reflections*. In: *Journal for Cultural Research* [online], March 13, 2015. Available at: "doi:10.1080/14797585.2014.982919" (accessed July 2, 2025)

48- Scholars of Egyptian feminism generally today see feminist movements in terms of "waves". Early Egyptian feminism was closely linked to nationalism, and it is suggested that as nationalistic consciousness grew, this inspired a feminist consciousness in the society including women. Demonstrations by women in support of the Egyptian nationalist cause were held in 1919, alongside those by men, which marked a new turn in Egyptian society and politics. The revolution of 1919 paved the way for the creation of the Egyptian Constitution in 1923. This guaranteed women certain rights, particularly with regard to education.

The second wave of Egyptian feminism has been given the name "state feminism", in recognition of the view that President Nasser had his own agenda in the political and constitutional reforms that favoured women; his aim was to give them power so they might be better used by the state to achieve the government's ambitions, a kind of tool for the government to use. The third wave can be seen starting in the late 1970s. This wave has been labelled "civil society feminism", referring to the way that women attempted to achieve progress and reform through non-governmental channels. However, in 2000, the state oversaw the creation of the National Council for Women, attempting to regain control over the movement by bringing it back within state-governed structures. After the Egyptian revolution in 2011, the most recent manifestation of the feminist movement concerns mainly the area of sexuality and the woman's right to control her own body, marking a shift away from more politically-oriented goals.

See Fahr Anna. *Representations of Women and Veiling with the Advent of Cinema in the Middle East*. In: *Offscreen* [online]. Available at: "https://www.proquest.com/docview/2064743425?parentSessionId=UPdeoPtzR5SsNE2LdYPOwf623Y2tHioMiPHp%2FXCe%2BvI%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=6180&sourcetype=Trade%20Journals" (accessed January 2, 2026)

Ayad Nada. *Revolution and Domesticity in Egyptian Women's Political Texts* [online]. Thesis. University of Southern California, 2016, 205p. Available at: "https://www.proquest.com/docview/2182663750?parentSessionId=SGk103JsQKjB4BmEjUy1F5JHtIQVc341EPuBBEoTVo%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=6180&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses" (accessed January 3, 2026)

Bier Laura. *Revolutionary womanhood: Feminism, modernity and the state in Nasser's Egypt*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011, 264 p.

Kamal Hala. *Op. cit.*

49- Elmahdy Mohamed. *The genius of the Egyptian revolution*. Cairo: Dar El-Shorouk, 2011, 474 p.

50- Elguedri Raoudha. *The Emergence of the Individual in Tunisia: Characteristics and Problems*. In: *Omran* [online]. 2020. Available at: "https://omran.dohainstitute.org/en/032/Pages/arto6.aspx" (accessed June 25, 2025)

51- Elmahdy Mohamed. *The genius of the Egyptian revolution*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 396 - 397.

Notably, it was in the spirit of the post-revolutionary period that Egyptian first-person documentaries began to flourish. There are direct correlations between the revolution and this development, although other factors played their part, too.<sup>52</sup>

One key connection lies in the newfound freedom individuals experienced to tell their own stories, making the first-person documentary a particularly resonant mode of expression. A second connection is the cathartic opportunity for Egyptians to express thoughts and emotions, thereby coming to terms with them and achieving a sense of closure. A third connection was the belief held by individuals and filmmakers that their testimonies on this transformative moment in history were important. A fourth connection is citizen journalism,<sup>53</sup> which flourished during the 18 days of the revolution and beyond. Through accessible digital tools, individuals were able to document events within their immediate environments and circulate these accounts rapidly, allowing personal experiences to accumulate into a broader picture of social change. The appetite for such journalism was considerable, paving the way for the public's acceptance of first-person expression through visual tools.

### **3. The new conception of the Egyptian individual, as reflected in the Egyptian first-person documentaries.**

This section is concerned with identifying and discussing how first-person documentary cinema reflects and reveals new understandings regarding the nature of the individual, which emerged and were consolidated during and after the 2011 revolution. The analysis will be based on three first-person

52- The rise of first-person documentary cinema in Egypt was not owed exclusively to the revolution; other factors, too, played their part, especially since the beginning of the third millennium. For instance, new digital technologies in the filmmaking industry led to the democratization of the medium; equipment and production costs were at a level where individuals could afford them without needing funding, and distribution was immediate and often free (e.g., YouTube videos). This encouraged experiments in new styles and genres. Additionally, new areas for screenings, such as cultural centers and independent production and distribution houses had been opened, giving a new slant on how and where cinema could be consumed. This was accompanied by the emergence of a new group of young people on the documentary film scene, with new ideas and a desire for innovation. Some of these were trained by independent cinematic organizations such as Al Jesuit and Semat. The Jesuit Film School is an educational platform for young filmmakers, founded in 2005. The platform offers accessibility and knowledge to produce low-budget digital films. "Samat" was an independent film production company established in the early twenty-first century. In addition to producing and distributing its films, it organized training courses and special events for screening independent films.

See Mamdouh Mohamed. *The Democracy of the Medium: The Rise of Independent Cinema in Egypt*. Cairo: Semat for production and distribution, 2007, 205 p.

Semat for Production & Distribution [online], Cairo. Available at: "<https://africultures.com/structures/?no=979>" (accessed September 2, 2025)

Jesuit Film School [online], Cairo. Available at: "<https://www.jesuiteg.com/cairo/activitydetails?id=1019>" (accessed September 2, 2025)

53- Citizen journalism refers to a system in which the public plays a purposeful and collaborative role in recording and disseminating news events, with the use of the Internet and digital technology. See Allan Stuart, and Einar Thorsen. *Citizen Journalism : Global Perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang, 2009, 292 p.

documentaries, namely *The Past Will Return* جاي الزمان (2015) by Dina Hamza,<sup>54</sup> *Happily Ever After* نهايات سعيدة (2016) by Nada Riyadh and Ayman El Amir,<sup>55</sup> and *Little Eagles* النسر الصغيرة (2016) by Mohamed Rashad.<sup>56</sup>

The three films were made by young filmmakers in the aftermath of the revolution; these men and women were raised during the three decades of the Mubarak era. Rashad, Riyadh and Hamza were active during the 18 days of the revolution, experiencing it directly. The revolution was an explicit inspiration for Mohamed Rashad<sup>57</sup> and indirectly influenced Nada Riyadh and Dina Hamza to make their films.<sup>58</sup>

The rationale for selecting these films encompasses three main points: first, they were produced in the years following the revolution (2015 and 2016), which provided a temporal distance that allowed for reflection and processing the exceptional events of 2011.<sup>59</sup> Secondly, these first-person documentary films operate as diary films, where individually they express the maker's responses to life in the aftermath of the revolution, but collectively provide a documented experience of the revolution and its broader social effects. Finally, I argue that these documentaries played a particularly significant role in the rapid development of Egyptian first-person documentary cinema, contributing to its visibility and potentially inspiring subsequent filmmakers to experiment with the form.<sup>60</sup>

What follows is a detailed analysis of the three films. Together, they will highlight key themes including autonomy and agency, a new understanding of the individual *vis-à-vis* the collective, and self-reflection and exploration. These aspects are interrelated but remain individual enough to warrant separate treatment.

### 3.1 Autonomy and Agency

Importantly, the revolution encouraged the development of individual autonomy and agency. Sociologist Elsayed Yassin explains that “individuals in the wake of the revolution demanded to play an active role in the decision making for themselves and their country”<sup>61</sup>.

54- Hamza Dina (Director). *The Past Will Return* [DVD]. Cairo: Misr International Films, 2015, 102 min.

55- Riyadh Nada, El Amir Ayman (Directors). *Happily Ever After* [DVD]. Alexandria: Felucca Films, 2016, 68 min.

56- Rashad Mohamed (Director). *Little Eagles* [DVD]. Alexandria: Hassala Films, 2016, 74 min.

57- In the film, Rashad states during his interview with Salma (one of the protagonists) that the revolution constitutes the primary impetus for making *Little Eagles* (2016), which also marked his directorial debut.

58- *Happily Ever After* (2016) was the first film directed by Nada Riyadh.

59- Unlike earlier works that were already in production prior to the revolution and later incorporated it into their narratives, or those that merely recounted the eighteen days of protest. These films engage with the broader implications of the post-revolutionary period.

60- It should be noted that these three films are not the only works that could be productively examined in relation to this study. However, the scope of this essay does not allow for an extended discussion of all relevant films, and thus the analysis is limited to those that best illustrate the argument at hand.

61- Yassin Elsayed. *The Arab Personality Between the Self-Concept and the Image of the Other*. Op. cit., p. 11.

This autonomy and agency are deeply reflected in the three chosen films. In *The Past Will Return* (جاي الزمان (2015), Hamza decides to take control of her own situation; she chooses not to be a victim of the suicidal thoughts she suffered after the loss of her father. This was stimulated by her experience during the 18 days of the revolution, when patriotic songs by her father, Egyptian songwriter Mohamed Hamza, were played in Tahrir Square in Cairo. At that moment, she felt that she had gained the courage to face her grief and fears. This initiated what proved to be a healing process, as she visited places she had never wanted to see (her father's hospital and grave), brought back her father's presence through talking about him, and even enrolling on group therapy, where she again had to open up her memories to others.

In *Happily Ever After* (نهايات سعيدة (2016), Riyadh, who was in a long-distance relationship with her boyfriend, Ayman El Amir, who was studying abroad at that time, decides to remain in Egypt as she believed that the revolution had opened a door to a positive future for Egypt. Unlike Ayman, who saw his future elsewhere, her decision is shaped by memories of her parents' experience as political activists in the 1970s, when they left the country after realizing that there was not much hope that their movements would gain success. Riyadh felt her parents had betrayed their country, and she was determined not to follow this example. She decides to support the revolution; she does not see herself as constrained to follow her boyfriend and thus demonstrates true independence and agency – making decisions based on her own values, and following them through. Her growing autonomy and agency are articulated visually represented in a scene in which she plays on a public children's roundabout. As her body spins in a communal environment, her voice-over recounts her decision to stay, followed by a revolutionary chant urging people to raise their voices as the revolution “shakes their core”. The framing places her within a communal environment while isolating her as a singular figure, visually asserting that her personal decision unfolds in harmony with collective revolutionary aspirations. As she whirls round and round, the scene conveys a sense of liberation and exhilaration, marking her decision to stay as an affirmed and embodied commitment to the revolutionary moment.

Autonomy is also manifested through the deliberate portrayal of emotional complexity and indecision, and vulnerability. In *Happily Ever After* (نهايات سعيدة (2016), Riyadh chooses to show the indecision she felt and the lack of clarity she found in her life. When asked by her boyfriend, “Why are you indulging yourself in political events when you sometimes struggle to determine your opinion of them?” she could not easily answer, leading to a feeling of displacement; she was lost and lacked direction. However, her choice is to reveal this painful aspect of her life, as she struggles to reconcile two conflicting feelings, to the outside world. This aesthetic and narrative choice reflects the broader atmosphere of national ambiguity following the 2011 revolution. Instead of delivering straightforward messages, these films foreground contradictory

emotional states such as doubt, guilt, love, and confusion. This embrace of emotional ambiguity, as this analysis suggests, becomes an act of autonomy, affirming the right to express complexity and human depth on one's own terms.

The sense of autonomy, expressed through emotional complexity and vulnerability, is also reinforced by the use of voice-over. In *Happily Ever After* نهيات سعيدة (2016), for example, Riyadh has an imaginary conversation with her boyfriend, narrated through a voice-over. She is in a state of uncertainty and doubt, reflecting the failure of the revolution, after two years, to achieve what she had hoped for. In tears, she confesses that she is not able at that moment to know what she wants in terms of her career and life choices and says she does not know if or when she will ever be ready.

These films make extensive use of voice over narration rather than direct address to the camera, for example. By departing from the traditional "Voice of God", often used in expository documentaries to assert universal truths, these filmmakers adopt instead the "voice of Me", personal, subjective, and grounded in lived experience. This cinematic move foregrounds individual truth-telling as a form of autonomy. In this sense, voice-over functions as an empowering tool, enabling filmmakers to assert their personal perspectives in contrast to the authoritative universals of conventional documentary narration.

Vulnerability is made evident in *The Past Will Return* جاي الزمان (2015). Although she rarely showed emotions in the film, even when talking about her father's death in the group therapy sessions, in one scene, Hamza decided to sit with her sister in her father's apartment, a place she had decided she never wanted to visit again. Opening herself up to her sister, she confronts her fears and emotions, finally crying as her feelings find expression. Making the decision to show – and even focus on – these vulnerable moments showed courage and demonstrated a sense of autonomy; she did not have to hide behind a brave face, but could reveal herself to others, even at the cost of possibly seeming weak or in need.

This scene is framed with notable restraint. The camera remains static and unobtrusive, maintaining a respectful distance that avoids dramatization while preserving emotional intensity. Interior space is used deliberately: the dark interior setting of the father's apartment contrasts with the film's brighter exterior scenes, visually marking this moment as one of inward confrontation. The absence of camera movement or editing cuts allows vulnerability to emerge organically.

In a similar way, in *Little Eagles* النسر الصغيرة (2016), Rashad is under pressure from his father to get a stable, respectable job and to give up his ambitions of making films. Rashad was prepared to make public his father's displeasure in and dissatisfaction of his life and career choices. Feeling strong enough to reveal these potentially embarrassing moments displays a great sense of autonomy and control of the situation. This autonomy is further articulated through formal choices. In the interview with his father, Rashad employs a long, uninterrupted

shot with a gradual zoom-in, avoiding cuts throughout the conversation. The slow zoom-in functions as a visual strategy of inquiry, drawing attention to the father's expressions and affect, and signaling Rashad's determination to confront, rather than evade, paternal authority. In doing so, the film reframes confrontation as an encounter initiated, structured, and managed by the filmmaker himself.

Another form of Autonomy is demonstrated through the filmmakers' choice to engage with the First-person film genre. They are not only the director, but also the main subjects, and the topics of their films demonstrate a deliberate assertion of personal and artistic freedom. Through the use of their own voices, images, and lived experiences, they construct narratives that define themselves through their own gaze. They do not seek permission to be seen; they claim space publicly through intimate, often vulnerable portrayals of self. Thus, the cinematic form itself becomes a manifestation of autonomy.

Another dimension of autonomy emerges through the production contexts of the films themselves. None of the three documentaries was funded through governmental channels, a condition that significantly shaped both their modes of production and their narrative freedom. *Happily Ever After* began as an independently initiated project before its filmmakers established their own production company, Felluca Films, in the post-revolutionary period; the film later received technical and/or financial support from regional and international institutions. *Little Eagles* was produced by Hassala Films, a private production collective founded after the 2011 revolution by a group of young filmmakers, including Rashad, with the aim of challenging mainstream production models that tend to marginalize unconventional forms, emerging filmmakers, and non-commercial filmmaking practices.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, *The Past Will Return* was developed within a filmmaking workshop supported by the private production house Misr International Films, which later produced the film.<sup>63</sup> Taken together, these trajectories situate first-person documentary practice within alternative institutional frameworks that foster experimentation and personal narration. At the same time, they reveal forms of collective agency, as the films emerged from interconnected networks of filmmakers who supported one another across projects through creative, technical, and symbolic collaboration, an ethos visible both on screen and in the films' credit sequences. Autonomy here is thus exercised not only individually, but also through collective practices.

In terms of circulation, these films were primarily distributed through regional and international film festivals, rather than commercial cinema. Notably, *Little Eagles* and *The Past Will Return* were also screened at Zawya,<sup>64</sup> an arthouse cinema in Cairo, marking a relatively uncommon instance of documentary films

62- Hassala films. Official website [online]. Available at: "<https://hassalafilm.com/>" (accessed December 30, 2025)

63- Misr international films. Official website [online]. Available at: "<https://misrinternationalfilms.com/>" (accessed December 30, 2025)

64- Zawya cinema. Official website [online]. Available at: "<https://zawyacinema.com/>" (accessed December 30, 2025)

being exhibited in theatrical venues. Such modes of distribution further reinforce the films' autonomy by situating them within alternative circuits of exhibition and reception, while also contributing to a gradual expansion of public engagement with documentary cinema on the big screen.

The post-revolution conception of the individual can then be seen to include autonomy and agency. The films reflect this, with the filmmakers choosing to show or hide what they choose, and to determine for themselves the limits of their own visibility. They feel able to reveal emotional complexity or vulnerabilities, and even the choice of this particular cinematic form testifies to this newfound self-awareness and confidence.

Another aspect of the new conception is the re-assessment of how the individual relates to the collective, the theme of the next section.

### 3.2 New understanding of the individual vis-à-vis the collective

This reconfigured understanding of the individual incorporates a sense of autonomy and individuality, but this must be broadened to include a reassessment of how that individual relates to the collective; it is not a separation but a re-definition, on new terms. Yassin suggests that individuality and rationality did not signify division between people but rather were expressed in the context of a willingness to open to others and a “collective spirit”<sup>65</sup>. Thus, the individualistic nature of these films does not preclude their capacity to address the experiences of others. Rather, their emphasis on individual autonomy, through the act of self-representation and personal storytelling, creates the conditions for engagement with the collective, whether by representing it directly or by critically challenging its structures. Speaking specifically about Egyptian first-person documentary cinema, Lebow claimed that “There is a collectivist notion of the first person in most Egyptian first-person films emerging since the revolution”<sup>66</sup>. That resonates with what Viola Shafik, the Egyptian film historian and theorist, noted, that there is a “personal-collective” voice in these films.<sup>67</sup>

The films in question offer insights into the way that the collective may be understood, and how the individual may relate to it. One insight is that when talking of the collective, it is necessary to understand the plurality of the idea: there is no single collective. Building on the previous analysis, five different kinds are illustrated in the three films. Some of these are larger (society, the authorities) and some are smaller (the protesters during the revolution, a therapy group). The family is another. It may be considered larger, as a wide social structure, or as smaller, when taken on an individual basis.

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65- Yassin Elsayed. *Revolutionary Time*. Cairo: The General Egyptian Book Organization. 2014. 312 p.

66- Lebow Alisa. *Me and Not Me: the personal collective voice of first-person films from the Egyptian Revolution*. In: Shafik Viola. *Documentary filmmaking in the Middle East and North Africa*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2022, pp. 233 - 245.

67- Lebow Alisa (Director). *Filming Revolution* [online], California: Stanford University Press, 2018. Available at “[www.filmingrevolution.org/](http://www.filmingrevolution.org/)” (accessed July 15, 2025)

These collectives are shown to be capable of providing support or of acting in a repressive or oppressive way.

In *Happily Ever After* (2016) نهيات سعيدة (2016), Riyadh participated with other individuals in protests, vigils and sit-ins in squares in Alexandria, Egypt, from 2011 until 2013. The protesters were demanding “Bread, freedom and social justice”. This slogan represented a broad range of demands, mainly a liberal civil democratic system that protects individual freedoms at all levels.<sup>68</sup> Riyadh filmed herself in the protests and, through the voice-over, talked about her individual, active role in the revolution. For example, she filmed the testimonies of the families of people killed in the demonstrations and visited the injured in the hospitals. As will be seen throughout her work, she also pointed out on multiple occasions that she did all this in the hope that she and her people would have a better future, respecting individual freedoms. In this case, the authorities were seen as the collective, represented as oppressive by denying the people the freedoms they were demanding.

The protesters, as a group, were seen as a smaller collective, made up of Egyptian individuals from different backgrounds, classes, ages, and genders. They had come together to amplify their voices and show solidarity to one another and to their cause, thus demonstrating the positive, supportive role that a collective can play. Elmahdy noted that “The revolution did not have a specific leader, but rather the leadership was collective, represented by the Egyptian collective mind that agreed on change”<sup>69</sup>. This understanding is reinforced in *The Past Will Return* (2015) جاي الزمان (2015), where Hamza also decided to protest publicly, going to Tahrir Square in Cairo, to join others gathered there. The protestors constituted a support system for her. Hamza reflects on this in her film, explaining that for her, the revolution was not only about ‘bread, freedom, and social justice,’ but also an escape from the loneliness she felt after her father’s death. Her sense of connection and belonging was reinforced from the moment when the crowd joined her in singing her father’s patriotic songs, giving her solace and allowing her to feel that her father’s presence endured in the people and in history through his music.

In protest scenes, Hamza’s voice and presence move fluidly between immersion in the crowd and reflective distance. Wide shots emphasize the collective body occupying Tahrir Square, while closer framings and voice-over re-anchor the experience in her individual perspective. Sound plays a crucial role here: the collective chanting and singing of her father’s patriotic songs envelop her voice rather than overpower it, allowing the collective to function as an extension of personal memory and affect. The film thus avoids presenting the crowd as an anonymous mass, instead staging it as a relational space in which individual grief and collective solidarity intersect.

68- Moustafa Hala. *Op. cit.*, p.12

69- Elmahdy Mohamed. *The genius of the Egyptian revolution*, *Op. cit.*, p. 350.

The potential for smaller collectives to offer support is further illustrated by the group therapy initiative in “You Are Not Alone”. This programme was established by two Egyptian psychiatrists in the aftermath of the revolution to support individuals suffering from PTSD. This micro-collective became a source of strength for Hamza and contributed to her healing process.

However, this episode illustrates the darker side that collectives can sometimes show. In this case, the pre-revolution Egyptian society can be seen as a powerful collective which, by making a taboo of mental health issues, acts repressively. Sufferers are stigmatised, and there is no encouragement to talk about such issues, let alone bring them more into the open and try to create a sympathetic atmosphere which might help healing. The filmmaker here challenges this taboo directly, choosing not only to embrace the opportunity to talk about her issues with others, but also to make them public. A shift in attitudes happened recently, and I argue that this film, and such cinema that normalized talking about mental health, contributed to this shift.

In *Little Eagles* جاي الزمان (2016), Rashad also discovered a new sense of self-confidence due to the revolution, as he realized that he was not alone; other people shared his thoughts and attitudes. He, too, saw oppression in the patriarchal family system. This had the effect of opening a new locus of protest, away from public spaces (for example, the streets and public squares) to more private ones (such as the home). Bassam – Rashad’s friend who belongs to a leftist family – delivers a lengthy monologue, synced with footage of youth participating in the revolution in Tahrir Square, where he speaks on behalf of the leftist children of the 1970s generation. He exposed what he felt to be the flaws in his parents’ generation: “They taught us politics and revolt against the regime, but they did not teach us how to rebel against them or even against ourselves ... This generation thought they taught us revolution and patriotism, but they didn’t teach me to be myself and they raised me without personal identity”<sup>70,71</sup>. Thus, he felt failed by his parents’ teaching – they had not got to the heart of the matter, considering only the authorities, as the symbol of repression and not realizing that they themselves were guilty of the same thing. Rather than illustrating Bassam’s speech literally, the film’s editing places his private reflection in dialogue with images of mass protest, allowing rebellion to resonate simultaneously at domestic and public levels. Through this juxtaposition, both the family and the street are visually positioned as sites of political struggle.

Bassam adds: “To my generation, let us stand up for ourselves and our individuality. Let us search for ourselves outside of [parental] guardianship”<sup>72</sup>. Essam Zakaria observed about this period: “This is the first time in the Arab nation’s life to witness popular revolutions against the authority of fathers ... a

70- All film quotations are translated by the author unless otherwise indicated.

71- Rashad Mohamed (Director). *Little Eagles*. Egypt: Hassala Films, 2016. 00:55:12 – 00:55:56.

72- *Ibid.*, 00:56:11 – 00:56:19.

revolution that aims to change the entire patriarchal system”<sup>73</sup>. Thus, different collectives are identified and represented in different ways; the authorities and the family were seen as restrictive or repressive, while his own generation was seen as supportive and inspirational. Rashad, the filmmaker and the main subject of the film, has a different background, coming from a working-class family that was apolitical. In the shot directly following Bassam’s speech, he looks in the mirror and clarifies in the voiceover his decision to unite with others of his generation to challenge patriarchy that embodied in his expectation of a conventional career, and to affirm his personal individuality by leaving his family in Alexandria, moving to Cairo to pursue filmmaking.

As seen above, the individual may relate to a number of collectives and feel different attachments and make different evaluations of each. This leads us to another key understanding, namely that the individual–collective relationship is non-binary. This means that there is more than just the individual on one side, and on the other, distinct and separate, there is the collective. This is well illustrated in the films. For example, the protesters were making a collective demand for individual rights. In this way, they had a dual identity, as it were. It is also seen with the example of Bassam, in *Little Eagles* النسر الصغيرة (2016), and his denouncement of his family’s failures to teach him real independence. It must be noted that he was still a part of the family, and his very ideas and evaluations had been shaped by membership in that collective. This implies that there may well be more than just two ideals in action, more than just two ideologies playing out. This nuanced understanding of the dynamic make-up of the different elements in the conflict is also shown by the fact that the real dynamics are fluid, as evidenced by *Happily Ever After* نهايات سعيدة (2016), with the protesters (ostensibly, a single collective) splintering and breaking down into factions after the revolution and with the introduction of elections. At this point, the differences between their agendas became evident, creating tensions of their own.

An additional insight can be drawn from *Happily Ever After* نهايات سعيدة (2016), where Riyadh begins from a very critical position of her parents. Through the journey of the film, she actively witnesses the progression of the revolution and its aftermath. This broadened her horizons and taught her to value the experience of her parents, not simply to condemn it through the lens of her own idealistic thinking. Thus, her hard evaluation of her parents and their decisions is revised, and she has a warmer appreciation of them. She experiences personal growth as she begins to understand more and develops a more fluid way to respond to people, circumstances and ideas. This shows how positions *vis-à-vis* the collective are not static; ideas change, relationships evolve, and new positions are taken, and relationships are either formed or dissolved.

73- Zakaria Essam. *The spring of the father’s murder, or how the new generation challenges the concept of tyranny*. In: *The General Egyptian Book Organization* [online]. 2012. Available at: “<https://search.mandumah.com/Record/473889>” (accessed July 25, 2025)

It can be seen that the post-revolution individual, through their re-evaluation of how they as an individual relate to the collective, is a healthy process, developing more understanding and constructive awareness of how it is not a simple question of belonging to one side or the other, and that positions adapt and develop as experience grows. The benefits are seen from every angle, encouraging personal growth and contributing to a stronger society.

### 3.2 Questions: Searching for the self.

A shattering event such as the Egyptian revolution had many repercussions, one of which is that it ignited in individuals a need to rediscover the self. As Elmahdy wrote: “When the self faces events that shake it, it searches for a solid point in its history or formation to base itself on and to act as a starting point; this is what happened to Egyptians after the revolution. Especially since a revolution carries many possibilities, uncertainty, and intellectual and social fluidity, which constitute a threat to psychological stability and carry the fear of future possibilities”<sup>74</sup>. The post-revolution Egyptian individual is marked as one who asks questions, who is curious and who refuses to be silent when there is a need to discover, and these questions often surround the issue of how to define the self. The questions often encompass the past, as understanding the past can inform the present and provide a basis for the future.

In *Happily Ever After* نهيات سعيدة (2016), these questions for the self emerge with particular clarity. Riyadh, after two years of the revolution and the acquittal of all officers accused of killing the martyrs, asked herself, “What could we have done differently to achieve a different result?”<sup>75</sup><sup>76</sup> In another voiceover, “Why do I still remember the events of the revolution and the faces of people, even though others are trying to forget or have travelled abroad”<sup>77</sup>? To understand herself better, she delved into the history of her parents and the nation, interviewing people who have experienced long-distance romantic relationships like hers, searching for answers. However, the more she searched, it seemed that the more difficult it was to find answers, about herself, her relationship with her boyfriend, or about her country. Thus, the journey itself may not yield straightforward answers, but it is vital, rewarding and productive. This ongoing process of reflection is reinforced through the film’s temporal structure. Extended takes, recurring locations, and the repetition of these questions across shifting emotional registers align the film with a reflective, diaristic mode, in which meaning emerges gradually through time and repetition rather than through definitive answers.

74- Elmahdy Mohamed. *The Revolution and Religion: A Psychological Study*. In: *Democracy Magazine* [online]. 2017. Available at: “<https://search.mandumah.com/Record/783759>” (accessed August 1, 2025)

75- All film quotations are translated by the author unless otherwise indicated.

76- Riyadh Nada, El Amir Ayman (Directors). *Happily Ever After*. Egypt: Felluca Films, 2016. 00:48:19 – 00:48:25.

77- *Ibid.*, 00:46:50 – 00:47:00.

In *Little Eagles* النور الصغيرة (2016), Rashad depicts an intense journey, a quest for knowledge about, and reconciliation with, his past, and direction for his future. As an adult, he has come to reject the example and advice of his father. He recalls that he also wished that he could have had parents like those of his friend, who were political activists in the 1970s. He questions his own view of them, and why he felt so cold towards his own father. He asked how his life would have been if his father had made different choices in his life. This question leads him in different directions. First, he interviewed his friends' fathers and, in doing so, discovered that they had in fact often neglected their families as they pursued political goals. They also questioned themselves, revisited their personal history, and confessed in one interview that they regretted doing that. Formally, these interviews are shaped by an editing strategy that privileges duration and reflection. By retaining pauses, silences, and moments of hesitation rather than smoothing them over, the film allows remembrance and regret to remain visible. Rashad then began to talk more to his father and started to see him in a new light. Building on earlier experiences, he went on to discover that his father had decided not to travel abroad, but instead remained in Egypt to be with his family and raise his children, making them his life's priority. This led to a healing for Rashad and a rapprochement with his father. He could also make decisions about his future more clearly, as he now felt he better understood his own motivations. This led to his decision to return to Alexandria and continue his film career there, close to his family.

Elsewhere in *Little Eagles* النور الصغيرة (2016), Rashad and his friend Bassam, by challenging the way their parents had raised them, were led to ask about the future, when they are the parents. Rashad asks: "Aren't you afraid that the day will come when our children say that we are a defeated generation?"<sup>78</sup> This emphasises the aspect that self-questioning is not simply retrospective, looking for answers in the past, but stimulates a keener awareness of both the present and the future.

## Conclusion

From the above, it can be affirmed that first-person cinema has proven to be an authentic tool for exploring the formation of post-revolution individualism in Egypt. Rather than merely reflecting this transformation, it actively participates in it by foregrounding personal experience, doubt, and self-questioning as legitimate modes of political and cinematic expression.

There is a complex, dynamic and fluid interchange between the different elements of transformation. The political revolution of 2011 transformed the structure and direction of Egyptian society and governance, while the understanding of what it means to be an individual in Egypt was also radically redesigned. The third

78- Rashad Mohamed. *Op. cit.*, 01:06:24 – 01:06:30.

transformation is represented by that in the medium of artistic and personal self-representation, namely the first-person documentary film.

Ultimately, the transformation of the individual can be seen as the most enduring. Once the eyes have been opened and have seen the self in a new way, that image cannot be removed. The same can be said for the artistic transformation represented by the newly developed (in Egypt) cinematic medium of first-person documentaries. This development is a reflection of the *zeitgeist* of early 21<sup>st</sup>-century Egypt, one where the society and the self are beginning to ask deep questions and seek answers, about who they are, where they come from, and their relationships to each other. The first-person cinema is a vital tool for resolving relationships between the I and the We, a crucial part of determining the new individual identity. The dynamics of this cinema can be represented as a triangle, with the three points being: I, the Audience and the collective; the film invites a prioritizing of the subjective experience, speaking to other individuals and establishing a new position with regard to the collective. Simultaneously, the shaping influence of the collective on the individual is revealed and acknowledged.

As this analysis demonstrates, the three transformations provide a subtle and dynamic interplay, with each one influencing and being influenced by the others. For example, the revolution gave impetus to society and individuals to question and challenge long-established norms, which led to individuals grasping the new artistic medium of film that seemed to have arrived at the perfect moment, and which itself gave individuals the opportunity to spread challenges to the collective authorities.

It is important to note that the 2011 revolution should not be understood as the sole factor shaping the evolving notion of the individual in Egypt; other socio-political, economic, or cultural developments have also played a role. This study does not aim to catalogue all collectives, nor to represent all individual identities or circumstances. Rather, it advances a broader analytical argument grounded in the films examined. Accordingly, the features of the post-revolutionary individual discussed here are not exhaustive and representative of the whole, but indicative patterns emerging within this specific cinematic corpus.

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**ملخص** | شكلت الثورة المصرية عام ٢٠١١ نقطة تحول في إعادة تشكيل الفردية والاستقلالية والتعبير عن الذات داخل المجتمع المصري. بتحديثها للأطر الجماعية الراسخة، فتحت الثورة آفاقاً جديدة للفردية والتفكير الذاتي. تتناول هذه الورقة كيفية تقاطع هذه التحولات مع ظهور السينما الوثائقية من منظور شخصي كوسيلة قوية للتعبير عن الذاتية ما بعد الثورة في مصر. تركز الدراسة على أفلام "الماضي سيعود" (٢٠١٥) لدينا حمزة، و"عاشوا في سعادة" (٢٠١٦) لندى الرياض وأيمن الأمير، و"النسور الصغيرة" (٢٠١٦) لمحمد رشاد، وتحلل كيف يتعامل صانعو الأفلام مع الرغبات الشخصية والضغوط الأسرية والانتماء الجماعي في أعقاب عام ٢٠١١. من خلال تحليل نصي وشكلي دقيق، يبحث هذا المقال في موضوعات الاستقلالية والفاعلية والفرد مقابل الجماعة في السينما الوثائقية الشخصية ما بعد الثورة. ويجادل البحث بأن هذا النوع السينمائي لا يعكس التغيير ما بعد الثورة فحسب، بل يشارك بنشاط في إعادة تشكيل الذاتية من خلال إبراز التجربة الشخصية والتساؤل الذاتي التأملي كأشكال سياسية وجمالية مشروعة.

**كلمات مفتاحية** | السينما المصرية ما بعد الثورة، الوثائقي بضمير المتكلم، الثورة المصرية (٢٠١١)، علاقة الفرد بالجماعة، الذاتية ما بعد الثورة، الذاكرة الجماعية

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