



7-4-2016

## The Path of Jihad in the Yacoubian Building

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### Recommended Citation

Gardaz, Michel (2016) "The Path of Jihad in the Yacoubian Building," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol13/iss1/4>

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## The Path of Jihad in the Yacoubian Building

### **Abstract**

The field of religion and film is growing steadily. Films are the most popular cultural productions in today's global world. In some cases, the Seventh Art is used to further the cause of religiopolitical ideologies. This article analyses the theme of Jihad in the film *Yacoubian Building* (2006): the most important Egyptian production to date. The film is based on the best-selling novel by Alaa Al-Aswany originally published in Arabic (2002). The film presents the Yacoubian Building (located downtown Cairo) as a moral microcosm of Egyptian society. In substance, the film is a harsh criticism of Egyptian society during Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The film describes the life of several tenants of the building among which is Taha El-Shazli. The character personifies how an average Egyptian becomes an Islamic fundamentalist and how he later became a martyr in the spirit of Jihad. Seen from this angle, the film serves the cause of Egyptian Islamic fundamentalist movements; it is a call to raise the people against President Hosni Mubarak's regime in order to establish an Islamic state based on Sharia.

## East of Cheops Pyramid

The "Orient" and the "East" were synonyms of exoticism in nineteenth century Europe. The breathtaking landscape of Cheops pyramid, the mythical country travelled by Herodotus, the Kasbahs and harems of North Africa, the wealthy caravansaries, and the unexplored deserts of the imagination, all attracted the visual artists of the Orientalist school, novelists, poets, adventurers and eventually ruthless colonisers. The "Oriental" woman occupied an important place on the canvases of painters such as Delacroix, Fromentin, and Gérôme.<sup>1</sup> The charms of the 'wide-eyed Houris,' the divine creature promised to the virtuous Muslims in *Qur'an* 56. 22-24 are the reminiscences of the literary portrayals of the voluptuous Scheherazade of the *Thousand and One Nights*. The warm sleepless nights in the harem of the sultan of Cairo stimulated the dreams of numerous Casanovas inhabiting the chilly European Catholic countries. Nothing could be compared with the Houris and the Giza pyramid complexes, not even the endless caravans of the Silk Road, the grandiose temples of Angkor Wat, the Kama-Sutra's sculpted stone figures of the Khajuharo group of monuments,<sup>2</sup> nor the "Cathay" of Marco Polo. China and the "chinoiseries" were trendy during the eighteenth century, but nothing came close to the European fascination for Egypt.

The expedition of Napoleon Bonaparte played an important role in the creation of the cultural movement called "Egyptomania."<sup>3</sup> Anchored in front of

Alexandria's port, artists of all breeds lavishly described in minute detail the 350 vessels of the fleet, the 40,000 troops and the names of the most brilliant minds of the time. The colonial ambitions of the "C onsul à vie" clashed in the end with those of Admiral Nelson. In spite of the final stampede, some of Egypt's treasures collected during the ephemeral colonization of the land of the Pharaohs would forever change our previous conception of ancient history. The decipherment of the Rosetta Stone by Champollion opened new horizons as the hieroglyphic inscriptions finally revealed their long-kept secrets. The Louvre - the world's first museum of Egyptology - welcomed the treasures gathered during Napoleon's expedition<sup>4</sup> and without computing the full extent of Dominique Vivant Denon's private collection (he was part of the same expedition of cultural spoliation) - six rooms of his Parisian mansion was full of treasure.<sup>5</sup> At last, the pyramids, the Sphinx, and countless mummies attracted writers and artists from all over Europe. The exotic representations created by them not only invaded the pages of novels and canvases of renowned visual artists, but they enflamed the imagination of blasé Europeans in search of adventure.

There is a significant correlation between the development of Orientalism and European colonialism.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, there is a narrow relation between the creation of the Orientalist school and the colonisation of North Africa and the Middle East. In fact, the Orientalist school was, to a large extent, 'marching in the

train of imperialism.<sup>7</sup> The case of Egypt is quite eloquent. Some postcolonial scholars of the early generation, however, would have us believe that all European artists and writers had the common intention of negatively depicting religious beliefs, customs and traditions of the "Orientals;" namely, by representing them as cruel, irrational, overly sexual, perverse and backward. This one-dimensional discourse is considered nowadays to be quite reductionistic. According to David Chidester, this kind of discourse belongs to the past: '[i]n more recent developments within postcolonial theory, however, attention has shifted away from the critique of European colonial representations of 'others' to a recovery of the subjectivity and agency of the colonized.'<sup>8</sup>

Scholars have to keep in mind that prior to the invention of the cinema, European representations of Egypt were essentially the work of writers and artists. In other words, they were the sole producers of Egyptian representations; they created our inner mental film of the land of the Nile. Seen from the imaginary metaphorical Eastern side of Cheops pyramid, we will see below that there is another side to the "Eastern" screen – the recovery of the voice of the so-called "colonized."

### **On the Other Side of the Screen**

Films are the most popular cultural production in today's global world. Hollywood is the Mecca of, not only the Western imagination, but the manufactured global imagination of humankind. Hollywood is the worldwide factory of images; it creates normative representations. There is an Egypt fashioned by Hollywood versus the one located on the maps of North Africa . From the 1932 classic *The Mummy* (staring the legendary Boris Karloff as Imhotep) to the relatively recent 2001 offering *The Mummy Returns* (starring Brendan Fraser as Rick O'Connell), Hollywood's representations of Egypt constructed a country quite different from the one we can experience when walking on the tarmac of Cairo's international airport. Hollywood's films are at the source of a new global mythology wherein the Indiana Jones of the movies has successively replaced Ulysses of *Homer's Odyssey* and the other heroes of classical literature.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, twenty-first century manufactured images are more powerful than textual narratives in many instances, particularly amongst the proverbial children-of-the-media.

On the other side of the screen, Egyptians have been producing films since the late 1920s, in fact, numerous movies were produced since the first silent films appeared. Cairo's film industry has become the Hollywood of the Middle East, while Egypt is the Arabic cultural powerhouse of the region (one Arab out of three is Egyptian). Actors such as Omar Sharif and film directors such as Youssef Chahine are internationally recognised figures in the industry.

Religion and film - a subfield of Religious Studies – has been steadily growing since the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> In order to convince oneself of the vitality of film studies, one need only consult the relatively young archive of *The Journal of Religion and Film*<sup>11</sup> to discover the major amount of work done in just the last few years. In the same spirit of this relatively young field of scholarship, the present article examines Islamic religious representations within the popular Egyptian film, *Yacoubian Building* (2006), particularly, the theme of Jihad. To date, the movie has had the biggest budget ever in Egyptian film history. It is also important to emphasize that the film is a mirror of Egypt, and not Hollywood's postcolonial construct of Egypt.

The film is based on the novel *The Yacoubian Building* by Alaa Al-Aswany,<sup>12</sup> which was published in Arabic in 2002 and translated into English in 2004. With more than 100,000 copies sold, it is a best-seller in Arabic speaking countries; and was subsequently voted the best novel by Egypt's Middle East Broadcasting Service. Its author is now the most read man in the country in addition to having his novel translated into more than a dozen different languages and turned into a TV series in 2007. On a more personal note, Aswany is the son of a prominent lawyer who trained as a dentist in Egypt and United States before opening his first dental clinic in the Yacoubian Building. His father also used to have an office in the same premises.

Seen from one angle, *Yacoubian Building* is serving a religious purpose, namely, the 7<sup>th</sup> art is used as a tool for politico-religious propaganda. Despite a traditional "happy ending," the film portrays what one may call the decadent values of contemporary Egyptian society. More particularly, the film shows how its protagonist Taha El-Shazli (Mohamed Imam) became a Jihadist. We witness his involvement with Islamic fundamentalists and his obsession to become a martyr ready to give his life for the sake of Allah's magnanimity. One could argue that the film serves the cause of Egyptian Islamic fundamentalist movements, that is, it is a silent call to raise the people against President Hosni Mubarak's regime and to establish an Islamic state based on Sharia. We would like to emphasise the fact that Aswany is a founding member of the opposition movement called Kefaya ("Enough" in Arabic: the Egyptian Movement for Change). Founded in 2003, this politico-religious movement (inclined toward the left with a moderate Islamist base) is opposed to the present government, and which is a key fact in understanding the author's criticism of contemporary Egyptian society.

### **From Text to Film**

The art deco style of the Yacoubian Building is a microcosm of Egyptian society. The main characters of the film described below are the embodiments of Egypt's main social, political and moral illnesses. Zaki El Dessouki (Adel Imam) is the son of an aristocrat and former minister. An engineer trained in Paris, he symbolizes



Egypt's past colonial heritage. He is portrayed in the film as a playboy who drinks heavily and spends his entire free time chasing woman. Zaki is the friend of two Christians from the Coptic minority. Both are described rather negatively in the film: Christine (Yousra) is a piano player and Zaki's former lover, while Fekry Abdel Shaheed (Youseff Daoud) is a corrupt lawyer. There are other Christians portrayed in the same manner, such as: Fanous (Ahmed Rateb), the butler of Zaki, and his brother Malaak (Ahmed Bedir). They both concocted an unscrupulous plan (by bribing Fekry and Bothayna, the future bride of Zaki and Taha El-Shazli's former childhood sweetheart) to acquire a shop on the Yacoubian Building rooftop. Bothayna (Hend Sabri) is an orphan shop assistant who is forced to perform sexual favours in order to help her family survive in Cairo's social jungle. By her marrying Zaki at the end of the film we have the traditional "happy ending."

Hatim Rachid (Khaled El Sawy) is the editor-in-chief of a French language newspaper. Breaking with the taboo of homosexuality within Egyptian cinema, his routine is to pick up young men and have sex with them. Abd Raboh (Bassem Samra) - a police soldier of modest origin - is one of his numerous victims. Haj Azzam (Nour El-Sherif) is a wealthy drug dealer. This former shoe shiner became the owner of several shops of the Yacoubian Building neighbourhood and the proprietor of a Japanese car dealership. In theory, he observes all Muslim rituals, but in practice, he uses his own mongrel interpretations of Islam for his daily

businesses. He smokes hashish on a regular basis, which is permitted by God according to him. He paid off a corrupt government official to secure his election to the Parliament, and bribed the same government official to ensure his silence regarding his illicit drug trade. In order to indulge in sexual fantasies, he secretly married Soad (Somaya El Khashab ), his second wife: a veiled widow who lost her husband during the first Gulf War. Azzam's scornful Imam grudgingly approved the secret wedding and gave his blessing. When pregnant, Soad was violently forced to have an abortion.<sup>13</sup>

Taha El-Shazli, the main character of this article, is the son of the Yacoubian's doorman, who since childhood dreamt of becoming a policeman. He is a very religious young man, very intelligent and a gifted student.<sup>14</sup> He daily implores the Compassionate and Merciful to help him succeed in his earnest endeavour. To reach his ultimate goal, he sleeps the bare minimum, devotes all of his available time (even his vacations) to physical training, and performs all kind of petty jobs to save money. He knows many would simply buy their way into the Police Academy, but he is too poor (and too honest) to bribe the proper officials. Because of his low social status, he was constantly humiliated by the residents of the building. Day after day, he swallowed his pride until finally the day of the Police Academy exam arrived. The jury was composed of three Generals, even though the exam was just a formality. Taha was well prepared and knew all of the questions

by heart.<sup>15</sup> Everything went well until one of the juror discovered that Taha's father was a doorman. His candidature was immediately rejected, his childhood dream shattered, and he was emotionally crushed by the experience. He later wrote to the President of the Republic to complain about the blatant injustice, but only received a letter informing him that no prejudices were committed by the respectable jury. His future career as policeman was now gone forever.

Because of his excellent grades, Taha was accepted at the prestigious Faculty of Political Sciences and Economy at Cairo University; however, his shabby-looking clothes betrayed his poverty. Again he was rejected, but this time by the upper class students, and so he continued trying to hide his humble condition. He soon discovered that university was a microcosm of society based on a rigid class system. One day in the local mosque, he was spotted by an Islamic fundamentalist student and eventually introduced to sheikh Muhammad Shaker, a militant member of the Jamaat al Islamiya . During a Friday prayer service, Taha attended a sermon on Jihad, given by sheikh Shaker that profoundly transformed him and his life's purpose. For practical reasons, we will be using the novel's narrative of the sermon to highlight the film discourse on Jihad:<sup>16</sup>

The true believer has no fear of death because he does not consider it the end of existence [...] G[J]ihad is a pillar of Islam, exactly like prayer and fasting. Indeed, g[j]ihad is the most important of those pillars but the corrupt rulers dedicated to the pursuit of more and the pleasures of the flesh who have ruled the Islamic world in times of decadence have attempted, with the

help of their hypocritical men of religion, to exclude g[j]ihad from the pillars of Islam, knowing that if people cleaved fast to g[j]ihad, it would in the end be turned against them and cost them their thrones. In this way, by eliminating g[j]ihad, Islam was robbed of its real meaning and our great religion was transformed into a collection of meaningless rituals that the Muslims performed like athletic exercises, mere physical movements without spiritual significance. When the Muslims abandoned g[j]ihad, they became slaves to this world, clinging to it, shy of death, cowards. Thus their enemies prevailed over them and God condemned them in defeat, backwardness, and poverty, because they had broken their trust with Him, the Almighty and Glorious. [...] My children, the task before Muslim youth today is to reclaim the concept of g[j]ihad and bring it back to the minds and hearts of the Muslims.<sup>17</sup>

Taha was soon recruited to the radical ranks of the Jamaat, and changed considerably in the process. Not only did he start growing a beard and wear Islamic clothes, but he quickly became intolerant toward those who were not as religious as he was. Bothayna (his childhood sweetheart) was not interested in his radical interpretation of Islam, Taha unsuccessfully tried to convert her to the right path.

During a protest against the first Gulf war (actually, a pretext to attack the government), Taha was severely beaten by the police and some of his friends died as martyrs. Arrested the same day in the middle of the night, he was later tortured and raped by a gang of policemen. To avenge himself, he decided to become a martyr, so he trained in a Jamaat terrorist camp for several months. Sheikh Shaker married him to a "virtuous" woman, and then one morning, the sheikh told him the news that Taha was ardently waiting for; the doorman's son was ecstatic. A few

hours later, he became a martyr while shooting at the police officer who ordered his rape.

In comparison with the novel, there are some minor omissions in the film such as the sequence where Taha was refused by the Police Academy and the storyline where Azzam implies that the bribes he gave went to the "big man," i.e. the President of the Republic. The reasons for omitting these scenes 'are probably due to the fact that film scripts, unlike novels, have first to be approved by the censorship office.' Screen dialogue was also added in which the homosexual editor attempted to convince the young naive policeman that their sexual relationship did not contravene any religious taboos.<sup>18</sup>

### **Under the Hijab**

The subtext of the film is Aswany's disguised criticism of moral decadence. Each of the main characters in the *Yacoubian Building* embodies the so-called wicked behaviours, religious flaws and other moral weaknesses of Egyptians. Zaki El Dessouki runs after women and gives sexual advice to his ignorant neighbours.<sup>19</sup> There are several scenes in the film where we see the main characters drinking alcohol.<sup>20</sup> Zaki also spent times with several Islamically incorrect Coptic acquaintances - his former pianist lover, the corrupt lawyer, and the brothers who tried to induce a young virgin Muslim woman into crime. In reality, there are major

tensions between the Coptic Christian minority and the Islamic fundamentalists in contemporary Egypt.<sup>21</sup>

Hatim Rachid's homosexuality probably provoked a commotion in the Film censorship bureau. The film seems to suggest that the "disease" of homosexuality is an epiphenomena of Egypt's modernization; it may have begun with Napoleon's colonial heritage. Homosexuality is believed to be foreign to Egyptian customs and traditions. Some radical Al-Azhar Imams accept as true that homosexuality is the consequence of "perverse" Western materialism; these same Imams even stated that homosexuals should be "put to death."<sup>22</sup> The film shows that those – even "good" Muslims – who transgress God's so-called sexual moral conventions will eventually be punished. Abd Raboh - the police soldier who was lured by Hatim to sleep with him – is convinced that he lost his only child because of his "unforgivable" sin. At the end of the film, Hatim was murdered in his own bed by a thief (the instrument of God?) that he had picked up from the street.<sup>23</sup> In the moral eyes of the Egyptian censorship bureau and those of Islamic fundamentalists, Divine justice had been rendered.

In general, within the film, what is associated with the West is necessarily "corrupted." Western ideologies such as secularisation, human rights, globalisation, are all Islamically incorrect. Likewise, all Western cultural productions are judged

"pornographic." Egypt's moral decadence seems to be the direct effect of the Westernization of society.

In the film, there are two categories of women. The first are those who were corrupted by the West, like the Coptic Christine who sings French songs at the piano while drinking wine, and Bothayna who refuses to follow Taha's principles of Islam. The second category is the "virtuous" women who proudly wear the hijab. For example, Soad is the second wife of the felon Azzam who lost her first husband during the unholy Gulf War in which Arab soldiers were fighting other Arabs, instead of combating "America" and "Israel." Taha's veiled wife, who lost her first husband as a martyr, is another good example of female Islamic integrity. In these two virtuous cases, we are very far away from the voluptuous Scheherazade of the *Thousand and One Nights* portrayed by nineteenth century European artists. In the collective Islamic fundamentalist's imagination of contemporary Egypt, women must wear the hijab; the emblematic garment against modernity and the Westernisation of values. In short, jeans embody modernity and the hijab embodies religious piety. Similarly, women who appear in TV soap operas now wear the hijab, and in real world homes, virtuous women are entrusted to do the same<sup>24</sup> because Egyptian TV stars are like Hollywood film stars, they are role models to be followed. Islamic fundamentalists are angrily battling whoever tries to corrupt

the morals of Egyptian women alongside the general gender discourse of Egyptian Islamist women.<sup>25</sup>

At last, the doorman's son of the Yacoubian Building is the sacrificial lamb of the film. Like many poor Egyptians in the real world,<sup>26</sup> Taha experiences the intense humiliation caused by pauperization. Readers also have to keep in mind that Egypt is the most populated country of the Middle East and the second-most populated of the African continent, which is considered by many to be a "demographic time bomb."<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the film, Taha was constantly reminded of his lowly social status. He experienced several injustices that finally lead him to become a Jihadist, notably, his refusal to enter the Police Academy, his arrest, torture and rape by policemen that left him inhabited by hatred. He wanted to avenge himself for such cruelty and sought justice for himself and all Muslims. But he could not find justice except in the noble cause of Jihad and so yearned to leave the world of injustices to be close to Allah via dead. Sheikh Muhammad Shaker's sermon on Jihad showed him the path of Divine justice, the path to embrace to radically transform Muslim societies; to be rid of those who rape their brothers and sisters in the name of democracy and modernisation. According to the sheikh, Jihad is the most important pillar of Islam, in contradistinction with the traditional five pillars. Like Taha's character, true believers should not fear death, because it is not the end of existence.



From the religious viewpoint of the sheikh, there are two main reasons why Egyptians live in "backwardness." Firstly, because the current corrupted regime has played down the fundamentals of Jihad, and secondly, because Muslims "had broken their trust with Him" - i.e., not following the principles of Sharia. The following section will briefly look at the other side of the mirror of fiction - the harsh Egyptian reality beyond the veil of the Yacoubian Building.

### **The Prophecy of the Mummies**

The Islamist expansionist era began after the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. The Islamist movements recruited their supporters (like Taha) not only from the poor urban areas, but in every single social class.<sup>28</sup> Islamism is a politico-religious ideology that spread swiftly from the slums of Algeria to those of Indonesia. The Islamic fundamentalists are those who are trying to Islamise all aspects of contemporary Muslim societies. In order to succeed, some zealous militants are preaching violence (Jihad) whereas others advocate non-violent solutions.<sup>29</sup> For those who preach the first option, Jihad is the sword of Islam;<sup>30</sup> although there are different points of view concerning this controversial concept.<sup>31</sup> Jihadists are promising to re-establish justice according to their own idealised version of Sharia (i.e., Islamic religious law based upon their idiosyncratic hermeneutic of sacred texts), however, the voices of those who preach the second (non-violence) option are seldom heard in the media.

In Egypt, the powerful Society of the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>32</sup> created by Hasan al-Banna in 1928 is quite active on the contemporary political scene. Over the years, and along with all of his branches in Muslim countries, it became the world's largest Islamist organisation.<sup>33</sup> During the 2005 Presidential election, the MB won 88 out of 444 parliament seats. Their surprise victory had the equivalent effect of a bomb in Egyptian political life.<sup>34</sup> The MB is the second most important political organisation in Egypt. In fact, it has a shining future considering that the next "free" election could mean the end of the present political regime. The next election most probably will not be based on a vote of religious convictions (like the previous one), but on a vote of frustration. It is the votes of frustration that pushes the masses into the arms of the MB. Endemic unemployment, social injustice, widespread corruption, the daily bafflement of human rights, and the despair caused by the grim prospects of worsening social conditions are some of the reasons why the masses have and will vote for the MB in the near future.

Mohamed Mahdi Akef is the seventh supreme guide of the MB. He claims, like some of Aswany's characters, that Egyptians are living in a "despotic state."<sup>35</sup> He denounces the injustices of the regime, its tyranny, and rampant corruption. Several MB leaders are presently detained; some were arrested "with or without charges."<sup>36</sup> The main objective of Mohamed Mahdi Akef is "to bring up our children on the right path."<sup>37</sup> In the words of the supreme guide, "[we] are present

everywhere, in tens of thousands, and nothing will stop us from pursuing our goals and our plans.<sup>38</sup> We could argue that the MB objectives are not crystal clear.<sup>39</sup> What exactly are the MB's real objectives? Are they dreaming of restoring the caliphate? Do they want to establish a theocratic state in Egypt ? On the other hand, are they preaching "an Islamic method" that will eventually revolutionise Egyptian society? Unfortunately, this method is not described in minute details, but its centre of gravity seems to reside in morality. The praxis is quite simple: with the implementation of Sharia, and other teachings of the *Qur'an*, Egyptians will all turn into virtuous peoples. Thereafter, Egypt will miraculously restore her might of ancient times. Seen from a certain angle, the same principle (Maât) was used by the Pharaohs of the past. Nowadays, the plagues of modern Egypt are caused by the same moral disorders that destroyed the great civilisation visited by Herodotus and conquered by Napoleon. This time Egypt was punished by Allah for not following the moral codes bestowed upon humankind.<sup>40</sup>

Some believe that it is only with the sword of Jihad that justice could be established. This is the point of view of the Jamaat al Islamiya ; the Jihadist organisation that Taha joined in order to become a martyr. In the film, sheikh Muhammad Shaker belongs to that same organisation. We should emphasise that Aswany's novel clearly identified this extremist group, but not in the film rendition. Initially, the Jamaat was a university student association that shared many

objectives with the MB with Omar Abdel-Rahman (a blind Imam) becoming the spiritual leader of the movement. In 1993, he was accused of planning the World Trade Center bombings, and since 1995, he is serving a life sentence imprisoned in the United States for conspiring to commit terrorist acts. Indeed, the Jamaat was closely associated with violence since its beginnings. Some of their militants / sympathisers seem to have been involved with the Anwar Sadat assassination in 1981, the murder of prominent intellectuals (such as Farag Foda), and the attempt on the life of Naguib Mahfouz<sup>41</sup> in 1994. In 1995, the Jamaat tried to kill President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia, whilst the death of 67 persons at the magnificent Temple of Hatshepsut near Luxor in 1997 was the epitome of Jamaat violence. This terrorist attack on harmless vacationers devastated the Egyptian tourist industry (i.e., the economy) for several years.<sup>42</sup>

In 2003, the year following the publication of Alaa Al-Aswany's novel, the Jamaat renounced using the sword of Jihad. Seen from one angle, one might argue that the Yacoubian Building serves the cause of Islamic fundamentalists in general, and of Jihadists in particular. The film subtly sermonises its spectators by arguing that Taha's sacrificial path is the right one. The average Egyptian viewers could probably identify with his quest for justice. We might also add that the son of the Yacoubian Building doorman is now part of what we call the Jihadists literary mythology of martyrdom. Seen from another angle, the subtext of the film seems

to plead for an Islamic revolution; the masses should rise against injustices, endemic corruption, unemployment, and a lack of moral guidance. Is the film a façade for Aswany's religio-political agenda? Is he really supporting Jamaat 's ideology or is it only fiction?

Let us not forget that he is one of the founders of Kefaya founded in the same year that the Jamaat stopped using violence to further its politico-religious ambitions. Kefaya, apparently a non-violent movement, is fiercely opposed to President Hosni Mubarak regime. We should also stress that the film does not offer any other remedies for Egypt's present dreadful socio-economical situation, apart from the Jihadist solution to the problem. It argues in favour of the "Islamic method" - i.e., the one reminiscent of the MB; Western alternatives such as democracy, neoliberalism, communism and so forth, seems to be Islamically incorrect. At the end of the day, we could probably say that the Egyptians are sound asleep in an endless Arabian nightmare; they are not hearing the Houris enchanting voices preaching the virtues of Jihad. Muslims seem to be deaf to the prophecy of the mummies; the one that prophesises that Jihad will resuscitate all of Egypt's preserved corpses and bring down the "corrupted" regime of President Hosni Mubarak.

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<sup>1</sup> Peltre, Christine. 1995. *L'Atelier du voyage: Les peintres en Orient au XIXe siècle*. Gallimard, Paris; Thornton, Lynne. 1994. *La Femme dans la peinture orientaliste*. ACR Edition, Paris.

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- <sup>2</sup> Gardaz, Michel. 2005. La Bayadère, le gymnosophe et le tigre: L'orientalisme français et l'exotisme indien au dix-neuvième siècle. *Religiologiques* 31: 1 73-88.
- <sup>3</sup> Meyerson, Daniel. 2004. *Linguist and the Emperor: Napoleon and Champollion's Quest to Decipher the Rosetta Stone*. Ballantine, New York.
- <sup>4</sup> Gardaz, Michel. 2000. The Age of Discoveries and Patriotism: James Darmesteter's Assessment of French Orientalism. *Religion* 30: 353-65.
- <sup>5</sup> Haskell, Francis. 1986 *La Norme et le caprice*. Flammarion, Paris; Haskell, Francis. 1989 *De l'art et du goût: jadis et naguère*. Gallimard, Paris.
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- <sup>7</sup> Macfie, Alexander. L. 2002. *Orientalism*. Longman, London, 59; see also Kenedy, Dane. 2003. Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory. In *The Decolonization Reader*, edited by James D. Le Sueur, 10-22. Routledge, London.
- <sup>8</sup> Chidester, David. 2000. Colonialism. In *Guide to the Study of Religion*, edited by Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, Cassell, New York, 432.
- <sup>9</sup> Ferrell, William K. 2000. *Literature and Film as Modern Mythology*. Praeger, Esport, CT; Lyden, John. 2003. *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals*. NYU Press; Plate, S. Brent. 2003. *Representing Religion in World Cinema: Filmmaking, Mythmaking, Culture Making*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York .
- <sup>10</sup> Flesher, Paul V. M., and Robert. Torry. 2007. *Film & Religion: An Introduction*. Abingdon Press, Nashville; Plate, S. Brent. 2005. Film and Religion. *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Lindsay Jones, Vol. 5: 3097-103. Macmillan, Detroit.
- <sup>11</sup> Check out <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/>.
- <sup>12</sup> Alaa Al Aswany was born in 1957.
- <sup>13</sup> This is considered an Islamic sin, but not according to Azzam's opportunist perspective.
- <sup>14</sup> Even the parents of some of the residents were envious of his intellectual abilities.
- <sup>15</sup> They were always the same; and the policeman of his neighbourhood gave him the correct answers beforehand.

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- <sup>16</sup> There are only trivial differences between the novel's narrative and the one of the film.
- <sup>17</sup> Aswany, Alaa Al. 2004. *The Yacoubian Building*. Translated from the Arabic by Humphrey Davies. American University of Cairo, Cairo, 94-5.
- <sup>18</sup> Mustafa, H. 2006. Novel Drama. *Al-Ahram Weekly* (29 June – 5 July), 15.
- <sup>19</sup> Sexual ignorance is bliss according to prudish Islamic fundamentalists.
- <sup>20</sup> This is a prohibited behaviour, *Qur'an* 2. 219- *Qur'an* • Le Coran . Traduction Jacques Berque. Sindbad, Paris. exégétique.
- <sup>21</sup> Masson, Jacques. 2006. Les Coptes aujourd'hui. *Géopolitique* 92 (December-February): 31-39.
- <sup>22</sup> Gardaz, Michel. 2005. La violence, la modernité et les intellectuels musulmans. *Religiologiques* 31, 49
- <sup>23</sup> In the novel, he was murdered by his former lover.
- <sup>24</sup> Rizq, Hamdi. 2006. Le voile est tombé sur les séries égyptiennes. *Courrier International* 832 (12-18 October), 70.
- <sup>25</sup> Marcotte, Roxanne D. 2005. Identity, Power, and the Islamist Discourse on Women: An Exploration of Islamism and Gender Issues in Egypt. In *Islam in World Politics*, edited by Nelly Lahoud and Anthony A. H. Johns, 67-92. Routledge, London and Marcotte, Roxanne D. 2006. What Might an Islamist Gender Discourse Look Like? *Australian Religion Studies Review* 19(2): 141-67.
- <sup>26</sup> Forty percent of the population earns less than \$2 a day, and 30 percent are still illiterate - see Buccianti, Alexandre. 2006 Démographie: Une bombe à retardement? *Géopolitique* 92 (December-February), 14.
- <sup>27</sup> Nolan, Marcus, and Howard, Pack. 2004. Islam, Globalization, and Economic Performance in the Middle East. *International Economics Policy Briefs* . June: 1-8, 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Kepel, Gilles. 2000. *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l'islamisme* . Gallimard, Paris. 17.
- <sup>29</sup> Sfeir, Antoine. 2002 *Dictionnaire mondial de l'islamisme*. Plon, Paris, i-ii.
- <sup>30</sup> *Qur'an* • *Le Coran* . Traduction Jacques Berque. Sindbad, Paris. exégétique, 22.39 and 25.52.
- <sup>31</sup> Bonner, M. D. 2006. *Jihad in Islamic History*. Princeton University Press, Princeton ; Crow, Karim D. 2005. *Jihad: Peaceful-Striving & Combative Struggle*. Editions CCD, Kuala Lumpur; Gerges, Fawaz A. 2006. *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; Lamchichi, Abderrahim. 2006. *Jihad: un concept polysémique*. Harmattan, Paris;

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<sup>32</sup> AKA: The Society of the Muslim Brothers, The Muslim Brothers, the Brotherhood, or MB.

<sup>33</sup> Faksh, Mahmud A. 1997. *The Future of Islam in the Middle-East: Fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia*. Praeger, London, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Gardaz, Michel. 2007. Au pays des pharaons, les Frères musulmans seront-ils rois? Argument: Politique, Société et Histoire 9(2), 207-14.

<sup>35</sup> Howeidy, Amira. 2006. Worried About the Future" Al-Ahram Weekly, (21-27 September), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Howeidy, Amira. 2006. Worried About the Future" Al-Ahram Weekly, (21-27 September), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Howeidy, Amira. 2006. Worried About the Future" Al-Ahram Weekly, (21-27 September), 4.

<sup>38</sup> Howeidy, Amira. 2006 Worried About the Future" Al-Ahram Weekly, (21-27 September),: 4.

<sup>39</sup> See the official English website at <http://www.ikhwanweb.com>.

<sup>40</sup> This is described in the Qur'an, Hadiths, and Sunnah.

<sup>41</sup> He is the Egyptian Nobel prize winner.

<sup>42</sup> Sfeir, Antoine. 2002. Dictionnaire mondial de l'islamisme . Plon, Paris, 20.

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