

Women Empowerment as Portrayed Through The Egyptian Cinema: Content Analysis of Films Produced Between 2001-2011

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Abstract

This research analyzed the portrayal of women empowerment in the Egyptian cinema between the years 2001-2011. A list of 52 female characters was coded in order to explore if there are any differences in women portrayals than those concluded in previous studies. The findings of this study revealed that portrayals of women's social class, job status, nature of job status, level of education and character traits have improved as compared to previous studies. Meanwhile, portrayals of women's background, age and relationship status have remained negative.

Keywords: Arab women empowerment, Egyptian cinema, Arab women portrayal in media, Arab women images in media, Arab women's stereotypes, Representations of women in Arab media.

Introduction

Films have always emerged as an important popular medium and a tool for studying and understanding society. This is because, they provide great insights on how the culture regards and defines itself, how it expresses its problems, limitations and boundaries. Also,, the audience tries to understand and relate to films; whereby films sometimes try to assert certain norms and values and sometimes, they also try to question others. (Abou Shady, 1998).

Egyptian cinema has always been an instrument of expressing a socio-culture discourse, and a significant reference point for the Egyptian culture as well. For ages, it has effectively articulated and documented the changing circumstances and conditions of Egypt's history.

Representation of Egyptian women is one of the many cinematic themes that have been extensively studied. The study of women as cinematographic figure is significant; because it evokes several images of a social and cultural discourse and sheds light on the gender and family relations as well. It is also being used to trace the history of the female identity, how it has changed and how it continues to change.

Recently, films have started to present a changing image of women than that of the past century. Filmmakers nowadays seek to deepen the discourse on women through studying the complex mechanisms of the relations between the genders and trying to bring it up to the surface. A process of modernization has also taken place; whereby more contemporary and modern images of women are now evolving. Social roles are also becoming more interchangeable and equal. To illustrate, women are sometimes depicted as successful, self-confident and forward, and men have been softened with feminine and sentimental features (Zeitoun, 2005).

Meanwhile, the new millennium witnessed a turning point with regards to women rights and status quo in Egypt. Interestingly, Egyptian cinema has succeeded in capturing those achievements, yet it also went further trying to highlight the societal pitfalls, challenge some prevalent gender stereotypes and discuss taboo issues that were never discussed before. Examples of these issues include female marriage rights, domestic abuse and sexual harassment.

The purpose of this research is to study women empowerment as portrayed through the Egyptian cinema during the period 2001-2011, exploring differences in women portrayals with regard to women empowerment as compared to previous studies' findings that were conducted on movies produced in the nineties in order to trace changes that might have taken place.

Literature Review

Portrayal of Women in Western Media

D. Bazzini et al (1997) conducted a content analysis of 100 grossing American movies that were produced during the period 1940-1980. Their findings concluded that males dominated leading and secondary roles. They also found out that women of all ages were underrepresented compared to their actual presence in society. However, this finding was more profound for females over the age of 35. In terms of the character traits, older women were depicted as more unfriendly, less intelligent, and less physically attractive than older men.

Naomi Wolf (1991) coined the term “beauty myth” which promotes that women’s main societal value is determined through their beauty and physical appearance. This is why portrayals of young females dominate cinema roles and excludes middle aged and older women.

Tedesco (1994) concluded in his research conducted on patterns of character representations in prime time that women tend to be depicted as married and have children more than men do. This representation suggests that women are expected to assume traditional roles and gender role expectations as mothers and wives despite their career aspirations, whereas men are free to achieve goals separate from the family.

However, Elasmr et al (1999) proposes that this relationship has become less pronounced in recent years. Furthermore, improvement in female depictions with regard to sex roles and occupational prestige has been observed. Yet they still remain lower in quantity and prestige than those of men.

As for the character traits, female characters are more likely to be depicted as stereotypically comic, passive, emotional, followers, powerless and preoccupied with pleasing men. This is compared to male depictions of being goal oriented and problem solver.

Sarah Eschholz et al (2002) conducted a content analysis of fifty grossing popular movies in the year 1996 in order to determine women portrayals with regard to labor force participation, sex roles of occupation, prestige of occupation and gender. They found that although women representations have improved as compared to previous studies, they remain to be underrepresented in leading roles in Hollywood and their depictions are still confined to traditional roles and stereotypes.

As for employment, the findings showed that women are more frequently depicted as unemployed than their male counterparts. Female characters are also shown as being financially dependent on men. Another interesting finding is that there

were no significant differences between males and females in terms of occupational prestige.

Portrayal of Women in Egyptian Media

Obediat (2002) proposes that Arab media in general are indifferent about promoting a balanced image of women in society; as it caters to popular tastes in order to make money.

Arab media has common characteristics regarding women's portrayal. First, the Arab media is biased towards the traditional role of women, but never stops to push them to follow the American or European models. Second, the Arab media concentrates on portraying society's stars such as singers and diplomatic personalities and neglects to tackle the efforts of lawyers, teachers, physicians and researchers. Third, the Arab media is biased towards women in urban areas at the expense of rural women except in cases of crimes or crises. Fourth, the Arab media does not display the responsibilities of men and women in an equal manner. Last but not least, the consumption role of women is overrepresented and highlighted in order to promote consumption and wealth, at the expense of labor as a social value (Obediat, 2002).

Another study of the main traits of the 1990s movies concluded a number of findings. First, the 1990s movies ignored to tackle the problems rural women have faced; while focusing on urban women only. These movies failed to reveal the different dimensions of urban women's personalities as humans. Second, women were depicted with minimal and superficial roles in the political arena. Third, violent acts carried out by and against women were overstated in movie representations. Fourth, images of women were confined to a limited number of similar models, and movies failed to reflect strong women who can actively and critically solve problems. Fifth, social, cultural and political achievements of women were absent from movie representations. This indicates progress of women's position in Arab societies was not a primary concern for the Arab cinema (Arab Development Report, 2005).

Nahed Ramzi (1995) carried out a descriptive study comparing the image of men and women as portrayed in the Egyptian Drama. Ramzi (1995) concluded that the Egyptian drama tend to portray women as failing to take successful decisions in their family lives and that these decisions usually turn out to be destructive to their family and marital lives.

Samir Farid, in his book *Surat al-Mar'a fi al-Masrah wal-Sinima* (The image of Women in Theatre and Cinema), explored the image of women as portrayed in 410 Egyptian films produced between 1962 and 1972 (Farid as cited in Arab Development Report, 2005). He found that about 44 percent of female characters were shown as without any given profession in contrast to only 20.5 percent of the female characters

depicted as working women. Surprisingly enough, women who are simply females account for more than 80 percent of female characters in commercial Arab films.

According to Nahed Ramzi (2004), women are most of the times depicted as “a cunning devil who seeks nothing but pleasure, marital or extra-marital. All she wants is to catch a man, any man, since this is every woman’s highest goal” (Ramzi 2004 as cited in Arab Development Report, 2004, p. 157).

Another study was carried to study portrayal of women in some Egyptian movies in the year 2000. The study concluded some important findings. First, rural women’s depictions were completely neglected in the movies produced in the 1990s. Second, these movies positioned women as being indifferent about their educational status or as pursuing uncompetitive educational degrees. Third, movie depictions focused on portrayals of women of high economic status at the expense of those who belong to the middle and lower economic classes. This, of course, does not reflect the reality of Egyptian women’s lives as most of them tend to live in less privileged or rural areas. Fourth, most of the movies presented women as housewives. Fifth, women were most of the time negatively portrayed. Interestingly, movies were also selective in the positive traits they circulated about women. Instead of showing success stories of woman, the positive image was only confined to portraying her as a religious woman or a kind and loving mother. Last, women’s aspirations and ambitions were confined to being presented as materialistic as opposed to self-fulfilling ones (Agwa, 2000).

Another interesting study was conducted by Mona El Hadidi (1977) that aimed to study the image of women in the Egyptian cinema during the period 1962-1972. Analyzing 410 movies and 460 female characters, El Hadidi (1997) found that the Egyptian cinema propagated a skewed image of women, portraying them as either deviated in her behavior or in her thinking or both. The results maintained the traditional look of men to women as sex objects. Interestingly, representations of rural women appeared in 5.4 percent of the movies. Also, in these movies, the Egyptian cinema failed to portray a real representation of rural women and the various problems and issues that they face. El Hadidi also noted that women appeared as housewives, accounting for 22 percent of the total roles women played in these movies; while working women accounted for only 20.5 percent of the total roles. Last but not least, the Egyptian cinema focused on representing women as simply females, but not as a social human being with different societal roles and problems.

Jehan Yousry (2002) surveyed 400 female college students in five Egyptian universities in order to know their perception of the image of women as portrayed in the Arab drama. The research concluded that Egyptian cinema failed to represent the rural and Bedouin women and their problems. It also concentrated on portraying young women at the expense of depicting middle-aged and old women despite of the

importance of their issues. Last but not least, the majority of the participants (about 63 percent) responded that the Egyptian cinema failed to effectively represent and address women's issues, and its depiction of women is far from realistic.

Adel Abdel Ghaffar (2001) studied the portrayal of women through conducting a content analysis of the six Egyptian TV series that got broadcasted in Ramadan 2000. He concluded that more space was given to male characters (56 percent) as opposed to female characters (44 percent). Of these female characters, only 53 percent of them were depicted as literate, in contrast to 47 percent shown as illiterate. Furthermore, the researcher noted that the Egyptian drama tend to focus on portraying middle and middle-upper classed women; which is consistent with the findings of many studies that investigated the women portrayals in cinema and drama.

Amany Abdel Raouf (2004) analyzed the social status of the Egyptian woman as presented on the Egyptian television and its relevance to real life. She noted that the Egyptian cinema tends to promote exaggerated unrealistic images of women. Movies present negative images of women, depicting them as being corrupts who violate taboos and traditions, or being actively involved in criminal or illegal activities such as prostitutes, drug addicts or dealers (Abdel Raouf, 2004).

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Theoretical Framework:

The Concept of Framing

Entman (1993) refers to framing as essentially involving selection and salience. He describes framing as "to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52).

Severin and Tankard (2001) point out that frames are certain packages that the media and the elite actively employ in order to characterize issues. These packages deploy certain congruent images, information, metaphors and symbols that influence people's knowledge, perceptions and attitudes toward issues. Thus, the package is what is referred to as a frame; which is essentially "a central organizing idea for news

content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration” (Tankard & Severin, 2001, p. 277). Applying the concept of framing to film studies; filmmakers actively engage in frame building by selecting certain attributes and elements from reality, packaging these selected dimensions through an issue and highlighting them through the use of cinematic techniques such as cameras, situational contexts, certain actors/actresses, language and scripts.

Barry (1999) argues that the art of film is derived from the process of perception as well as the ability to create a reflection of reality through framing the content to create attitudes. He added that “understanding can be brought to the still image, such as the meaning of close ups, camera angles, lighting and contexts”.

Additionally, frames have at least four locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture (Entman, 1993). First, communicators are consciously or unconsciously involved in frame construction through determining what to say; often directed by their own schemata, which are frames that categorize their belief systems. Applying this theory to the scope of this study, the communicator in this case will be the filmmakers and directors. They can have a powerful influence on audiences’ thinking and perception of women’s issues through framing women’s issues in their works. If they believe in women’s rights, they will focus on certain attributes and present them in frames that would promote their rights. On the other hand, if they do not believe in women’s rights, they could present them through traditional frames or frames that would undermine their status.

Methodology

Research Questions

RQ1: Have women portrayals through the Egyptian cinema changed as compared to previous studies?

RQ2: Are there any new empowerment issues that got tackled in movies produced during the period 2001-2011?

RQ3: What are the different empowerment/ disempowerment frames women were presented through in movies produced during the period 2001-2011?

Quantitative Approach: Content Analysis

Content analysis is considered the best approach when it comes to studying the portrayal of a certain group in any given medium. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), content analysis is “a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variable.” They further stated that content analysis is used to study the image of certain groups; so content analysis, in the context of this study, would help in

exploring the issue of women empowerment as portrayed through the Egyptian cinema during the time frame 2001-2011.

Sampling Criteria

This research will use a purposive sampling. The criteria for purposive sampling is including movies that only discuss women's issues and produced during the time span year 2001-2011; since this study is interested in studying women empowerment, movies that are interested in feminine issues are most likely to fit the study's purpose. This specific time span was chosen because this is when the Egyptian cinema started to present women through progressive frames, presenting them as subjects as opposed to objects of men, female actresses got assigned to primary and leading roles and this period witnessed the increased presence of female filmmakers as well.

Research Variables and Operationalization

1. Variables of the movie:

1. Film Genre: drama, comedy, realist, autobiographical and literature
2. Role of female within movie
3. Gender of filmmakers
4. Year of production

2. Variables of the female character

- A. Social class of woman portrayed in coded movies: upper, upper-middle, middle, lower-middle, lower and undetermined.
- B. Background of woman portrayed in coded movies: urban, rural
- C. Age of woman portrayed in coded movies: teenager, adult, mature adult, elderly, undetermined
- D. Relationship status of woman portrayed in coded movies: single, engaged, married, divorced, widow, in a relationship, undetermined
- E. Job status of woman portrayed in coded movies: employed/white collar, employed blue collar, unemployed, no given profession, student, private business
- F. Nature of job status of woman portrayed in coded movies: high managerial position, low managerial position, undetermined
- G. Level of education attained by woman portrayed in coded movies: illiterate, literate but no formal education, school degree, discontinued, intermediate degree, university degree, post graduate degree.
- H. Character traits of woman portrayed in coded movies: weak, powerful, passive, self-independent, limited thinker, critical, follower, active/cope with difficulties, progressive, sex object and regards herself as inferior to man.

Rationale and Filtration Methods

The following points clarify certain aspects regarding the coding rationale and the filtration process the researcher will carry out:

- The researcher will not study female characters below 16 years of age in movies. In other words, the study will focus on teenager, adult, mature adult and elderly female characters. Each variable will be precisely defined in the operational definitions section. (SEE APPENDIX B)
- The researcher will not study all female characters in movies to be coded. Only female characters with influential roles in the discourse of the movie will be studied such as leading and supporting roles.

Inter-Coder Reliability

To ensure reliability of the results, it is recommended that about 10 percent -25 percent of the content be analyzed by another independent coder (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Thus, 10 percent of the sample was re-coded by a second coder, who is a mass communication graduate student. Then, the researcher calculated inter-coder reliability. According to Holsti (1969), the inter-coder reliability can be measured through following:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2} \times 100$$

According to Holsti's equation, "M is the number of coding decisions on which two coders agreed on, N1 and N2 are the total number of coding decisions by the first and second coders" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p. 172).

Thus, based on Holsti formula,

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2(379)}{402 + 402} \times 100 = 94.3\%$$

Qualitative Approach: In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews with cinema experts, scholars and practitioners were also conducted in order to supplement the content analysis in the data collection part of this research and will help in filling some information gap. These interviews are of great help as they provided the researcher with important data with regards to the research topic such as the list of films to be analyzed.

Results

Table 1: *Social Class of Women Featured in Coded Movies*

(Table 1) illustrates the social classes of women featured in the coded movies. The social class of the coded female characters is classified according to five categories listed in the following table.

Social class	Frequency	%
Upper	8	15.4
Upper middle	16	30.8
Middle	12	23.1
Lower middle	9	17.3
Lower	7	13.5
Total	52	100

**mean average rating = 2.83*

As shown in (Table 1), the majority of the coded female characters belong to the upper-middle class, representing about 31 percent of the research sample. This is followed by 23 percent, who belong to the middle class. A number of 9 characters or 17 percent of the female characters belong to lower-middle class. This is also followed by 15 percent belonging to the upper class and 13 percent belonging to the lower class. Nevertheless, the mean average rating of 2.83 indicates that the majority of the coded female characters belong to the middle class.

Table 2: *Background of Women Portrayed in Coded Movies*

(Table 2) illustrates the background of the coded female characters. This variable is categorized to urban and rural.

Background	Frequency	%
Urban	40	76.9
Rural	12	23.1
Total	52	100

As shown in **(Table 2)**, about 77 percent of the coded female characters are of an urban background, whereas 23 percent of the coded female characters belong to rural ones.

Table 3: *Age of Women Portrayed in Coded Movies*

(Table 3) illustrates the age of coded female characters in the study. This variable is classified into four categories as listed in the following table.

Age	Frequency	%
Teenager	5	9.6
Adult	37	71.2
Mature adult	10	19.2
Elderly	0	0
Total	52	100

As shown in **(Table 3)**, the majority of the 52 coded female characters are adults (21-under 40 years), representing about 71 percent of the sample coded, followed by mature adults (40 – under 65 years), representing about 19 percent of the female characters, followed by teenagers, who represented about 10 percent of the research sample. Elderly female characters (above 65 years) are totally absent from the study.

Table 4: *Relationship Status of Women Portrayed in Coded Movies*

(Table 4) demonstrates the relationship status of the female characters coded in the study. This variable is categorized into six categories as illustrated by the following table.

Relationship status	Frequency	%
Single	10	19.2
Engaged	2	3.8
Married	18	34.6
Divorced	6	11.5
Widow	5	9.6
In a relationship	11	21.2
Total	52	100

As shown in **(Table 4)**, most of the female characters coded in the sample are depicted as married, representing about 35 percent of the sample; followed by women depicted as being in a relationship, representing about 21 percent of the sample. Then followed by single women (about 19 percent), followed by divorced women (11.5

percent), followed by widowed women (9.6 percent) and engaged women are the least represented with a 3.8 percent of the total coded female characters.

Table 5: *Job Status of Women Portrayed*

(Table 5) illustrates the job status of women depicted in the coded movies. This variable is divided into six different as listed in the following table.

Status	Frequency	%
Employed/ white collar	17	32.7
Employed/blue collar	16	30.8
Unemployed	3	5.8
No given profession	5	9.6
Student	5	9.6
Private business	6	11.5
Total	52	100

As shown in (Table 5), the majority of the female characters coded in the movies are depicted as employed (adding all percentages except unemployed, no given profession, student), representing about 75 percent of the sample. Upon breaking down this number, one will find that both categories of women who are employed/white collar or are employed/blue collar are almost equally represented in the coded movies, yielding 32.7 percent and 30.8 percent respectively. Followed by women who are portrayed as having their own private business; representing 11.5 percent of the sample. Women depicted as having no given profession or as students have equal representation (9.6 percent). Last, unemployed women represent 5.8 percent of the coded female characters.

Table 6: *Nature of Job Status of Women Portrayed in Coded Movies*

(Table 6) demonstrates the nature of the job status of the coded female characters. This variable is classified into three categories; high managerial position, low managerial position and undetermined.

Nature of job	Frequency	%
High managerial position	15	28.85
Low managerial position	17	32.69
Undetermined	20	38.46
Total	52	100

As shown in (**Table 6**), women portrayed as being employed in high managerial positions represent about 29 percent of the sample, whereas women depicted as being employed in low managerial positions represent about 33 percent of the sample, and about 38 percent of the coded female characters' managerial positions could not be determined.

Table 7: *Level of Education Attained by Women Portrayed in Coded Movies*

(**Table 7**) demonstrates the levels of education attained by women portrayed in the coded movies. This variable is classified to seven categories as listed in the following table.

Level of education	Frequency	%
Illiterate	2	3.85
Literate but no formal education	5	9.62
School degree	4	7.69
Discontinued	2	3.85
Intermediate degree	11	21.15
University degree	24	46.15
Post-graduate degree	4	7.69
Total	52	100

As shown in (**Table 7**), the majority of the coded female characters are depicted as university degree holders, representing about 46 percent of the sample. Followed by 11 female characters or about 21 percent are depicted as holding intermediate degrees such as diplomas or high school certificates. This is also followed by about 10 percent literate but did not receive formal education. Holders of school degrees and post-graduate degree holders are equally represented with an 8 percent each. Also, illiterate women and those who discontinued their education have equal 3.85 percent representation.

Table 8: *Character Traits of Women Portrayed in Coded Movies*

(**Table 8**) illustrates the character traits of women portrayed in the coded movies. This variable is classified according to eleven character traits. The researcher has checked all personality traits that apply to the character under study. The character traits are listed in the following table with frequencies and percentages of each trait.

Character trait	Frequency (cumulative)	%
Weak	15	28.85
Powerful	26	50.00
Sex object	8	15.38
Self-independent	31	59.62
Active/Cope with difficulties	24	46.15
Critical	22	42.31
Limited thinker	9	17.31
Passive	12	23.08
Progressive	17	32.69
Regards herself as inferior to man	4	7.69
Follower	10	19.23

As shown in (Table 8), it is observed that positive character traits are more pronounced than negative ones yielding higher percentages. Self-independence is the most observed female character trait in the coded movies, representing about 60 percent of the total 52 characters (31 out of 52). This is followed by powerfulness, (26 out of 52), representing about 50 percent of the total female characters. This is also followed by being active/cope with difficulties, about 46 percent, critical, about 42 percent and progressive, about 33 percent. Weakness is observed in 15 characters of the total female characters, followed by passive, 23 percent, followed by follower, 19 percent, followed by limited thinker, 17 percent, followed by sex object, 15 percent and regards herself as inferior to man, which is about 8 percent.

Discussion of quantitative results

This study examined women empowerment as portrayed in the Egyptian cinema between the years 2001-2011. The researcher conducted a content analysis, in which 20 movies and 52 female characters were coded and analyzed.

In order to study women empowerment through the Egyptian cinema, the current research examined three research questions. In order to answer the first research question, changes/differences in women portrayals with regard to demographics and character traits (variables of the female character) were examined. Then, the researcher compared them to previous studies' findings.

With regard to portrayal of women's demographics and character traits, this research has found that there are some aspects that have changed from previous studies that were conducted on movies produced in the nineties and there are some other aspects that have remained the same as well.

Portrayals of Women' social class, job status, nature of job status, level of education and character traits have shown positive changes. The mean average rating

of the social class of women is 2.83 (see table 1), which indicates that the majority of the female characters are portrayed as belonging to the middle class. Furthermore, when upper and upper-middle classes are grouped together and middle to lower classes are combined together in order to give more robust results. The findings also reinforce that middle and lower classes of women are now more represented in the Egyptian cinema than before, representing about 46 percent and 54 percent of the research sample respectively. Thus, this indicates that women representations with regard to social status have improved and that the cinema is re-directing its portrayals to reflect upon the issues and problems relevant to middle and lower class women.

Job status portrayals (see table 5) indicate that 75 percent of the research sample is depicted as employed; whereas unemployed females are the least represented, yielding a percentage of 6 percent. A deeper analysis of the findings would also reveal that women who are portrayed as white collar employees versus blue collar employees have very close representations, yielding about 33 percent and 31 percent respectively. Again, this indicates that women portrayals with regard to job status have improved and are presenting closer images to reality; where women are performing managerial, administrative or professional such as physicians and teachers and not only confined to performing manual tasks such as factory workers. Surprisingly, women who had private businesses represented 11.5 percent of the research sample, which is not a big percentage. However, it shows that cinema portrayals are becoming more reflective of women's job status in the real world; where women are pursuing a variety of careers and not only limited to unchallenging occupations.

Nature of job status in table 6 reveals that employed women of high managerial posts represented about 29 percent of the study as opposed to about 33 percent who occupy low managerial positions. The latter has a higher percentage, however, the differences between both percentages is small (4 percent or only 2 characters). Thus, one can conclude that occupational prestige of female depictions have improved from the previous studies; which indicates that more women are now shown as pursuing better challenging jobs such as managers, ministers, university professors and others.

Level of education (see table 7) establishes that the majority of women portrayed are university degree holders, representing about 46 percent of the research sample, whereby illiterate and discontinued are the least represented, yielding about 4 percent each. Furthermore, post-graduate degree holders represented about 8 percent of the sample. These findings indicate a positive change in education portrayals of women; whereby previous studies analyzing movies produced in the nineties concluded that most of women were portrayed as illiterate or being indifferent about their educational degrees and were rarely depicted as having or pursuing post graduate degrees.

Character traits of coded female characters (see table 8) show that portrayals of positive character traits are more pronounced than negative ones. Again, this suggests that cinematic representations of women's character traits are improving; showing women as powerful, self-independent and able to solve problems. Scholars have always condemned in their previous studies the reinforcing of women's negative characteristics at the expense of positive ones.

On the other hand, women's portrayals of background, age and relationship status have remained as negative as previous studies have concluded. This resonates with previous research findings, which suggested that the Egyptian cinema tends to ignore the problems of rural women's problems and gives urban women much more attention.

In addition, age of the coded female characters (see table 3) reveals that the majority of the coded female characters are young adults, who belong to the age group 21 – 40 years old; representing about 71 percent of the research sample. This finding confirms Wolf (1991)'s beauty myth, which suggests that females' value in movies is determined through their beauty and physical appearance. This is why portrayals of young females dominate cinema roles and exclude middle aged and older women. This finding also harmonizes with previous studies' conclusions, which states that age portrayal of women is far from reality as it tends to completely neglect elderly women despite the importance of their issues.

The relationship status of women portrayed (see table 4) indicates that the majority of the research sample are depicted as married; yielding about 35 percent as opposed to 19 percent shown as single. Again, this affirms previous studies' findings which suggested that married women are overrepresented at the expense of single ones reinforcing the sexist idea that women's value and aspirations are achieved through marriage.

Discussion of qualitative results

The researcher aimed to answer the last two research questions through qualitative observation of the coded movies of the research sample as well as through input from in-depth interviews conducted with cinema practitioners and scholars. The qualitative analysis of the research sample indicates that movies produced during the first ten years of the twenty-first century are offering liberating views of women empowerment. Maggie Morgan, filmmaker and film lecturer, points out that portrayal of women in movies has started to be different in the last ten years. She adds that women are now portrayed as "very empowered, liberal and different... things that we have never seen before." Morgan also attributes these changes to the increased presence of women filmmakers and talented male filmmakers, who are interested in

discussing hot issues that were never spoken about before in an honest open way and with added consciousness (personal communication, March 26, 2012).

Wessam Soliman, scriptwriter, also anticipates that movies produced in the next few years are very likely to present women through political rebellious frames, tackling their exceptional role in the Egyptian revolution. This also resonates with Maggie Morgan's expectation that movies produced in the future will be more likely to tackle more realistic images of women and the society in general. This is because people are becoming more conscious and aware (personal communication, May 2, 2012)

Following is a discussion of the qualitative analysis of the coded movies. The movie, *Asmaa*, tackles the issue of AIDS. This is the first feature movie to discuss such sensitive issue given the sensitiveness of the Egyptian culture towards this issue. The filmmakers do not discuss the disease from a medical point of view, but rather from a social one, aiming to change the society's negative perception of the disease carriers. The filmmakers tackle the disease through the life story of an HIV infected woman, who is fighting battles to live a normal life, after being shun away by people when they know of her infection. Throughout the movie, Asmaa is confronted with people wanting to know how she contracted the disease in order to make sure she is a good person. The heroine is also depicted as a very determined, powerful and self-independent character, who never loses her sense of dignity.

The movie, *678*, presents the stories of three women from different social socio-economic classes; struggling with the effect their personal experiences with sexual harassment has had on their lives. The movie sheds light on the traumatizing experience these incidents have on the central characters, crippling them emotionally and psychologically. The movie also tackles how the society is plagued with contradictions and self-conflict when it comes to blaming the victims and denying their plights to justice.

Ehky ya Shahrazad (Shahrazad, Tell Us a Story) is another movie that presents stories of women's oppression in contemporary Egypt by featuring a female TV talk show. The movie's main story revolves around the cultural misogyny and the society's fear of women autonomy. Yousri Nasrallah, the movie director, writes in his production notes that "more than 70 percent of Egyptian households depend on women's work. Rather than accept this reality, and accordingly accept women as equals, society is constantly pressuring women into showing more submission."

Wahed-Sefr (One-Zero) is the first movie to tackle the problem of divorce among Christian women. Nevine is a Coptic woman in her late thirties, who is portrayed as desperately seeking divorce for 15 years. This remains to be a widespread problem in Egypt that faces thousands of Copts. This is because the Church does not

allow divorce and remarriage of divorced Copts except under very rare circumstances. These conditions include adultery, conversion to Islam and conversion from one Christian denomination to another (Ibrahim, 2011). This forces unsatisfied couples to live separately, but without being granted a divorce. In very exceptional cases, couples do get a divorce, but they don't get a remarriage permit.

El-Na'ama wa El-Tawoos (The Ostrich and the Peacock) discusses female sexuality, FGM and lack of proper sex education in the Egyptian society. The movie features a sexually unsatisfied married couple, who resorts to marriage counselor in order to help them overcome their sexual problems. During the discourse of the movie, light is shed on how the society represses female sexuality and denies their right to sexual pleasure. The movie also links these problems with the society's widespread practice of female circumcision, which adversely affects women's psychologically and sexually. FGM is a very widespread practice in Egypt and is mainly performed in order to limit female's sexuality in conservative societies. According to the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2008, "the percentage of ever-married [Egyptian] women (15–49 years) that are circumcised is 95.2 percent."

Conclusion

This research studied women empowerment as portrayed through the Egyptian cinema through analyzing movies that were produced between the years 2001-2011. Results deduced from this study were compared to previous studies' findings in order to track any changes in women portrayals. The findings suggest that some aspects have favorably changed and some aspects have remained as negative as before.

This study concluded that the women' social class, job status, nature of job status, level of education and character traits are being positively depicted than before. To illustrate, the issues and problems of women who belong to middle and lower classes are more tackled. More women are depicted with high occupational prestige. Women are now shown as having higher levels of education, such as university and post-graduate degrees and fewer women are depicted as illiterate. Furthermore, movies are now presenting women as strong, defined and critical as opposed to previous depictions which confined women to negative character qualities only.

As highlighted before by Maggie Morgan, these positive changes can be attributed to the increased presence of women filmmakers like Kamla Abou Zekry and talented male filmmakers as well such as Mohamed Diab, Amr Salama and Ahmed Abdallah El-Sayed, who are interested and keen to present serious, quality movies.

Despite the positive changes, the filmmakers and the media elite should devote more efforts to present real, balanced and non-distorted image of women. They should also tackle their social, economic as well as their political accomplishments and

contribution such as during the January 25th revolution and its aftermath. Filmmakers need to present women through new progressive frames in order to mirror their increased engagement and effective role in the society. To illustrate, ever since the January 25th revolution, there has been a remarkable increased involvement of women in many aspects of society. More women are establishing their own NGOs and joining political parties in order to serve the community and effect a positive change on the society as a whole. Given the power and potential of the Egyptian cinema to reach millions of spectators not only in Egypt, but across the Arab world as well, these new frames and roles should get reflected on the silver screen.

On the other hand, media regulators should have an active role in dealing with the question of women representations in media. An independent media watch body should be established in order to monitor negative portrayals of women and minorities not only through the cinema sector, but in drama as well.

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Appendix A: Operational definitions

1. **Social class of woman portrayed:** the social category of the woman featured in movies. It could be determined through the lifestyle they are engaging.
 - **Upper class:** aristocrat who are living a luxurious life. Her income exceeds her needs; she enjoys spending her time in clubs and parties. She does not face economic problems.
 - **Upper-middle class:** Intellectual and professional woman who belongs to political, social or civil groups.
 - **Middle class:** educated woman who may be employed or not. She does not live a luxurious life.
 - **Middle-Lower class:** refers to a woman who is poorly paid and barely earns a living salary to support her family, but there is still a distinction between this class and the lower class.
 - **Lower class:** woman who works in the domestic sector, in factories, in lands. She is depicted as struggling with poor living conditions and earning income that barely satisfies her basic needs.

2. **Background of woman portrayed:** refers to whether woman is depicted to be living in rural or urban areas.
 - **Urban:** woman dwelling in big main cities such as Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said...etc.
 - **Rural:** woman living in less privileged villages/ areas.

3. **Age of woman portrayed:** refers to the age of woman depicted in movies
 - **Teenager:** from 16 - under 21 years
 - **Adult:** 21 - under 40 years
 - **Mature adult:** 40 - under 65 years
 - **Elderly:** 65 and above

4. **Status of woman portrayed:** refers to the woman's social standing
 - **Single:** woman is depicted as not married
 - **Engaged:** woman depicted as engaged or in the stages of getting married
 - **Married:** woman is depicted as married
 - **Divorced:** woman is depicted as divorced
 - **Widow:** woman is depicted as widowed
 - **In a relationship:** woman depicted as having an informal relationship

5. Job status of woman portrayed:

- **Employed/white collar:** refers to employed woman who perform managerial, administrative or professional work such as lawyers, doctors.
- **Employed/blue collar:** refers to employed woman performing manual tasks such as factory and land labor.
- **Unemployed:** woman who is staying at home
- **No given profession:** woman is depicted as just a female with no specific profession or job
- **Student:** woman is depicted as pursuing an educational degree
- **Private business:** woman is depicted as having a private business whether on a small scale or a big one such as a tailor versus owner of a private company

6. Nature of job status of woman portrayed:

- **High managerial position:** woman is depicted as being employed in top decision-making or intellectually challenging positions
- **Low managerial position:** woman is depicted in lower job posts or performing uncompetitive job tasks.

7. Level of education attained by woman portrayed: refers to the woman's educational background

- **Illiterate:** woman cannot read and write
- **Literate but not formal education:** woman is depicted as being able to read and write but did not receive a formal education degree.
- **Discontinued:** refers to woman who attended some school then discontinued after primary or preparatory stage.
- **School degree:** refers to woman who has a high school degree only.
- **Intermediate degree:** refers to woman who received intermediate diplomas like commerce diplomas or attended higher institute. This kind of degree is higher than a school degree, but still not equated to university degrees
- **University degree:** refers to holders of BAs or BSs
- **Post-graduate degree:** refers to woman who is pursuing or pursued graduate studies, holders of MAs or PhDs

8. Character traits of woman portrayed:

- **Weak:** woman who is depicted as being vulnerable and cannot make a decision on her own.

- **Powerful:** woman who is goal oriented, able to make good judgments, show courage in standing up to her beliefs and maintains self-respect.
- **Sex object:** woman is only viewed as an object towards sexual gratification
- **Self-independent:** woman who stands alone without a man's aid (this can be financial or psychological)
- **Active/cope with difficulties:** woman who stands up for her rights, and who is able to solve any difficulties that she may face
- **Critical:** woman who is aware of her rights and refuses to be discriminated against in any field.
- **Passive:** woman who does not defend her rights or stand against unjust circumstances and accept the status quo without active response or resistance
- **Progressive:** woman who is forward; advocating or trying to implement social reform ideas.