

DAMANAT

CINEMA INDUSTRY AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

MOHAMMED AL-MAHDI



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Shift Cinema Foundation

An Overview of Cinema and Its Companies:

The first cinema in Yemen, the Private Cinema, was established in December, 1962 three months after Revolution. The idea came when the attitude of the Egyptian leadership in Yemen was to make a cultural campaign in Yemen. This contributed in establishing the cinema in Yemen despite there was a big ignorance after Revolution.

There was a belief among the authority and businessmen then that development will not happen without cinema. The number of investors was big, and now they are pioneers in other investment fields.

The idea of improving cinema came when there was a big demand of it as it was the only to provide entertainment before the appearance of television in Yemen and accordingly the investment was big. Yemen competed the developed countries, and the houses of cinema were developed in 1979 through better data shows and furniture which increased the audience attraction.

The number of cinema houses in Yemen was 43 houses including 4 houses in Sana'a, 11 houses with a Lion Share in Aden, 7 houses in Taizz, 4 houses in Al-Hodeidah, 5 houses in Hadramout, 2 houses in Ibb with the same number in Shabwah, 1 house in Al- Mahrah, 4 houses in Abyan, 1 house in Lahj and 2 houses in Dhamar.

By the way, there were mutual connections among cinema companies in Yemen and some artistic companies in Egypt, India

and some European countries. Totally, there were three cinema companies in Yemen with a big competition and they are:

- 1- Kaba'a Foundation for Trade and Cinema.
- 2- Sabiha Group for Trading & Cinema
- 3- Nasir Maso'od Group for Trading & Cinema

Unfortunately, all these houses were captured by leaders of corruptions. Then they were closed, so there are just few of those houses. Nowadays, football matches and rare movie shows are always presented. In Sana'a, there is only the private cinema and some cinema houses in the commercial centers, but they are too expensive that the ordinary citizen cannot afford. Now these cinemas are often of no fans not just because that the community regards it as prohibited, but also because the existence of the internet, computers, home-based watching and TV channels.

An Overview about The Producers of Cinema Movies

Today, there is no cinema movies production. But there are individual and collective attempts and experiences working on making short movies, cinema movies, documentary and other various movies with simple limited possibilities. Movies are often made for the purpose of serving social issues when these movies are funded by international corporations to discuss the society issues, and thus the movies are often reporting, preaching and promoting health or education concepts and others. They are not necessarily containing the beauty of the cinema art and the cinema movie. These movies are often presented in special shows to the

attendants of workshops, training courses and conferences. If the film is of a good quality, the movie is often kept for participation in the festivals without the desire to show it at the local level.

Companies Working in the Field of Art

Private companies working in the fields of culture and art face noticeable regression in the last years all over Yemen provinces except of some companies in Sana'a, Aden and Hadramout. However, there are rare and successful models that we only can count them by the fingers of the hand, and that is due to many reasons such as:

- 1- Continuous interior and exterior war since March 2015.
- 2- Sole voting system which uses the art and culture as a weapon to pass political and sectarian agendas in order to increase the conflict.
- 3- Low support to such companies and regarding them as unnecessary accessories in the time being.
- 4- The bad planning and implementation to the projects of these companies, which lead to rapid failure.

Freedom of Expression in the Perspective of The Company Working in The Field of Art

Cinema is the most important media mean for influence, income and investment. It is considered an art itself containing all other arts "The Seventh Art". It transfers human and his stories to different worlds including past, present and future. Human is the fundamental base of cinema.

Freedom of expression represents a basic right of human rights as the Article 19 of International Declaration of Human Rights provided. In line with other associated freedoms like freedom of information and freedom of press, freedom of expression contributes to obtain all other rights. Shift Foundation confesses that human rights are applied to network and non-network means alike. UNESCO is committed to study issues of freedom of expression, personal privacy, information manipulation and moral aspects in the Internet. Freedom of expression and freedom of information are the basics of building a good democratic society and achieving social and economic growth, which allows the freedom of exchanging necessary thoughts for creativity and to enhance accountability and transparency. General Director of UNESCO, Iryina Bocova, Said, "Press flourishes when media means are free and independent, and when journalists have safety while preparing their reports, and when escaping the punishment is exceptional but not the rule".

In terms of activities, Shift Foundation provides Yemeni and international movies from different cultures and countries with high quality to make a real interaction with its audience including children, youth and the Yemeni community, to let them know different issues touching their reality and imagination they come along with. As for the Foundation's vision, the Foundation seeks to change the Yemeni society point of view toward cinema, which is full of negativity and bias since the mid of 1980s. This is what contributed to the deterioration of cinema, its bad reputation, and the attempts of religious scholars which reached to its extremes by closing cinema after the war in 1994.

Despite the fact that Shift Foundation doesn't have the right to close a scene or reproduce it due to the reason that it respects the artistic work of the movie which should not be misused it, thus, Shift Foundation tries to search films from all cultures and countries movies that don't have invoking scenes to the Yemeni community that needs a long time to accept them as parts of the film's story and plot, especially when the movie is collectively presented.

Here, movies play a basic role in expressing the stories of the people and their hardship, passions, opinions, privacy and all what is related to them as a living entity interacts with its surroundings.

Cinema presents many values and plays a faithful and influencing role as it presents an equivalent world to the life and nature and gives enthusiasm and values to the family. It improves positive behaviors and practices. It is an intermediary means to the positive change and a generator of imagination. We should not forget that cinema changes and improves, add rules and legislations about the human issues. It is also a source of gaining knowledge and information and identifying other diverse cultures and civilizations.

The Experience of The Company Working in The Field of Art

Since 2009, the idea of establishing Shift is in my mind, I tried with many friends writing a project proposal to be funded, but with other names other than Shift. Then I got the chance in 2015 to rewrite the project proposal and settled on the name –Shift and for many reasons including:

- 1- Enhancing the positive point of view about cinema, and creating good relations with corporations, centers and cultural
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- spaces, and presenting new, innovated and valuable cinema shows.
- 2- A platform to present cinema talents for local amateurs and producers of youth.
 - 3- Contributing in raising the awareness of the society, especially the youth, of the importance and the effect of visual arts to solve and limit the influence of negative thoughts and the unhealthy phenomena among the society.
 - 4- Providing a new convenient place for people, and improving the feeling of the impact of watching movies collectively.
 - 5- Reviving the culture of going to cinema and alleviating the psychological pressures resulted by political and economic situations going in the country through creating new, good and encouraging public places.
 - 6- Discovering the abilities of the youth and their skills in the cinema production which allow them to get chances to invest their talents.

Shift Foundation has presented 60 events of which 42 is the total of events of "CineShow" program, which presents local and international purposeful and selected movies of different categories using visual equipment with high accurate data show screens and with a cinema sound system to be presented at the independent and public cultural and educational centers with high and accurate standards once a week (short movie + long movie) for two hours according to the annual plan. The movies are presented with professional standards and special cinema rituals through choosing

the movies that are to be presented and linking between them in the idea or the type through corresponding with the party in which the program will be presented. Then designing an advertising poster is made about the place and time of show for the audience, and coordination for the show, and making sure that the equipment and the place of the show are ready. This is made through a power point talking about the initiative, partners and supporters. It also contains a short brief on cinema history or the category of the movies that are to be presented, or a biography of a creative person of movies, presenting a background of the movies to be presented along with cinema watching instructions. After that, it is followed by a short discussion and distribution of popcorns. This is ended with the Initiative's evaluation through a two color stick to be raised by the audience to express their content or refusal.

The same is done with kid programs under the title " Kids Show " by which we produced 18 shows, most of them associated with Ibhara Foundation for Childhood and Creativity in which we presented silent short and long cartoon movies dubbed into Arabic. Kids have reacted in a noticeable and amazing manner where they created dialogue for the silent movies and discussed the ideas of the presented movies as well as the cinema technology which surprised them and had an unforgettable impact on them.

Shift enthusiasm in cinema, made several aspects to the development of success in film performances, as well as the relations of the Foundation with youth volunteers and also the audience that are increasing because of the innovation in the performances, learning from the learnt lessons after each

presentation, trying to minimize errors, maximizing good practices in the Foundation's work and growing the relationships with the youth.

Firm's Experiment and the Obstacles Facing Freedom of Expression:

Freedom of expression is considered the driving force which gives the Foundation the permission to work within the cinema domain. However, there are a variety of obstacles and challenges that the Foundation strives to deal with and then avoids them accordingly. These challenges have increased sharply under the current crisis and harsh conditions the country passes in all aspects. Among such obstacles are the severe deterioration in the cultural and artistic fields as well as the sharp decrease in freedom of expression which are attributed to the drastic changes in the political scene which in turn impose restrictions on the inventive and creative cases prosperity according to its agendas, for example, there were activities carried out by the Foundation during the conflict period. It was announced on Social Media such as Facebook and What's app. So, it received great interaction where the amount of attendance was great including guests from Political Security Agency who came to evaluate and see what the activity elements are all about. So, both of the work team and audience were afraid of the existence of figures from the Political Security being something unusual as they are not used to such guests before in any activities and our work is not involved in the consequence of the ongoing war and it is not contrary to usual life in Yemen.

Though the movies we present are dealing with different topics and issues which try to be linked with Yemeni movies for being showed all together in one single activity in order to encourage the audience to make their appropriate discussion and criticism on the projected movies, there are issues in which we face a great difficulty as showing them may result in creating a state of controversy among society and official security forces which shift its loyalty according to the political changes, so the illegal or unjustified censorship scale, closure and prohibition become more intensified to the extent that discussing issues such as the subject of making peace which provokes the fears of the conflict parties profiting from the continuity of war as a sample.

The rules and bylaws entrenched in the current enforce constitution grant a huge room for freedom of expression yet has been gradually diminishing since March, 2015.

We have faced a big challenge during the execution of the Second International Festival for Yemeni Movies which held on December, 2016. At this festival eight short Yemeni-produced movies were projected which were made under film industry programs within civil community organizations and a documentary film for the US director Jemenz about Soqatra Island. We were deeply shocked when some scenes of two short films were cut about the humanitarian crisis and the deterioration of situation in Sana'a due to the effects of the random attacks launched by the Saudi-led coalition although these scenes were on graffiti drawings in Zubairi Street Wall located in the middle of Sana'a which were still present on the walls till our projection talking about the refusal of Militia rule

to obey the government. We have tried through negotiations to persuade the cinema administration to not cut those scenes but they did.

However, we resorted to keep showing them via PowerPoint. This was a big victory for us because our standards contradict cutting any scenes of any artistic work.

We are so lucky for the overlooking of official authorities whose censorship grow up as well as they suppress the activities and works performed by artistic and cultural organizations and firms inside Yemen. Really, we have noticed the stop of many works because they did not get a license for these works from the Political Security Agency and the National Security Agency or Ministry of International Planning and Cooperation (MOPIC) or Ministry of Culture even though unqualified persons came to control the activities and licensed works and to ask in an illegal and provoking way for their share from the funds and support of these projects

Due to these difficulties and restrictions, activities organizers prefer not implement them than to be subjected, extorted or controlled. One of the catastrophic difficulties which artistic and cultural companies and organizations face, including Shift Foundation, is financing and supporting the Foundation's projects. This is because donors don't believe in cinema as a means and channel required for any community through which it can transfer its ideas and issues as an enter tenement to the community and as an investment industry.

Besides, the closure of cinema houses available in the provinces of Yemen made no effective benefit of such spaces as an option for

freedom of expression to introduce the issues and stories of the community and the youth's experiences and creativity.

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Positive Future Vision about the Condition of Companies Working in the Field of Art

What we have mentioned that there is a retraction in freedom of expressions and maximization in the role of State's controlling authorities and the nonexistence of an authorized party to issue licenses to implement artistic and cultural activities and works even though the organizations have work activity licenses issued from Ministry of Culture or Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSAL). On the contrary, we see an unjustified interfere from MOPIC, the Political Security Agency and the National Security Agency that control and issue licenses to these works and activities.

This is considered a serious abuse and a confusing problem to the artistic organizations as they are being closed or forced to minimize their works. The Yemeni citizen never got used to such practices by the authorities except in the rare situations so of course they get shocked when they receive such prohibition, control or risk.

Final Recommendations

The ongoing war, siege, and conflict since March 2015 is not an excuse to any party of the conflict to violate an eternal right of the human rights while Yemen is one of the first countries to sign on the international declaration of human rights and its relevant agreements, conventions and recommendations.

We recommend discussing these recommendations and making a draft which contains all what is related to the policies of freedom of expression in the framework of artistic and cultural work and concluding with solutions to be presented to Ministry of Culture that include the following:

1. Establishing cinema policies as the cinema to be a creative industry, and houses of cinema in the field of art, culture and media.
2. Supporting cinema through youthful programs and activities and giving the chance to film producers of youth to develop the industry of cinema.
3. Increasing the freedom of expressions in making movies so that it assures that cinema would be a convenient place and a media device to exchange opinions, stories and cultural exchange.
4. Renewing and rebuilding closed cinemas in different provinces through creating investment opportunities in the field of cinema and changing the Yemeni community view towards cinema.
5. Enabling movie producers and especially youth to develop their skills in producing films with high standards
6. Establishing educational and training academies in film industry as well as creative and cinematic industries.