Hala Lotfy’s *Coming Forth by Day* Towards a New Egyptian Cinema

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Abstract:

Examining the cinematic landscape in Egypt between late 2010 and now, one can speak of a New Egyptian Cinema. The author reasons that cinema is the artistic field that benefited the most from the 2011 Revolution in Egypt. This new style of cinema is marked by a new language and an independent mode of production. One of the films that belongs to this New Egyptian Cinema is Hala Lotfy’s debut film *Coming Forth by Day* (2012). *Coming Forth by Day* is about the very life of those left behind, the everyday nameless faces living unnoticed regardless of the times, events, or even history. Lotfy’s film establishes a new type of Egyptian realism – one of rhythm, silence, lightings, camera, settings, and bodies. This article examines two notions of Lotfy’s *Coming Forth by Day*. The first is the notion of cinematic language and the representation of reality; the second is the notion of rebellion. Each notion is discussed through a close reading of certain scenes. The author maintains that *Coming Forth by Day* belongs to the Deleuzian concept of the time-image. He also argues that, if the New Egyptian cinema is a result of the Egyptian revolution, *Coming Forth by Day* contains a rebellious quality. This notion of rebellion is evident on the level of content, but mainly and most importantly, on the level of filmic language.

Examining the cinematic landscape in Egypt between late 2010 and now, we can speak of a New Egyptian Cinema. The 2011 Revolution has clearly failed in achieving its social, political, and economic goals, and now Egypt has relapsed into a military dictatorship. However, in terms of art, along with Novel, Prose, and Graphic Arts, I argue that Cinema is the artistic field that benefited the most from the 2011 Revolution in Egypt. Film was one major component during the Revolution in Egypt through which the world witnessed how Egypt’s Tahrir Square became a global symbol. Live broadcasts and amateur footage created a unique narrative of the Arab Spring. A vast number of Egyptian filmmakers, especially from the younger generation, were active participants in the Revolution, and succeeded in creating a space in which they were able to enjoy their own artistic freedom. This new style of cinema is marked by a new language and mode of production that differs from the mainstream productions in Egyptian Cinema.

One of these films is Hala Lotfy’s debut film, *Coming Forth by Day* (2012), which first came out in a time of political turmoil, a couple of months after the military coup which ousted the Egyptian Muslim Brothers’ president Mohammed Morsi and the Raba’a massacre on August 14, 2013. *Coming Forth by Day* presents a new line in Egyptian cinema that was made possible by the eruption of the 2011 Revolution, creating new spaces and possibilities, whether
Amir Taha

for the mode of production, or for the mode of perception. The main production company of Lotfy's film is Hassala, a cooperative production initiative founded by a group of young artists, including Hala Lotfy, in June 2010 (Lotfy). In 2012, Hassala released its first feature film, *Coming Forth by Day*, after only three years.

*Coming Forth by Day* implicitly negotiates the status of women in Egypt, sectarianism, religious oppression, and what is more, it breaks the religious and social taboo of death, especially where it concerns a family member with a fatal illness. *Coming Forth by Day* is about the very life of those left behind, the everyday nameless faces living unnoticed regardless of the times, events or even history. However, it is the visual style that contains these social commentaries. The film is all about the image; the visual representation is the driving force of any possible meaning in the film. Lotfy’s film establishes a new type of Egyptian realism. This realism is that of rhythm, silence, lightings, camera, settings, and bodies. This article examines two notions of Lotfy’s *Coming Forth by Day*. The first is the notion of cinematic language and the representation of reality, the second is the notion of rebellion. Each notion is discussed through a close reading of certain scenes. I argue that *Coming Forth by Day* belongs to the Deleuzian concept of the time-image. I also argue that if the New Egyptian cinema is a result of the Egyptian revolution, *Coming Forth by Day* contains a rebellious quality. This notion of rebellion is evident on the level of content, but mainly and most importantly, on the level of filmic language. The cinematic language itself is the rebel: it stages time, not action, and it is concerned with what is, not with what is to come or what was. In fact, it takes the notion of rebellion in the Egyptian context to the next level where it is no longer about the historical event as such, but rather about the possibilities and the space such an event creates: a new and different way of cinematic expression, production, and aesthetics.

**Cinematic Language and the Representation of Reality**

*Coming Forth by Day* is all about time. The film is about a day in the life of an Egyptian family in which two women, a mother and a daughter of a disabled man, struggle on a daily basis to survive in the severe social and economic situation in Egypt. Their lives are defined by the illness of the father and the presence of an awaited death. The still life of this family is shaped by oppression, poverty, ill health, disconnection, and injustice among other things. The still life of Soad the main protagonist is, as Gilles Deleuze argues concerning neorealist films, a direct image of time in which each aspect is time, on each occasion, under various conditions of that which changes in time. Time is the full, that is, the unalterable form filled by change. Time is ‘the visual reserve of events in their appropriateness.’ (16)

This is evident in the choice of the subject matter in relation to the visual style of the film. The use of long takes, minimal camera movement, simple and direct cuts, lighting, and sound design is what creates a time-image film. The notion of narrative causality is entirely missing in the film; even character causality does not exist. Throughout Lotfy’s film, none of the three characters is derived from or defined by the past, nor are they motivated by or moving toward...
the future. The film can be read as portraying the coexistence of and the interplay between life and death, despair and hope, light and darkness, and the end scene might represent a beginning of a different reality driven by a relief from awaiting death. However, Soad and her mother are caught in a reality marked by lifelessness and forgetfulness. The life of this family becomes in itself an everyday banality in the larger context of the life of many Egyptian families. Deleuze discusses Yasujirō Ozu's cinema by arguing that “in Ozu, everything is ordinary or banal, even death and the dead who are the object of a natural forgetting” (14). *Coming Forth by Day* does the same: Soad’s imprisonment, the mother’s burden, and the dying father are all ordinary. The question is how the film presents all these ideas visually.

**Preparing the Dead (24:37:02-32:43:17)**

Lotfy called this scene the master scene of the film (*Lotfy*). She explained that this scene was shot 23 times. And indeed, this scene offers one of the few emotional moments in the film. Soad and her mother nurse the disabled father. It is the daily time to change the bed sheets, dress him in fresh clothes, and attend to his bed sores. The scene takes place in the father's room which is, unlike the other rooms of the flat, lit up by daylight. After the mother has succeeded in feeding her husband a quick breakfast, Soad takes her father to the balcony, so he can get some sunlight. For the first and last time in the film, the spectator hears the father's voice telling Soad to put him back to bed and that he is bothered and bored.

After the opening scene, which takes place inside the dark flat, the spectator moves with Soad and her father closer to the outside world (Fig. 1). The scene (23:06:16-24:36:55) is set on the balcony, and, for a very short time, daylight is fully present. However, the scene is shot in a close frame. Soad stretches her father's leg and tries to expose his skin to the sunlight; the camera does not show any sign of the outside world; only Soad and the father's decaying body are visible. When the father utters the first and last words heard from him in the film, the frame widens a bit, but it still remains in close range: the father is in focus occupying the lower right of the frame, while Soad is out of focus in the upper left. The distant outside world is completely out of focus, rather blurred in the background.
Amir Taha

The composition of the scene, even though shot in natural daylight (not in the dark and dim lighting of the flat) remains true to the notion of the family’s non-life cut off from the outside world. It is the father, the dying man, whose position in the frame clearly receives the light. For the most part, Soad is in the shade, and when she moves towards the light, she immediately moves out of focus.

While placing a character in the lower half of the frame in relation to another character in the upper half often indicates a weakness and helplessness of the former and expresses the power and dominion of the latter, this is not quite the case here. Ironically, the father does not wish to be in the light and demands to be put back to bed as he is bothered and bored. The composition suggests a possible meaning of the scene by placing the father in focus and closer to the camera.

The position of the father sets the tone and the atmosphere of the frame; the father being in focus, the scene stresses the presence or even omnipresence of death (Fig. 2). This omnipresence is at the same time an absence of this character. It is solely his being near death that dominates the lives of all the characters. Being in the light (symbolizing life) is no longer his desire. Only when the father speaks does he become present. His words are a clear statement, “put me back to bed! I am bothered … I am bored” (24:20:33). He desires to go back to his bed where death is near. In addition, Soad, with her distance to the camera and being out of focus, is the helpless and non-living character. She is caught between the permanent presence of death and a desire to live, and a death about to happen and a life which is taking place somewhere on the outside.

Furthermore, the sound design plays a major part, supporting the visual style and enhancing the atmosphere of this scene. Out on the balcony, the spectator hears a mixture of distant sounds in the background. In fact, this mixture becomes a dull noise: birds, radio, shouting, and car sounds. The film keeps the volume of this background low, so it never becomes the dominant sound of the scene. Instead, silence is what dominates the scene. Accordingly, it seems that nothing is able to take place in the life of the three characters: neither sound, nor light.

Fig. 2: The father and Soad on the balcony. (Lotfy 24:20:33)
Life, in *Coming Forth by Day*, is all on the outside and never a part of the inside.

I will now discuss the scene in which Soad changes her father’s bed sheets and prepares to dress his wounds (24:36:59). The whole scene, in which Soad and then her mother change the father’s clothes and attend to his wounds, is shot in one long take of eight minutes. The scene contains almost no narrative content: rather, it is a long and a slow representation of a painful and dull situation. It also shows and reveals the life situation of the three characters. The camera only minimally changes its position throughout the whole scene; it is placed on the bright balcony capturing what is happening in the scene with only slow movements. The scene starts, after a direct cut, with Soad taking the sheets and the clothes out of a wardrobe (Fig. 3). Again, Soad is captured in a total low-key light. This visual feature matches her character traits outlined in the previous scene, where Soad is shown out of focus: positioning Soad in the shadow suggests that she is the character who psychologically suffers the most.

In addition, the camera follows Soad’s movements, showing every detail: the clothes, the dirty old mattress, the fresh sheet with its stains and holes, and the new bandages. When Soad starts to move her father to put him to bed, the camera becomes static. Here, the treatment of the father’s illness, which really is more of a palliative alleviation of the symptoms, mirrors the preparation of the dead for their journey to and through death. The father gets fresh clothes and his sores get disinfected and covered in what appears to be a metaphorical act of mummification. The positioning of the father within the frame enhances this notion; what the spectator sees is mainly his body from behind. From the moment Soad puts him to bed, the father’s face is no longer seen, except when Soad and her mother lay him down. Even then, he seems like a mummy with a vacant look and a stiff body. Throughout the whole scene, he does not utter a word, nor does he make a sound.

Shortly after Soad starts attending to her father, the mother appears out of the dark space outside the room (Fig. 4). She moves in her lifeless fashion and starts to help Soad. The composition of the frame shows the three of them: Soad on the left, the father in the centre, and the mother on the right. The tense
and sad relationship between the two is immediately evident the moment the mother enters. The mother asks what she can get her, and Soad tells her impatiently to bring her the ointment. The mother sits down and tells Soad, “leave him … I will hold him” (28:03:50). Throughout the whole scene, the two exchange resentful looks. The few words they exchange are full of accusations and resentment. Their only topic is the father, whom they talk about in the third person although he is present:

The mother: Shouldn’t you have let the mattress air out a bit? It smells really bad.

Soad: What have you done about the medical mattress?

The mother: I will ask about the price today.

Soad: Please don’t forget. Ok? As you see, the sores are getting worse. This mattress doesn’t work.

The mother: Leave him, leave him … Hold him from the other side! Hold him well!

The mother: Leave him to me! … Hold!

Soad: Please don’t forget about the mattress!

The mother: We’ll see … I will go rest for a while before the shift.

(Lotfy 23:11:45-23:12:50)

In this dialogue, it becomes clear how both characters project all their personal frustration onto one another and how they use the father to do so. The sense of disconnection among all three characters is also evident. The father does not react or interact in any way. Both women communicate with each other, or rather miscommunicate, in a very impersonal manner.

Soad and her mother are caught in this miserable situation centred on the father; they both have no life, and each is dead in her own way. The process of attending to the father is visually sad, and yet it is also banal (Fig. 5). The realist dimension of this scene is represented in the camera position, the minimal camera movement, the absence of cuts (being shot in a long take), the lighting, and the physical appearance of the characters in addition to the acting, which shows the emotional numbness and psycho-
logical exhaustion of the two women. These characteristics also effect dullness and suggest a sense of detachment and heaviness on the level of perception. The position of the camera in the outside world, on the bright side as it were, with its semi-static nature (only the lens moves) establishes a spectator's point of view. Not only showing but also watching, the camera produces a mode of observation very much concerned with details: objects, bodies, and characters.

Moreover, the use of long takes enhances the sense that what is being seen is a real-life situation without a narrative superimposed on it. This is again what Deleuze hints at when he discusses the concept of the time-image in which the action floats in the situation rather than bringing it to a conclusion. The eight-minute sequence is a scene where everything remains real within the reality of the setting. There is nothing but the dull room, the old dirty mattress, the stained sheet, the yellowish lighting, the sores on the father’s back, the “zombie-like” mother, and the pale and frustrated Soad. In terms of action, what takes place is changing the sheets, dressing the sores, and clothing the father, all of which is done also in “real time.”

In addition, Deleuze refers also to the concept of “still life” in neo-realist cinema, which can be evoked for this scene. He argues that “the still life is defined by the presence and composition of objects which are wrapped up in themselves or become their own container” (16). To this definition, I want to add that there is an embodied absence in this scene that is related to what Deleuze writes about the presence and the composition of objects. For the very physical presence of the father’s body is in fact an absence of his character and vice versa. Earlier, I referred to
how both women talk about him in the third person and never directly talk to him throughout the whole scene (Fig. 6). What they both deal with is his body and nothing more. Even the father himself does not interact with anyone or react to anything, neither his daughter nor his wife. They never look at him; neither does he look at them. Taking into account the composition of the three characters within the frame, the father is positioned in the centre between Soad and the mother. Their lives are arranged around the father’s illness, and while his body stands physically between them in the scene, his absence/presence is also what stands between them emotionally in their lives. It is the presence of the body that connects the two women, yet the absence of the father as a person is what disconnects them and separates them from one another. In this sense, it is one of the pure optical situations [...] which bring the emancipated senses into direct relation with time and thought. This is the very special extension of the opsign: to make time and thought perceptible, to make them visible and of sound. (Deleuze 17)

Rebellion: To Catch Up with the Light? (50:32:59-59:56:22)

This section deals with the second half of Lotfy’s film. It is set in the outside world after Soad leaves the apartment. This section discusses two sequences. The first is the scene in which Soad leaves the flat and goes out (50:32:55); the second scene is the ending of the film.

In the first sequence, Soad tells her mother that she will go out to visit a friend. But later, the viewer sees Soad only on the streets or in microbuses, moving from place to place almost aimlessly. The sequence starts with Soad having her hair done at a hairdresser’s (50:53:04). For the first time, Soad is shown fully in the daylight; however, the lighting remains yellowish with a cold colour tone, which indicates that it is late afternoon. Both the lighting and the tone continue to be realistic in portraying the dull and chaotic characteristics of this part of Cairo. The film does not name the neighbourhood in which Soad lives, but it is clear that it is one of the lower middle-class neighbourhoods near downtown Cairo.
After leaving the hairdresser, Soad gets into a microbus heading for Tahrir (Fig. 7). This sequence (52:46:13-59:56:22) signifies a change in terms of montage/editing. For the first time, with Soad now out of the flat, the film employs parallel montage. When Soad gets into the microbus, the film cuts back to the flat and shows the mother cleaning the floor (53:27:22 [Fig. 8]). Here, the interplay of light and darkness is thrown into starker contrast with Soad being in the outside world in daylight, and the mother in the dark flat. The effect is heightened by still portraying the mother in a lifeless and ghostly way.

The film cuts back to Soad in the microbus (54:20:09), introducing one of the most powerful scenes in the film. This scene is a long take showing
an interaction between Soad and a young woman sitting next to her. The young woman starts a conversation, or rather a monologue, with Soad as audience. She starts by asking Soad whether her head scarf is properly covering her hair, then she asks her about the direction of the microbus, telling her she wants to go to Helwan, one of Cairo’s outer districts. She then compliments Soad's handbag and asks her where she got it. When Soad tells her that it is old, the young woman says, that it actually looks old. It becomes evident that this young woman behaves rather oddly. She changes the subject, and abruptly asks Soad whether she is Christian, because she does not wear a head scarf. Soad uneasily says no:

Young woman: Well, I was like you … Then, I have been told…Well, I am possessed.

Soad: What do you mean?

Young woman: Possessed … A spell was cast on me, and something haunts me, you know; they say; it is easier to be possessed if your hair is uncovered… You are not married, are you?

Soad: No, I am not.

Young woman: What is this then?

Soad: Just a ring.

Young woman: I am 26, and I still have not got married.

Soad: You are still young.

Young woman: No, I should have got married a long time ago … but the person who cast the spell meant for me to be viewed as a chimp, so I would not get married … She … She … (angrily) It is her, that bitch that cast the spell on me.

Soad: Who is the bitch?

Young woman: My stepmother, I know it is her …

Soad: How [do] you know it is her?

Young woman: I know, she does not like me, but …

Soad: How [do] you know it is your stepmother?

Young woman: I know it is her, she does not like me, but I am … Well, I am going to Helwan to see a certain priest in a church there … they say, he is very good … so yeah, I have gone to many sheikhs and done all I could, but nothing worked …

Soad: What [happens] to you?

Young woman: But with God's will, they will undo the spell … I will keep on going there until they undo the spell … Sometimes, I wake up and I find these things … you know … look … See? See? (shows Soad her arm)

Soad: There is nothing. There is nothing wrong with you.

Young woman: I don’t … look! I mean, he sucks my blood, look how my veins are popping, look! … I have had enough, seriously. He comes at times, while I am sleeping. That son of a bitch … but I will undo it; I will undo it … He comes while I am asleep, and sometimes I hear voices before dawn, and I wake up frightened. I never see him, but I can feel him … So, that is it, I became a spinster …

Soad: Spinster? You are still young.

Young woman: No, young? Women my age are all married …

You know, I had a lot of suitors, but the spell.

(Lotfy 54:20:09-58:58:04)

The scene continues with the young woman asking Soad if she has money to change. Soad asks her how much and takes out her purse, but the young woman snaps a banknote telling Soad; “this one is

“Well, I was like you … Then, I have been told…Well, I am possessed.”
good." Shortly after, the young woman stops the microbus and gets out; the camera moves out of the bus showing her standing there, confused, but only for a second, and then walking off the frame. The camera gets back to Soad, and the scene ends with a cut back to the mother in the flat (59:57:00).

This encounter with the young woman along with the whole dialogue can be read in many different ways. One way is viewing it as a sort of social commentary. The unstable behaviour of the young woman and her ranting reveal several possible readings addressed below. Other than her mother and father, this is the only person with whom Soad has an active encounter in the film. Following the neorealist aesthetics, Lotfy employs a single long take of almost five minutes. The scene is shown in a medium shot and with one camera position. For the first and only time in the film, a scene is shot with a hand-held camera. The camera adapts the movements of the microbus, effectively adding to the verisimilitude of the optical situation. This visual quality establishes the sense of an active observer intruding into the personal space of the two characters. This is not done forcefully, but rather in a realistic manner, for in public transportation in general, and in these microbuses in particular, there is no personal space at all, as is shown through the two men sitting behind Soad and the young woman (Fig. 9). During the whole scene, both men, and especially the one on the right, are quiet listeners, leaning towards the dialogue, a passive part in the conversation between the two women. Visually, the man on the right is taking the same camera angle as the spectator. This also appeals to the film’s realism: the violation of the personal space in Egypt is an everyday reality on the streets, in public, and even in private transport.

One of the most recent critical social problems in Egypt is sexual harassment. Thus, in some moments, in the second part when Soad is outside, such as when she takes a microbus back home (01:24:24:03), the spectator, especially if Egyptian, expects and sometimes fears that Soad might become a victim of sexual harassment.

Thus, in discussing the dialogue between Soad and the young woman, the implicit social commentary needs to be addressed. The character of this woman is a very tragic one, however, and the impression of everyday banality that I discussed earlier

Fig. 9: The young woman engages Soad in a conversation about her tragedy, while the man in the back intrudes their space. (Lotfy 54:20:09)
is again evident here. This seemingly psychologically unstable woman with her condition presented in the film is a character one can meet almost every day in Egypt: a young woman failing to cope with living in a patriarchal society, dominated by old traditions, religious orientation, and often ignorance, develops what can only be speculated to be a psychotic disorder. She directly tries to define Soad with her supposed religious identity: no head scarf, thus she has to be Christian. She starts then to talk about her misery which is also based on religious background: she got possessed because she did not wear a head scarf and her stepmother cast a spell on her, so she would not get married. Here comes the second social aspect of marriage for women. It is still a tradition in Egyptian low and low-middle classes that a woman must get married at a young age: 18 to 25 years old. The idea of becoming a “spinster” still is a social stigma for women. A spinster in these social classes is a woman who is approaching or just entered her thirties. The film does not offer an explanation or a cause for the young woman’s mental illness, and is not even concerned with the omission. Yet, it is important to provide a social reading that might help to understand why this woman reached this situation, or at least, to say that her condition seems to be connected to certain social aspects. Social oppression, as represented by the stepmother, is one of them. To be blunt: within Egyptian culture, the stepmother/father is portrayed as an evil figure. It even became one of the stock characters in popular culture and film; it is a figure who torments the children and turns their parents against them. A colloquial Egyptian proverb comments on this by saying: “I did not know how precious my mother was until my stepmother arrived.”

Another social aspect of this dialogue is indeed sexual frustration. This is to be understood against the backdrop of a culture where marriage still is the only way to practice sex in an acceptable and stable environment. In fact, marriage in Egypt became for many people, especially males, a synonym for sex. In other words, the main motif of marriage is to have regular sex. For women, it is mostly to escape from the strict life and the lack of personal freedom in the family house.

As a final social aspect to discuss here, I want to return to the religious dimension already hinted at earlier. Religion plays a key role in this scene on different levels. Firstly, one must reckon the sectarian situation in Egypt. Since the 1970s, with the beginning of Anwar el-Sadat’s rule, Egypt witnessed the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as a tool used by the regime to crush the Egyptian left. Sadat deployed a new socio-political strategy meant to replace Gamal Abdel Nasser’s socialist and progressive orientation with conservative Islamic values. After Nasser’s crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and the 1960s, Sadat started his rule by releasing all imprisoned Muslim Brothers and giving them space to practice religious, social, and political activities (Osman 78).

Furthermore, in gaining more social space, mosques were filled with fundamentalist imams preaching values and concepts of Wahhabi Islam imported from Saudi Arabia. A conservative and radical strain of Islam came into being accompanied by a certain social code and lifestyle. An example of this new lifestyle was the way people dressed; males wore long beards and white Djellab, while women wore a
headscarf, **Hijab** and even **Niqab**. Soon, these teachings reached many members of the middle class, and gradually the number of women wearing **Hijab** increased rapidly. The notion of identity in Egypt became largely defined by religion. Women with open hair are stigmatized, and for some religious dogmatists, it is not even imaginable that a Muslim woman does not wear a headscarf.

In this sense, the young woman with her psychological condition voices this sectarian prejudice openly when asking Soad if she is Christian because Soad does not wear a headscarf. In addition, when Soad reluctantly tells her that she is not Christian, the young woman brands her with the other stigma. The young woman warns Soad about not wearing a headscarf, telling her that she was like her and that is why she is possessed.

The young woman thus moves within a socio-religious chain of oppression. The social is represented on the one hand by the pressure to marry at a certain age in order not to become a spinster and, on the other, by breaking loose from family oppression, which is an arena to an antagonism between the daughter and the stepmother. The religious aspect is evident, firstly, in the earthly punishment of being possessed because of not committing to the teachings of Islam by wearing her hair uncovered. Secondly, she became a victim of the religious exorcism business, which controls her life entirely, keeps her in a vicious cycle, and worsens her psychological condition.

Moreover, the vicious cycle of religious oppression now widens. After exhausting her options with the Sheikhs, she reaches now to the ‘other side,’ the very side she is prejudiced about: the Christians. She tells Soad that she is on her way to Helwan to a famous priest who practices exorcism in a church. Discussing this paradox is very complicated, and I cannot develop the topic in full depth. However, it is important to address this point briefly. Despite the increasing sectarian tension in the last forty years in Egypt, there are still many signs of a normal co-existence among Egyptians of different backgrounds. One of the most explicit examples is a Muslim believing in the power of Christ and Mary to cure and heal despite the radical differences of both religious persuasions.

To summarize, this scene cleverly delivers a social commentary via a realistic dialogue between Soad and the young woman. I argue that the choice of Doaa Oreyqat, who plays the young woman, was crucial to this scene. In terms of physical appearance, just like Soad and her mother, she is one of the ordinary and unnoticed humans, someone who can be encountered every day in the streets of Cairo, one of those who are not remembered. As the film proceeds, the young woman is again ‘forgotten’; she vanishes from the film’s memory. What is striking about this encounter is not the fact that it is tragic, but rather, the banality of this tragedy. The script along with the acting invokes a sense of black humour in the way the young woman talks, her incoherence, and how she communicates with Soad. The spectator is somehow induced to laugh when she negatively comments on Soad’s bag right after she compliments her about it, and when she suddenly asks Soad if she is Christian, and finally when she snatches a banknote from Soad’s purse and immediately gets off the bus. The look of concern and sympathy on Soad’s face when her eyes follow the young woman out of the bus is only temporary. The concern on Soad’s face is mixed with some irritation about being ‘robbed’ of money (which will affect her later on).
The scene ends with the young woman confusedly stepping out of the frame and Soad checking her purse looking concerned and irritated. This long scene is an encounter of two miserable characters, two tragedies. A young woman probably suffering from psychosis, caught in a vicious cycle of social oppression, and Soad, a thirtyish woman, actually a spinster, whose family life is her prison, a life defined by a death-in-waiting. The moment the young woman steps out of the frame, she ceases to exist entirely. It seems that her existence is completely contingent. The very topics addressed flow “naturally” in the scene and disappear again without any trace. The young woman is an object of natural forgetting. Her being is as banal as the nature of the conversation which lacks a precise subject matter.

In effect, the rebellious aspect in this scene is mainly defined by a rebellion of form rather than of the content. The observational quality of this long-take establishes a sense of continuity of action. However, it is not the content of the action that is being focused on here. Rather, if this scene generates any kind of reflection, it is “not simply focused on the content of the image but on its form, its means and functions, its falsifications and creativities, on the relations within it between the sound dimension and the optical” (Deleuze 10). In other words, as the film belongs to the cinema of time-image, this scene, which employs neo-realist aesthetics, is marked by an absence of plot in favour of the visual image.

In sum, whether within the Egyptian context or beyond, Coming Forth by Day is yet another line of flight from the dominant narrative cinema. In times of socio-political eruption in Egypt, the film shows a story of an ordinary woman who suffers a life defined by death. It is a story of loss, or rather a story of parting from someone you love. While the scene discussed contains social commentary, both its form and style deliver a sense of banality which causes a natural forgetting through the visual image. Tragedies, injustices, oppression, and suffering are of no importance; they are not the topic, they are just there.

**Coming Forth: The Ending**

After the mother calls Soad and tells her that she has brought the father to the hospital, Soad rushes there, but soon leaves again. She spends the next hours wandering aimlessly until she reaches the City
of the Dead, where she spends the rest of the night alone (Fig. 10). Except for her encounter with the deranged young woman, Soad’s whole wandering in the outside world is marked by loneliness.

The last scene (01:32:5-01:35:42) begins with Soad entering the flat in the morning. While Soad slowly enters the frame, a banging sound can be heard. Soad enters the mother’s room to find her sitting on the floor with the inside of a mattress all over the place. The mother bangs with a wooden stick into the cotton pieces, imitating an upholsterer, as she attempts to fix the mattress. Soad asks her:

Soad: What are you doing?
The mother: I am fixing your father’s mattress. Smells bad … He can’t sleep on it.
The mother: Where were you? I thought you were buying bread.
Soad: I don’t have money at all. I came walking from Al Hussein.
The mother: You went to Al Hussein?
Soad: How is he doing?
The mother: Sick.

Soad: Where are we going to bury Dad? Where is our cemetery located?
(Lotfy 01:33:12-01:35:27)

After Soad asks her mother about what she is doing, she sits next to her, and the room is lightened by daylight; for the first time, the sun is strongly flowing into the flat. The mother is located entirely in the light, while Soad is in the shadow (Fig. 11). However, compared to the whole interior shots, this shot is brighter and less depressive in terms of lighting. The dialogue taking place between the two women represents a sort of relief that goes along with the visual characteristics: this could perhaps even be the beginning of a new phase in their lives. There is no trace of tension or resentment between the mother and her daughter, rather a sense of calm and maybe compassion is felt in this shot. In addition, fixing the mattress seems to be an act of self-occupation rather than an act of denial, given the fact that the father is probably about to die. After the meaningless interaction about where Soad had been, Soad asks a meaningful and real question: “Where are we going to bury Dad? Where is our cemetery located?” (01:35:27:57). The mother reacts by silently looking
into the streaming sunlight coming from the outside and the film ends, fading out to black.

With this ending, Soad expresses that both her and her mother’s lives could be “reanimated” only after the departure of the father. This life begins with the question of the burial and the ultimate goodbye. Soad’s journey in the outside world might be a prelude of her coming forth to live. The cinematography during her outside journey makes clear how she is cut off from life. When she goes into Al Hussein Mosque – an almost typical social reaction to the father’s condition being near to death – the act is meaningless to her. Accordingly, religion does not help her in any way and does not offer an answer or even a brief respite. Outside the Mosque, she is all alone watching life going on around her: vividness, noise, and people talking and joking. It seems that only after death and the dead surround her in the last stage of her journey, can she ask her mother the right question. Where religion does not help, the reality of death as represented by the City of the Dead does.

In the Egyptian context, the film breaks the taboo of death and its religious and social sacredness, especially where it concerns a family member with a fatal illness. One does not speak of the burial before the death. The accepted way of dealing with this condition is signified by the mother’s act of fixing the mattress, but then the mother accepts the reality evoked by Soad’s question. This reality is that the father’s departure, his physical death is a relief to all, a notion that cannot be accepted socially. The life of a person disabled by a stroke becomes a burden for any family, especially in the middle and lower-middle classes with no possibility of proper health care. At a certain point, it becomes clear that under these conditions, the death of this family member is the only way out of this miserable situation. This relief is indeed never shown, nor spoken of. *Coming Forth by Day* tackles this idea from the very beginning and thus breaks this taboo with its neorealist aesthetics, which rely completely on the power of the image. In addition, though the film is about the loss of a beloved person, Lotfy succeeds to free the film from any shallow, sentimental emotionality. In fact, the film does not contain any melodramatic build-up at all. Rather, *Coming Forth by Day* shows this loss as a real-life situation, even in the scene where the two women attend to the father; the banality of the action and its representation are what might be emotionally striking, and not the act itself. The notion of rebellion in *Coming Forth by Day* is evident mostly in the mode of production. The visual style contains the social commentary. The film is another line of flight from the traditional Egyptian cinema.

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**Works Cited**


