

## History on the Screen: Nasser and the Biographical Film in Egyptian Cinema

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**Abstract :** The emergence of Muhammad Fadel's 1996 film 'Nasser 56' ushered in a new era in Egyptian cinema. Not only was it the first biographical film of late Egyptian president Gamal 'Abdel Nasser (1918-1970); it also broke a long-accepted taboo against cinematic depiction of modern political leaders. Passionately received by Egyptians and Arabs throughout the world, the success of 'Nasser 56' empowered other filmmakers to follow Fadel's suit. Interestingly, the three biographical films that followed had, completely or partially, a Nasser dimension. In addition to another biographical film of Nasser, Anwar al-Qawadri's 'Gamal 'Abdel Nasser' (1999); Muhammad Khan's 'Ayyam al-Sadat (Days of Sadat)' (2001), and Sherif Arafa's 'Halim (Halim)' (2006) portray, as the titles clearly suggest, two significant figures whose lives thoroughly intersected with Nasser's - Nasser's successor Anwar al-Sadat and the legendary singer Abdel Halim Hafiz. Expectedly, therefore, Nasser himself is abundantly referenced in those films, albeit differently. This paper seeks to examine the ways in which Egyptian filmmakers impersonate Nasser on the screen. Starting with scholarly definitions of the biopic, the paper will first ponder the reasons that have made the biopic an unattractive genre to Egyptian filmmakers. It will then argue that the popularity of Nasser and his wide appeal to the public has transformed the status of the biopic genre in Egyptian cinema. However, the impersonation of Nasser in the four films above proved a daunting mission to filmmakers. As this paper will show, unless he is the main character, the reenactment of Nasser in films will constantly pose dilemmas to filmmakers, a few of which will be discussed in this paper.

**Keywords :** Ahmad Zaki, bio-pictures, Egyptian cinema, Nasser, Nasser 56

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