

Methodological Challenges in Studying the Egyptian Film Industry

Abstract

My contribution will address some methodological challenges involved in conducting an ethnography of film production in Egypt, both in terms of the overall conception of my object of study and the ordinary techniques through which I “collected data” about it (e.g. interviews, participation, observation). When I set out to study the Egyptian film industry, I had a narrow conception of what “the industry” would consist in, as an aggregate economic unit with capital/labor inputs and movie outputs. After 21 months of fieldwork in Egypt, I have had to expand this understanding to account for the totality of work done by film workers on the ground, including interactions with the television/advertising industry, the state bureaucracy, the local real-estate market, etc. I had to reconsider what I initially conceived as being “inside” vs. “outside” the industry, which had repercussions over the way in which I approached access to the industry, interviewing filmmakers, and observing/participating in their work.