

## The visual content of violent scenes in films; and their impact on society

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### Introduction:

Social changes occur due to the various factors; whether cultural, economical or political; that affect human societies, on the other hand; art in general is a prime expressive tool and a communication method; and cinema is the most popular and capable method that can reach all cultural and social levels, so it is regarded to be a main cause for these social changes, especially the negative ones.

Cinema is the art most capable of addressing audience in a language they can understand and react to; as it can reach different types of audience with various cultural, social or age levels; there is the rub; cinema is an important; yet dangerous tool, as it is one of the basic sources that form social values and habits, whether positively or negatively.

The emerge of cinematic films and their wide popularity was followed by the interest of psychologists and sociologists in its influence; on their audience and on the society; because cinema is an audible and visual art, thus; it is an important tool for social changes and the development of cultural awareness; or vice versa; so it can be used as a destructive method and become a dangerous and misleading force.

Despite the prevailing idea that cinema films are an entertaining tool, yet it was proved that they are the most effective audible and visual source: due to its great attractiveness; through which viewers can acquire different information, attitudes, ideas and concepts through the dramatic construction of the film; that can affect their behavior.

By conducting a simple comparison between cinema films during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and current films; and the influence of both of them on the social behaviors, morals and values; we shall find that there is a huge difference in all aspects, including violence, chaos, randomness, austerity, moral degradation and consideration of women. Current films promote violence; moral and behavioral deterioration that has led to a declining public decency and has negatively affected the whole society.

Due to the huge influence of the cinematic image that cover all life aspects, this research shall study one of the most common phenomenon of recent films; the spread of violence in cinema; and the social changes related to it.

### Problem:

Cinema is usually accused of being the reason for negative social changes on all ethical, intellectual and cultural levels; especially in Arab societies; on the other hand; cinema specialists defend it by indicating that the cinematic image is derived from reality and is influenced by it.

Therefore; it is important to study the positive and negative impact of cinema on Arab societies, and try to decode this dialectic that has emerged ever since the 7<sup>th</sup> art was created.

## Objective

The research aims to study the visual content of violent scenes in films; and their impact on the society.

## Hypothesis

1. The adaptation of the visual language of cinematic image directs the feelings of the receiver, engrosses their consciousness and the partially disrupts their ethical principles.
2. If violent scenes are presented in a style that confers them a sense of realism and credibility; this will indirectly affect the viewer and negatively change his behavior.
3. Intensification and repetition of violent scenes in cinematic films will create generations that regard real street violence with an indifferent and habitual attitude.

## Methodology

The research follows the analytical descriptive method to study the role of cinematic image in influencing the society.

## Key words:-

Violence, simulated crimes, cinema censorship, audiovisual arts, pure violence

## Violence in the cinematic image

Violent scenes represent a main part of the attractiveness of cinema, as it generates a large amount of excitement and interaction, especially that such scenes usually are the peak of the dramatic events, this is why these scenes were presented in cinema from its very beginning, although their objective then was not to present violence as a concept, as it was integrated in the film according to the dramatic necessity. By reviewing early cinema films; we shall find that cameras used to avoid direct filming in violent scenes, and uses a symbolic substitute instead of clear shots.

With the development of cinematic potentials, the beginning of the digital era in cinema and the development of special effects, montage and artistic techniques of filming violent scenes, and the increasing tendency towards a more realistic and honest filming to create a feeling of glamorousness for the audience; violent scenes increased, and specific details of killings and violent unjustified mutation have become a feature in modern films. The year 1969 is a milestone in the beginning of the new approach to violence in cinema, as the movie "The wild bunch"; directed by Sam Peckinpah; has presented violence as a concept in itself (fig. 1).



Fig. (1) Scenes from "The wild bunch"; which represents the beginning of a new concept of violence in cinema

Afterwards; more films that follow the same vision appeared, and the culture of pure violence started, violence is glamorously filmed in individual scenes through close shots and different camera angles, which increase its emotional effect and visual value. Hence; violent scenes have transformed from concealed symbolic scenes, to pure violent shots and scenes artistically filmed to impress and astonish.

Cinema makers have two opinions on the advantage of presenting violence in cinema; the first sees that such films imitate reality and some of their events are true, while the other sees that violent films convey an undesirable behavior that destroy social values; and that highlighting violent events and behaviors that limitedly occur in specific places leads to their expansion.

This criticism concentrates on cinema films more than other types of art, because movies emotionally affect people's attitudes and behaviors, provide the viewer with specific responses. Most recent films present violence as an effective problem solving method; or the only option for the main character to overcome the obstacles that prevent him from reaching his goals, thus; promote the idea that violence is the solution for many problems.

### **Cinema and social attitude**

There is a relation between the situations and circumstances experienced by the people; on which their attitudes and choices towards movie types are based. The attitude that people subconsciously develop as a response to the economical, political and social change can be noticed through the history of cinema, e.g. the popularity of action movies during times of military defeats, or casual comedy movies during economical crisis.

### **Cinema and simulated crimes**

As direct violent scenes appeared on cinema screen at the end of the sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; a new term has appeared in the world of crime, which is simulated crimes, it indicates crimes that are inspired from watching certain cinema films. The simplest form of this simulation is to imitate the looks of cinema characters; such as hair cuts or fashion style; or a behavioral imitation of the moves or demeanor of the leading movie character; as happened recently after the films starred by actor "Mohamed Ramadan"; or it can be an extreme simulation, by imitating the crimes presented in the film (fig. 2).



Fig. (2): The influence of actor "Mohamed Ramadan" and his dramatic characters

Theories of “behavioral settings” confirm that frequent exposure to violent scenes in cinema has a negative impact, as these scenes affect the subconscious and create negative behavior patterns that stay hidden and suppressed in the human mind until an event occur; during which the person is normally highly emotional due to anger and psychological tensions; that correspond with these patterns, so they start to recall these scenes and violence becomes a real act, which means that violent film scenes has become a reference to the type of violence response to this event, and the way to execute it.

### **Aesthetics of violence in the cinematic image**

Violence presented on cinema screen can be analyzed into two elements:

Firstly: the behavior being filmed; there aren't many changes in the behavior of violence during the history of cinema, as its scenes range from bunches to gun firing, or explosions, stabbing or mutation.

Secondly: the cinematography style; which means the scene layout and the technique used in shooting it in order to present the required behavior. This element has largely developed due to the great advancement of cinema techniques and tools, as well as the change of cinematic vision in trying to embody reality. Violence in cinema transformed from hidden to obvious; it then became more intense and impressive to the point of shocking the audience with its elaborated details (fig. 3).



Fig. (3) Elaborate details of wounds in cinema films

The perfection of violence scenes has become an opportunity to show cinematic skills and mastery; and there are a lot of potentials and tools from which the cinema artist can chose what is adequate to his vision and can stimulate the desired reaction from the audience.

Film directors strive to embody and convey violence in a more detailed manner than it really is; by exploiting the visual language of the cinematic image and by using various artistic methods; such as detailed and close shots and camera movements, as well as aesthetic shots in the image structure such as framing, defining space and its size around the character, distribution of elements inside the cadre; and also using shapes as denotations, employing high- or low-angled shots, controlling camera shutter speed, lighting formation elements and color effects (fig 4).



Fig. (4) Examples for various artistic styles used in violent scenes in cinema

### **Field study and analysis**

Two questionnaires were designed to study the role of the visual content of violent scenes in the cinematic image; and their impact on different categories of the society.

The first questionnaire was addressed to a specific sample of psychologists and sociologists (15 specialists), aiming to identify the impact of frequent exposure to violent scenes; and their influence on the social behavior of individuals and groups.

The second questionnaire was a data analysis form; addressed to different categories of audience, through a specific sample (20 viewers), that was subjected to watching a violent movie; “Shad Agzaa’ (Parts’ tightening)” directed by Hussein Elmeniawy and starred by Mohamed Ramadan in 2015; as an example of violent movies to measure the influence of these type of films.

Based on analyzing the collected data and converting it into percentages; the following results were concluded:

### **Conclusions**

- 1- The cinematic image is an important factor in promoting; if not creating; negative traditions and behaviors, in addition to destroying the values of our societies, which led to a distinct change in the behavior of the audience.
- 2- Relying upon themes that guarantee profit; even at the expense of film quality; confirms the gap between film makers and psychologists and sociologists.
- 3- There is a governmental inaction on setting general rules and controls for the cinema industry based on psychological and sociological studies.
- 4- The censorship in Egypt has failed to achieve its main objective; which is to maintain balance between free creativity and preserving social values.

- 5- Cinema is capable of achieving many positive social objectives, besides being an economical entity and a main source of income.
- 6- Film makers are an integral part of the cultural milieu; and their influence is faster and stronger than other cultural categories.
- 7- A huge responsibility rests on film makers in the formation of social awareness and the intellectual and psychological balance of different categories of society.
- 8- An artistic work can encourage specific undesired behaviors that are anti-society; especially cinema movies.
- 9- Violence in cinema movies leads to real street violence.
- 10- Explicit violent scenes are instigators of violence; even if their objective is only to entertain.

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