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Hollywood Fantasies vs Native Realities: The Orient in Stephen Sommers' *The Mummy* (1999) and *The Yacoubian Building* (2002) by Alaa Al Aswany

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Content

Abstract

This research explores the representation of Egypt in Stephen Sommers' film*The Mummy* (1999) and Alaa Al Aswany'snovel *The Yacoubian Building* (2002). It argues that these works present two opposing lenses: Hollywood fantasy and Egyptian socio-political realism, through which Egypt is imagined and constructed. Drawing primarily on Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* (1978), the research examines how *The Mummy* perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes that reduce Egypt to a static, exotic backdrop and its people to voiceless figures serving Western adventure narratives. In contrast, *The Yacoubian Building* offers a nuanced, insider perspective that dismantles such essentialist portrayals, portraying Egypt as a dynamic, diverse society grappling with modern challenges. The findings indicate that Orientalism remains a powerful force in shaping Western media representations, evolving with new cinematic forms while maintaining colonial-era assumptions. Furthermore, the research shows that Hollywood operates not merely as entertainment but as a vehicle of cultural dominance. The work concludes that resisting Orientalist narratives requires the promotion of authentic Eastern voices and cultural expressions that reflect the complexity of their societies and challenge reductive Western portrayals.

Key words: Stephen Sommers, The *Mummy*, Alaa Al Aswany, *The Yacoubian Building*,

Hollywood Fantasies, Egyptian realities, Edward Said, *Orientlism.*

I. General Introduction

The East has long been the subject of discrimination and misrepresentation in Western Medias, vilifying its people through persistent Orientalist stereotypes. These stereotypes have been deeply ingrained through various artistic forms, such as paintings, and travel writings…etc. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these representations were disseminated through cinema, particularly Hollywood. This dominant global industry has played a crucial role in perpetuating Western fantasies about the East. Egypt in particular, with its geographical location, and its rich ancient history, has "provided an exotic setting for a wide range of narratives" (Smith 2007, p. 16). Hollywood has thus depicted Egypt not as a land of living realities, but as a fantastical relic of exoticism by emphasizing its "strangeness" and its difference from the West, timelessness existing outside the flow of history, and Pharaonic past by focusing on ancient curses, pharaohs, and Mummies.

This is exemplified in the Hollywood film *The Mummy (1999)* which"persists in the use of Orientalism's recognizable elements" (Arti 2007, p. 16) such as exoticism, backwardness, and Villain Arabs, creating "a dichotomy between the civilized West and the backward orient" (ibid). Despite its overall simple plot centered on the mummy's resurrection, the film's contrasting depiction of Westerners and Egyptians is anything but simple. Instead, it perpetuates and reenacts 18th and 19th century stereotypes enmeshed with new emerging clichés that align with geopolitical shifts occurring around the film's release. This portrayal not only vilifies Arabs but also functions as a political tool that reinforces Western dominance and justifies contemporary interventions in the Middle East

Outside the confinement of Orientalist clichés, there exists a version of Egypt that is deeply embedded in its socio-political realities and the grappling of its people. Egyptian

literature captures this rawness and authenticity by creating fictional world that, while imagined, is not far removed from lived realities. This reflects a literary convention where Egyptian authors do not aim to document reality. Instead, they create "a world that structurally resembles the social context under which the literary work is written" (Istanbulli 2010, p. 06).

Alaa Al Aswany exemplifies this literary convention in *The Yacoubian Building* (2002), which represents a vivid portrayal of contemporary Egyptian society through the intertwined lives of diverse characters residing in the same building. The novel mirrors the social and political realities of its time by embedding complex issues, such as corruption, class tensions, political repression, and martyrdom, within the personal narratives of its characters. It portrays these issues not as inherent traits of the East but as the outcome of colonialism and globalization. By doing so, Al Aswany complicates the reductive and stereotypical representations of Egypt in Western media, offering instead an authentic depiction of the country's social structure.

a. Review of Literature

The Mummy and *The Yacoubian Building* have been the subject of literary criticism, each of these works has been analyzed independently through different theoretical perspectives. *The Mummy (1999)* the first work that will be examined in the upcoming chapter has been examined through Orientalist perspective. In his book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People(2001),* Jack Shaheen analyzes the portrayal of Arabs and Muslim in over 1000 American films from (1896 to 2000) including*The Mummy (1999*). He argues that *TheMummy (1999)* is repeating and documenting every classical stereotypical portrait of Arabs and Muslims that were embodied in Orietalist work. The Egyptian is portrayed as "one dimensional caricature, cartoon cutouts' used "as stock villains and as a comic relief…their

only purpose being to deliver cheap laughs". He further argues that Mummy plots tend to focus on the mystical aspects of Egypt's past ignoring the contemporary realities and the complexities of the culture.

Muzna Amina (2020) examines the historical accuracies and racist tendencies targeting Egyptian characters in her work *Racism and Historical Inaccuracy; a Cultural Analysis of The Mummy (1999)*. She acknowledges that the film incorporates some historical facts about Egypt's past; however, she argues that "despite the historical accuracy, the film does not accurately represent the people of Egypt"(p. 03) in fact the Egyptian "are given stereotypical portrayals which represent the casual racism of the creators" (ibid)Muzna further analyzes the film's narrative through the lens of media theory, distinguishing between the denotative and connotative meanings of the text. At the denotativelevel the movie can be understood as a historical fiction adventure. However, at a deeper connotative level the film perpetuates themes such as the "white adventurers as heroes and saviors of the world with local characters being either props, or stereotypical roles played for laughs" (p. 05). To resist this stereotypical depiction Muzna insists on the importance of "media Literacy" that will allow consumers of the movie to indentify the connotative meaning embedded within the narrative. While this approach of media literacy that Muznasuggests can be effective in movies, it is still not enough to resist the Western stereotypical depictions of the Orient as it does not offer an alternative to replace them in their minds.

*The Yacoubian Building*on the other hand,has been analyzed from different perspectives. Rashad Al Arequi (2008) analyses the novel from a cultural and socio-political perspective, focusing on how the novel portrays human relationships within contemporary Egyptian society. He argues that traditional Islamic and cultural values are eroding due to western influence that "attempts to distort and hybridize the Eastern culture" which results in the alienation of individuals in Egypt. He explores this alienation through the character of

Zaki whose cosmopolitan identity conflicts with local norms that he sees as “an obstacle to satisfy [his] social and sexual desires” (p. 69). Al Areqi further explores class division depicted in the novel, emphasizing how the lower class endures systemic “human rights violation and sexual exploitation”. He underscores the role of the community in shaping individuals, stating that the “community can create either the good citizen or the bad one”. This insight invites an expansion of analysis to include not only communal influences but also the influence of socio-political shifts in Egypt on the characters actions and decision making.

Michel Gardaz’s*The Path of Jihad in The Yacoubian Building (2009)* is another insightful analysis of the novel that hones on the character of Taha El-Shazli to explore the path of Jihad within contemporary Egyptian society. He highlights that the radicalism of youth in Egypt is a product of social exclusion and political oppression; he exemplifies this process through the life arc of Taha El-Shazli. He underscores that Taha’s radicalism is put in motion by systemic failures: his socio-economic marginalization, followed later by “the several injustices that finally lead him to become a Jihadist” (p. 15)from his refusal to enter the police, his arrest, and then the torture and rape “that left him inhabited by hatred” (ibid) which lead him to seek revenge and justice “through the noble cause of Jihad” (ibid).through Taha’s transformation to a Jihadist and the sympathyportrayal Al Aswany gives him, Gardaz argues that the novel can be seen as serving the cause of Islamic fundamentalists in general therefore the novel functions as a form of politico-religious propaganda that critiques the corrupt regime of Mubarek and implicitly calls for an Islamic revolution based on Sharia law (p. 06).

AyobamiOnanuga’s (2022) feminist analysis of *The Yacoubian Building*, employing Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical framework on agency, focuses on the ways women assert themselves within the novel’s patriarchal context. She highlights that despite apparent male domination in Egyptian society, the female characters find means to assert influence through

their sexual relationships with their husbands. Onanuga argues that "the sexual relations with their husbands for these women is their way of affirming that they are essentially needed in, and integral to, the lives of their husbands" (p. 98). It is within this intimate space that these women discover their voice, where "they can exercise and assert their power." While her analysis offers valuable insight into women's sexual autonomy under patriarchy, the use of Bourdieu's framework, developed in a liberal Western context, may not fully capture the complexities of self-determination in more conservative cultural settings like Egypt. Consequently, this approach tends to overlook other significant modes of empowerment portrayed in the novel. Onanuga's insight would benefit from a more culturally nuanced perspective that acknowledges the diverse forms of influence the women wield and how Egypt's socio-political structures shape these expressions of power.

b.Issue and Working hypotheses

From the above review of literature, it is clear that despite the significant researches conducted on both *The Mummy (1999)* and *The Yacoubian Building (2002),* no study has explicitly positioned Egyptian or any other Eastern literature as a direct counter-narrative that challenges and resists Hollywood's Orientalist fantasies and stereotypical depiction of the East. Further, these works have been largely analyzed separately, with no comparative study exploring how *The Yacoubian Building* functions to subvert Orientalist images perpetuated by films such as *The Mummy.*

To address this gap, the research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of *The Mummy (1999)* and *The Yacoubian Building (2002).* The study intends to engage the two works in a literary dialogue to uncover how Egypt is depicted in both works. First, *The Mummy (1999)*will be analyzed through an Orientalist theoretical framework in order to identify the stereotypes embedded within the film's narrative and the rationale behind such

depictions. These stereotypes will be countered then through a closer reading of Al Aswany's novel *The Yacoubian Building (2002).* In order to facilitate this analysis, the study will incorporate additional sub-theories that are developed by Egyptian scholars to support the main purpose of this research.

c.Methodological Outline

It is important to stress the fact that this research does not follow the classical methodological outline of a comparative analysis, which typically compares works side-by-side within the same chapter by analyzing common themes. Instead, it adopts a two-chapter approach in which each work is analyzed separately. Despite the separation, the analyses remain interconnected through dialogic engagement, with themes weaving back and forth as the second work respond to and critiques the first. This structure is in no way accidental but intentional and purposeful serving the research's main aim.

Adopting the classical comparative outline would have limited the scope of this research, constraining it to predefined themes, and restricting the ability to explore the works more broadly. By dealing with the two works separately, this study is able to not only engage with the representations embedded in *The Mummy,* but also to use the film as an entry point to explore a boarder range of Orientalist representations that extend beyond its narrative. It also allowes for a critical engagement with previous researches on *The Yacoubian Building* (2002). Moreover, this method enables the identification of additional forms of Orientalism beyond those depicted in the screen of *The Mummy* (1999), including how Orientalism is asserted through feminist discourses. It also enables the integration of boarder historical events surrounding both works, such as the American geopolitical shifts which have greatly influenced the depiction of Muslims on screen revealing the covert agenda of Hollywood industry. The internal socio-political transformations in Egypt reflected in The

YacoubianBuilding, highlight how these transformations continuously shape Egyptian lives and cultural production.

Having established the rationale for adopting a two-chapter methodological outline this following paragraph transitions to the divisional outline of this thesis. The study is organized into two main chapters addressing Western depiction of Egypt as well as the strategic dismantling of the latter in Egyptian literature. The first chapter is devoted to the analysis of *The Mummy (1999*), focusing on the persistent Orientalist stereotypes embedded within the film. Drawing on Edward Said's theory Orientalism (1978), this chapter systematically identifies the recurring motifs and narrative strategies that construct Egypt as an exotic, mysterious, and as the threatening "Other" in Western imagination. It further expands the analysis to include the boarder historical context surrounding the movie's release, examining the geopolitical shifts and Western social changes have shaped the representation of Orientals in Hollywood's movies.

The second chapter shifts the focus to *The Yacoubian Building (2002*), employing a close reading of the novel through Egyptian theoretical frameworks to offer a critical response to the Orientalist images identified in the first chapter and also to the other forms of Orientalism discovered while conducting the research. Additionally, this chapter weaves significant historical events and socio-political transformations surrounding the novel's context, highlighting how these factors cannot be separated from the culture and its people.

II. Methods and Materials

A. Methods

To conduct the research effectively, this dissertation relies heavily on the theoretical framework of *Orientalism* by Edward Said. The selection of this theory is not accidental but

aligns with the nature and aim of this research. *Orientalism* not only inspired the initial idea behind this study but also provides a concrete framework that helps to understand how the West constructs and perpetuates cultural clichés about the East. It provides the essential tools to analyze*The Mummy* (1999) thoroughly and identify the stereotypes woven into its story. Moreover, it paves the way for a broader reading that goes beyond the simplistic spotting of stereotypes to include the geopolitical forces shaping these portrayals, thereby exposing Hollywood not merely as an industry of entertainment but as a powerful tool for Western political interests.

While *Orientalism*is not directly used or cited as an analytic tool in *The Yacoubian Building* (2002), it remains crucial in shaping the critique. The stereotypes highlighted by Said's work are brought to the forefront through the examination of *The Mummy* and are then strategically countered in Al Aswany's novel. To effectively resist these reductive images, this research integrates additional sub-theories, specifically, theories developed by Egyptian scholars or rooted in Egypt's particular cultural, social, and political context. These include SabaMahmood's theory of Agency (2006), SamiaMehrez's theory of Space (2010), and AmalKabesh's theory on Postcolonial Egyptian Masculinities (2013). These additional frameworks are progressively integrated into the second chapter and explained in parallel with the analysis.

Since Said's theory of *Orientalism* is central to this research, it is important to provide a brief overview of his work and introduce some key terms. *Orientalism* (1978) is one of the most influential works that laid the foundation for many postcolonial studies and critical theories, especially those that aim to advance comparative literature focusing primarily on the Middle East. Said's work made it possible to critically examine and expose Western discourse across various forms of media, including literature, travel writing, and other cultural

productions, revealing how such representations serve to construct and maintain power relations between the West and the East.

A.1-Orientalism

Edward Said, in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), presents three key definitions of the concept.First, Orientalism can be understood as an academic discipline in which the Orient, its culture, language, and history, is the object of analysis and scrutiny conducted by Western scholars. These scholars are known as Orientalists. Said defines an Orientalist as "anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient… is an Orientalist and what he or she does is Orientalism" (1978, p. 9).

Second, Orientalism is "a way of thinking based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'The Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (1978, p. 2). In other words, it is a mode of thought based on a binary division between East and West, where the East is representedas fundamentally different from, and inferior to, the West. This binary relegates the East to the margins of subordination.

Third, Orientalism functions as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (1978, p. 3). This domination is made possible through the stereotypical depiction of the Orient as inferior, timeless, exotic, and savage. These images are produced and reinforced through various forms of cultural knowledge that naturalize and generalize such representations, thereby justifying Western political and cultural control over the East.

A.1.a. Otherness

According to Edward Said, the concept of “Otherness” is a concept of Orientalism thatrefers to the process through which the West constructs the East, the “Orient”, as fundamentally different and inferior. Through this process, the West defines itself in opposition to the East: if the East is portrayed as irrational, backward, and exotic, then the West positions itself as rational, progressive, and superior. This dichotomy enables the West to reinforce its own identity by projecting a distorted and imagined image of the Orient, one that is disconnected from the lived realities of Eastern peoples.

The act of “Othering” creates a binary division between the “Self” (the West) and the “Other” (the East). This division serves broader political and ideological purposes. By depicting the East as mysterious, backward, or uncivilized, the West legitimizes its intervention, domination, and control over Eastern societies. These distorted representations become powerful tools that facilitate colonial and imperial ambitions by framing the Orient as a region in need of Western guidance, governance, and “civilizing.” Through this process, the West maintains unequal power relations and justifies its continued influence over the East.

B. Materials

B.1- Biography of Stephen Sommers

Stephen Sommers is an American director, screen writer, and producer. He is mostly known for his adventure and actions films, and particularly recognized for writing and directing high-budget films, including;*The Adventure of Huck Finn*, and *The Jungle Book*(1994*),The Mummy* (1999), and*Van Helsing* (2004), His distinct filmmaking style such as his combination of witty dialogue with fast-paced action, make him stand out as a remarkable screen writer. Most importantly his movies such as *The Mummy (1999)* in

particular tend to feature adventurous plots, a sense of humor, and a nostalgic nod to classic Hollywood adventure and monster movies.

B.2- biography of Alaa Al Aswany

Alaa Al Aswany is an Egyptian author widely known not only for his best-selling novels but also for his outright criticism of the Egyptian government, especially under Hosni Mubarek's regime. In an interview with the Cairo Review Al Aswany explains how he took his dissatisfaction of the government, beyond his literary works, into active political engagement stating "I participated in many demonstrations…I joined the revolution on January 25. I had once written that if we have five hundred thousand protests in Cairo, the regime will fall. I found myself with one million People" (Al Aswany, 2011). He is a founding member of the opposition movement Kefaya, which called for democratic reforms and free elections in Egypt (N. Oweidat, C. Bernard, D. Stahl. 2008). Moreover, he actively participated in the 2011 Arab spring protests that eventually led to Mubarak's resignation (Joseph Hincks. 2014). Heis notably known for his raw depiction of everyday life in Egypt, highlighting the struggles of ordinary people under an authoritarian regime. This is often expressedthrough a fragmented, non-linear structure that interweaves multiple characters' perspectives, offering a nuanced view of Egypt. Thisnarrative style not only reflects the complexity of the Egypt's social structure but, as Hafez explains, createsambiguities and gaps that readers are invited to fill, an effect partly shaped by the political censorship prevalent in Egypt(2010, p. 69)

B.3- Synopsis of The Mummy

The Mummy (1999) is an action-adventure film set in the 1920s Egypt. the story follows Rick O'Connell who joinsa librarian Evelyn and her brother Jonathan in a quest to uncover the lost City of the Dead. Their expedition awakens the Mummy Imohteb, who

brings havoc over Egypt for the sole purpose of resurrecting his lover Ack-Su-Namun. The three adventurers are the only ones that can stop Imohteb and save Egypt from the unleashed curse. While the movie's plot may seem straightforward and rather simple, it combines elements of horror, mythology, humor, and high paced actions with Orientalist stereotypes within a guise of fantasy and humor. This combination of elements and the setting of the narrative make*The Mummy* a compelling work for analysis to explore how Western cinema construct and imagine Egypt.

B.4- Synopsis of *TheYacoubian Building*

The Yacoubian Building set in 1990s Cairo, explores the lives of residents in the cosmopolitan building of Yacoubian. The story follows a myriad of characters in the building from different class status,ZakiBey is a wealthy aristocrat grappling with the decline of his social status. HaggHazzam, a corrupt aspiring politician, exploits his ill-gotten wealth to manipulate and oppress the lower classes while cheating his way into elections. Taha El Shazeli, whose dreams are shattered by systemic social injustices, ultimately turns to radicalism. Busayna, a poor but beautiful young woman, makes daily compromises to ensure her family's survival. Souad, another impoverished woman, consents to a polygamous marriage as a means to secure her son's future. Through these fragmented yet interconnected stories, the novel exposes themes of corruption, unequal class division, social marginalization, and repression in contemporary Egyptian society. This narrative provides a rich foundation for examining the complex socio-political changes and how the characters navigate their lives in a society in constant change.

III. Results

This section of our work presents the key findings established after a thorough reading of *The Mummy (1999)* and *The Yacoubian Building (2002)*. This research has attempted to answer our issue, which is examining how Egypt is depicted in the two selected cultural texts. In order to do so, we have relied on Edward Said's theoretical framework *Orientalism* that has been employed in the reading of *The Mummy* (1999) which enabled us to reach three major conclusions.

The research has revealed that Orientalism is not a product of the past but persists in other forms and guises, adapting to new emerging Medias such as Hollywood's films. While these films, such as *The Mummy*, are produced for the sake of public entertainment from the outside, from the inside they reproduce every Orientalist stereotypes that has come to define the East as an exotic, mysterious, and timeless relic and Orientals as inherently corrupt, violent, and backward, reinforcing the binary division of a superior West and irrational East.

Through an extended reading of *The Mummy* (1999) that contextualizes the film within the geopolitical shifts surrounding its release, this research has shown that Hollywood serves as a powerful tool of Western political propaganda. Films like *The Mummy*, serve to influence the audience perception on the East by reinforcing certain worldviews that align with western geopolitical narratives prevalent during the periods of Western dominance or presence in the region.

Our analysis has revealed that resisting Orientalism requires foregrounding authentic cultural expressions that offer nuanced, reality-grounded depictions of the East. This result has been reached through a closer reading of the *Yacoubian Building* (2002) through multiple Egyptian theoretical frameworks. The study demonstrates that socio-political factors are inseparable from the daily lives of Eastern people and are deeply intertwined with the urban

spaces. It further shows that Muslims are not inherently violent, rather, their violence stems from the social exclusion, political oppression, and the psychological manipulation exerted by Shuyukh in Islam. Drawing on Kabesh's theory, the research concludes that Eastern masculinity is not fixed but changes in tandem with the socio-political flux characterizing postcolonial countries. Additionally, Eastern women exercise implicit forms of agency that may seem a form of oppression and submission through a Western perspective.

IV. Discussion

This section is divided into two main chapters that explore the depiction of Egypt in *The Mummy* (1999) and *The Yacoubian Building* (2002). The first chapter is dedicated to analyzing *The Mummy* through the lens of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, examining how the film constructs Egypt and its people. The second chapter offers a counter-narrative by examining the portrayal of Egypt in Al Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building*, highlighting how the novel challenges and subverts Orientalist stereotypes prevalent in Western representations.

Chapter one: Hollywood and the "Orietalist" Clichés in *The Mummy (1999).*

This chapter explores how *The Mummy (1999)* perpetuates Orietalists clichés, echoing the 19th century Orietalists tendencies that have long defined the East as a realm of fantasy and exoticism. By deconstructing the film's narrative and visual elements, we will analyze these tropes in depth and explore how Egypt and its inhabitants are represented within the framework of Hollywood's cinematic imagination.

a. Egypt a One Dimensional Décor

> In the vision of the Orient, as in the projection of space, the occluded alternative to the here and now is constantly Othered, not as the object of administrated desires, but as loss: a temporal relation. Beneath the futuristic image of space image of the space lays constantly the archaism of the unconscious. (Sean Cubitt. 1999, p. 118)

In light of the above quotation, the vision of the Orient is not a real realm but an "imaginative geography" shaped by Western imagination and fantasies. Instead of depicting it as a place of ongoing realities or future possibilities, Western discourse frames it as a place that once had greatness and is now plunged into darkness and barbarism. This framing thus creates a temporal dent between the Orient and the rest of the world "showing it as an isolated

entity that is immune from changes and development. By doing so, the Orient becomes not something the West desires or wants to control; it is relegated to a "lost" space, which justifies Western presence in the Orient attributing it to a great mission of "recovering" and "redeeming" what has been lost (Cubitt, 1999, p.118)

This pattern is easily discerned in *The Mummy (1999)*, which confines Egypt to its past. The movie unfolds across three distinct periods: the ancient Pharaonic era, 1923, and 1926. In the opening scenes, Egypt is shown at its best glory, with the lush civilization, the towering pyramids, and physically beautiful people. This ancient time is granted a positive depiction because "there is no west at this point in history, so it is acceptable to show Egypt as a powerful nation" (RidhaMikdadi, 2003). The movie then dramatically leaps to the present to 1923 and then to 1926 AD. This era on the other hand is not granted the same courtesy. Modern Cairo is characterized by a decayed present marked by constant conflicts, ruins of a lost great civilization, and backwardness of the land and its people.

These dramatic time lapses do not merely set the tone for the narrative; instead they invoke a recurring 19th century motif. These scenes evoke "a romantic nostalgia for a "pure" civilization" (Ella Sohat, 1997, pp. 26, 27), once a source of knowledge now a mere fragments of that glorious past (Said. 1978). The West places itself as the savior of this civilization from barbarism. This sentiment is captured in Basil Glynn's (2020) observation "The tragedy of vanished greatness and the wonders of ancient Egypt half, lost in sand and time were gradually replaced throughout the 19th century with the romance of its rediscovery and accompanying excitement at how contemporary world could benefit and learn from new found knowledge" (p. 42). This romanticized rediscovery is embodied by the trope of the Western adventurer "Rick O'Connell", whose quest is to unearth this "lost" knowledge and reclaim it.

Moreover, the focus on the grandeur of the Pharaonic past creates a stark civilization binary with contemporary Egypt. The camera reinforces this divide by focusing on the monumental achievements of this past, its rituals, and its order. In stark contrast, in the 1920s these monuments are depicted as decayed, broken and crumbling architecture swallowed by the mounting sand, while the Arabs are depicted as primitive, and lawless resembling biblical figures. Walid El Khashab (2017) explains that in cinema these biblical figures have served as an anchor for Western national identity using them to generate an Orientelized Egypt in order to affirm the identity of the West as modern and rational. As a result, Egypt's socio-political or cultural complexities are ignored rendering Egypt into a stage for Western narratives rather than a living, dynamic reality.

Notably, the film excludes representations of Egyptian youth. While Egyptian characters' age is not explicitly specified, the few of them that appear on screen are relatively old. This absence is not accidental, but a symbolical technique that allows to erase any futuristic possibility for Egypt. By overlooking the younger generation, the film confines Egypt to a static and timeless relic, dominated by its past rather than its present or future. It reinforces the notion that Egypt "is always examined in relation to and its association with "heritage", "traditions" culture as if it were divorced from the surrounding reality" (Elsheshtawy. 2004).

Yet despite the grandeur of ancient Egypt that the film presents, this period "also becomes tainted…by its association with the mysterious and supernatural" (Lant 1996, p. 90). Through an Egyptologist perspective such as Thomas Greiner's (2022), *The Mummy*integrates some accurate historical aspects, including the artifacts and the mummification rituals featured in the film's opening sequence, in an attempt to represent an accurate image of ancient Egypt (Campbell as cited in Muzna, 2020, p. 02). However, mystical aspects such as the magical performances practiced by Imhoteb and the Pharaoh curse are added to this

supposedly accurate version of ancient history. This mystical aspect can be traced back to, as Smith (2007, p. 20) explains, the rise of Egyptology in the 19th century followed by the discovery of Tutan-Khamen's tomb in 1922.

The combination of accurate historical elements and mystical additions can be seen as an attempt to create blurriness between fiction and reality (AmjerDarawal 2024). Mane k. Yakoubian (2024), a specialist in Cognitive Science, calls this technique "Truth Effect", which consists of the brain's tendency to interpret repeated statements as signals of truth, regardless of their authenticity. She further explains that Medias exploit this "truth effect" by embedding misinformation deeper into public consciousness. Patrice Georget (2022), a Professor of Psychology, states that this misinformation is combined with factual truths to create prevailing stereotypes. By repeating them, these biased representations create fixed mental images about the groups to which these clichés are directed to.

Hollywood has exploited "truth effect" to create fixed images about the Orient through entertainment films. Elmer Davis (2022), the Head of the Office of War information, helps illuminate this "truth effect" in the context of Hollywood films; he states "the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize they are being propagandized". *The Mummy,* employs the truth effect by combining historical accuracies in the sake of an adventure movie, which leads viewers digest the misinformation as a factual truth, creating a magical Orientelized Egypt. This is evident in the way Egypt comes to be represented nowadays, as many people associate Egypt with Hollywood's version rather than the real one.

The gaze extends beyond distant observation, deliberately intruding upon Egypt's sacred spaces by penetrating tombs and hidden chambers without invitation. This intrusion is reinforced by narrative moments such as Evelyn's remark, "Do you realize we are in a room

no one has entered in over 3,000 years?"a line that echoes the symbolic penetration of a feminized space (Mikdadi, 2003). In this way, the camera does not merely document the setting; it violates and inspects it with a voyeuristic curiosity.

The feminization of Egypt is further emphasized through the character of Evelyn. In a drunken state, Evelyn rambles to Rick, "You're wondering what a place like me is doing in a woman like her." Though this line has little bearing on the plot, it marks a turning point: Egypt ceases to be a mere backdrop and instead becomes metaphorically embodied as a woman through Evelyn herself. From this point onward, Evelyn assumes the role of Egypt's legal representative, a status sustained by her direct cultural connection: "He [her British father] loved Egypt so much he married my mother." (52:18)This statement reveals the West's persistent obsession with forming intimate connections with the East, whether through conquest, possession, or even marriage, and reinforces the image of the land as a woman to be claimed like a bride, desired and ultimately possessed. Evelyn's half-Egyptian heritage positions her as an intermediary to Egypt and its people's history and culture, effectively depriving the indigenous population of any active voice or agency within the narrative.

From their first encounter, it is evident that Rick harbors no genuine emotion or interest toward Evelyn; he merely acknowledges her presence. However, once her closeness to the land is revealed, his indifferent attitude swiftly transforms into desire (Mikdadi, 2003). Evelyn is no longer a burden but becomes worthy of pursuit, much like Egypt itself.

The metaphor reaches its climax in the film's final scene. After defeating Imhotep and saving the day, Rick lifts Evelyn into his arms,a classical heroic cliché, and mounts the camel with her. Accompanied by shimmering treasure, they ride off into the desert together. This visual composition, containing the Occidental hero, the woman, the land, and the treasure,

symbolically reflects the colonial fantasy of conquering, possessing, and claiming the Orient as both prize and property.

b. Fundamentalism and Muslims in *The Mummy*

Arab Muslims have long been subjected to discrimination in Hollywood cinema, portraying them as uncivilized, aggressive, terrorists, and bloodthirsty individuals, traits that are implicitly linked to their Islamic faith. Although it is commonly assumed that such hostile depictions emerged with the 9/11 attacks, these depictions have a longer history that reflects the shifting political landscapes.

In the early stages of cinema (1910s-1920s), Muslims were depicted through an exotic lens featuring magic, and lanterns. In order to fully comprehend the nature of these early representations, one should understand that during this period, the Middle East and Africa were shaped by the European imperial powers, especially British and French imperialism. As Marc Lynch (2024, p. 06) explains France dominated North Africa, along with much of the rest of francophone West Africa, and, following the First World War, extended its control to Syria and Lebanon. Britain, meanwhile, wielded its power in Iran and maintained control over both Egypt and the coastal areas of the Arabian Peninsula. As a result, the Orientals were confined to the early textual representations of 18th and 19th century.

By the end of the Second World War, with the emergence of the decolonization movements around Africa and the Middle East, followed by the Suez canal crisis, the imperial power of France and Britain collapsed and were soon replaced by the United States and the Soviet Union and the Middle East became a critical area of tension between the both of them. The tension intensified following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war in which the United States strongly backed Israel with military aid which severely strained its relations with Arab allies. In the aftermath of this war America seized the opportunity to lead peace negotiations, aiming

to exclude the Soviet influence on the area by posing itself as the mere mediator capable of compelling Israel (lynch, 2024).

Hollywood captures these tensions in different films, becoming the tool of American propaganda mirroring and supporting America's interest in the Middle East which centered on three pillars: the Middle East's religious origins, historical symbolism, unwavering support for Israel, and access to oil resources (Mc Alister, 2005, p.35). Therefore Muslims were depicted "through biblical constructions" (SulaimanArti, 2007, p. 7) and historical epics, which "romanticized Jewish-Christian ties to the land while erasing or vilifying Arab Muslim presence" (McAlister, 2005).

The depiction of Muslims as terrorists emerged with the outbreak of the Iranian revolution which threatened U.S. position in the Middle East. This event followed the toppling of Shah Muhammad Reza by the Islamic revolution, and then later the emergence of anti-Israeli fundamentalism. These events and the rise of the Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East served as a compelling backdrop for Hollywood films framing Muslims as terrorists and fanatics that should be contained through American intervention with a hint of exoticism.

In 1990, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S dominated "the political and security architecture in both the Levant (rooted in the Egypt-Israel Camp David peace agreement and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process) and the Gulf" (Lynch , 2024). America needed a new enemy to replace the vacant place that the Soviets left behind in action movies, and Muslims were the best target and thus became the official enemy of the U.S as Brain Edward argues "With the end of the cold war, a new foe quickly took the place of soviet communism in the imagination of many Americans much the same energy that animated American fear of the "red" menace shifted during the 1990s to panic in response to the "green" terror" (2001, p. 13)

As a result, Muslims came to be represented as terrorists, and backward. However, earlier stereotypes, such as the image of exotic desert dwellers riding camels, did not disappear. Instead, these older tropes continued to coexist in 1990s Hollywood films, now blended with the newer, more politically charged depictions that emerged as global power dynamics shifted after the Cold War, however it was only with the 9/11 attacks on the two towers, that Arab Muslims became a real threat in the eyes of the general western public..

Anthony lane (1999) identifies the presence of this political landscape in *The Mummy* when depicting Arab Muslims. He writes:

> The Arab people have always had the roughest…deal from Hollywood, but with the death of the Cold War the stereotype has been granted even more wretched prominence. In The Mummy, I could scarcely believe what I was watching…So, here's a party game for any producers with Middle-Eastern setting in the mind… one could argue that the racism of The Mummy is merely period detail, or that the gaps slip by so quickly that they don't have a chance to stick. I find, however, that they hang around while the rest of the movie fades. (New York Times)

This blend of exoticism and threatening image of Muslims is evident in the depiction of the character of Ardeth bay. While the other Egyptian characters are reduced to caricatures, hypersexual, superstitious, or idiotic, Ardeth represents the more aggressive stereotype of the Arab Muslim. He is framed as a ruthless desert warrior, quick to resort to violence and unnecessary killing, with his actions tied to his identity of devoted Muslim.

This violence is constantly shown in the movie, as Ardeth and the rest of the Medjay (a semi-nomadic people whose homeland was in the eastern desert ranging from Egypt to the red sea) ambush people out of nowhere and killing them and the film offers no rational reason behind their behavior. This is apparent in the scene when the protagonists discover the City of the Dead (50:44). As the westerner characters and the Egyptian workers are gathered peacefully around the fire after a long day spent on searching the tombs. Out of nowhere the Medjay, led by Ardeth, appear disrupting the peaceful night. They begin slashing and stabbing innocent people that happen to be Egyptian workers. The killings unwarranted; in fact when

the Medjay appear in any given scene is only to kill people around them. In the aftermath of this scene, the protagonists and Ardeth cross paths again but this time there is no killing. However, the film does not stop reminding the audience of the brutality of Ardeth, if not through images it is through dialogues.

In this particular scene when Ardeth and the protagonists meet again in the Cairo Museum of Antiquities (1:14:52) Ardeth explains to the protagonist that he and his people are a secret society that have been guarding the city of the dead for three thousand years "and [they] swore to do any and all of [their] powers to stop the priest Imohteb from being reborn into this world, and now because of you we failed" and Evelyn retorts "and that justifies the killing of the innocent people?' to which Ardeth replies remorselessly with a simple but a determined yes. The question seems random and has no real connection with the purpose of the conversation "as if the film is trying to suggest that [Arab's] violence isn't the best deterrent"(Jessica Lechenal 2017) reinforcing the cruelty of Muslims.

His violence is closely tied to his identity as a Muslim, which the film emphasizes through his frequent use and seemingly random invocation of God's name, especially in scenes involving violence like the one discussed above. This association becomes even more pronounced through his use of pseudo-Qur'anic Arabic, a fabricated language that sounds authentic to western ears while bearing little resemblance to the actual spoken Arabic. The language is not used to enrich his character, but plays a role of a constant reminder for the audience of his religious otherness.AmjerDarawal (2024) argues that the American film industry, in collaboration with political interests, has deliberately distorted the honorable Meaning of Allah's sacred words, associating Islam and the one that practice it with hatred, violence, and terrorism. This strategy solidifies the connection between Islam and terrorism.

Unlike the other characters who are given names, Ardeth remains anonymous throughout the movie; in fact his name comes to be revealed only in the sequel *The Mummy*

Returns (2001). While reading his character many criticsargue that his namelessness is aA new strategy to deprive him of his identity and reduce him to a stereotype, while such a reading of his character is compelling, I argue that this goes further. Instead, it serves as a tool for deliberate generalization. By not assigning him a proper name, the film encourages viewers to see Ardeth not as an individual but as a representative of all Muslims, “a subtle way to depict Muslims as antithetical to terrorist ideologies” (Darawal, 2024), through a single figure.

As the narrative unfolds, Ardeth's violence is gradually softened once he joins forces with the West “under the common cause of fighting against the ancient East” (Mikdadi, 2003). As a result, he “is given a more positive role” (Ibid), transforming him from a threat into a “good Arab.” This seemingly new representation of Ardeth emerges only when he aligns with Western characters. In doing so, the film implicitly designates the Westerners as the true saviors of Egypt.

This dynamic echoes Edward Said’s (1978, p. 34) reading of Lord Balfour views on colonial rule where Egyptians were divided into two categories; the “bad” and “good” native. He writes, “any Egyptian who would speak out is more likely to be “the agitator [who] wishes to raise difficulties than the good native who overlooks the difficulties of foreign domination”. This binary of “good” and bad “Arab” is particularly evident throughout *The Mummy*. In the film’s earliest scenes, Ardethis framed as an antagonist (Lucy Mahanna. 2024). Yet, once he stops being an obstacle for the protagonists’ grand scheme of finding the City of the Dead, he instantly falls into the grace of the West turning him into a friend.

Despite his evident character development,Ardeth is still depicted through an Orietalist gaze, exotic and primitive being, unable to be detached from his archaic nature. Ardeth seems most of the time confused and disoriented once he is out of his elements, his nomadic life, and steps into the civilized world of the west. This disorientation is visually

emphasized in several scenes where Ardethis shown trailing behind the protagonists, following rather than leading, as if unsure or lost. He is therefore stripped of his agency and authority over his own land, placing the westerners as the only capable beings to navigate and save the land from danger.

This dynamic is emphasized in the rescuing scene, where Ardeth joins powers with Rick and Jonathan to stop Imohtep from unleashing his curse on Egypt and rescue Evelyn. During this particular scene, Ardeth is shown trailing behind Rick and Jonathan following rather than leading, a status he held among his fellow Medjai but vanishes in the presence of the protagonists, which deprives Ardeth of any agency or authority. Additionally, his traditional nomadic attire sharply contrasts with the modern and particular clothing of Rick and Jonathan, which visually emphasizes his position as an outsider. In doing so, the movie implicitly suggest that Muslims live in isolation from the progress happening in the West, framing them as violent nomads who "are incapable of achieving the cultural level that Western populations have achieved" (Muzan Amina, 2020, p. 15).

c. The Occidental Heroes, The Oriental Villain, and The Rest

Cinema serves as a powerful tool of cultural production, allowing the West to strengthen its identity through the portrayal of "the Other" (Khatib, 2006). *The Mummy* (1999) promotes a binary opposition through a clichéd heroic narrative, where the Western adventurer protagonist kills the magical Oriental villain and saves the world. The purpose of such a narrative is to assert the identity of the American and British protagonists by "placing them in the center of the narrative while the Orientals are marginalized" (Sohat, 1997, p. 20). By doing so, the film constructs the West as the embodiment of virtue, natural leadership, rationality, and possessing knowledge not only about themselves but also about "the Other," while the racial "Other" embodies everything the West defines itself against.

The American adventurer Rick O'Connell is depicted as fearless, resourceful, a natural leader, rational, and a survivor who navigates the dangers of the land and defeats the villain single-handedly, overshadowing the local population. His heroism is reinforced on two levels. Visually, Rick is constantly framed as the dominant figure of the narrative, standing firm in the face of danger when others flee and walking out of battles unscathed, which makes him stand out. For example, in the opening sequence set in 1923, Rick bravely confronts the awakened Imhotep, demonstrating his courage and quick thinking under life-threatening circumstances (*The Mummy*, 00:07:00, 00:10:00). Another scene reinforcing his heroism is when Rick rescues Evelyn from the collapsing tomb, fearlessly navigating the treacherous environment while others hesitate (*The Mummy*, 01:12:30). Narratively, the Eastern characters' roles serve not only to advance the plot but also to cement Rick's traits. Lines such as "That man is stronger than what I thought" (Ardeth, 00:35:50) and "These Americans are smart" (Beni, 00:28:40) confirm Rick's identity and validate the superiority of American culture.

Jonathan, the British Egyptologist, similarly occupies an important role but is portrayed as greedy, opportunistic, and idiotic, treating Egypt as a playground for adventure and treasure hunting reserved for Westerners. Despite his flaws, the film still depicts him as superior to the local characters. His survival of the mummy's curse and ability to navigate the dangers of an unfamiliar land, while Egyptian characters suffer violent deaths, highlight his racial superiority, suggesting even bumbling Westerners are more capable than the "Orientals"

Jonathan's presence in Egypt is motivated by personal greed rather than scholarly interest. Throughout the film, he plunders Egypt's valuable artifacts without facing consequences, while characters like Beni and Hassan face fatal outcomes for similar greed. The filmmaker uses sarcasm and camera gaze to downplay the severity of Jonathan's theft by depicting Egyptians as incompetent savages who "value water more than gold," reinforcing

colonial attitudes paralleling Said's Orientalism thesis, which explains how the West has long portrayed "the Other" as incompetent to justify exploitation and occupation (Said, 1978).

In opposition to the Western protagonists, Egyptian characters adhere to one-dimensional Orientalist tropes recycled over time. They are depicted as "camel-riding nomads," stock villains, or comic relief whose "only purpose is to deliver a cheap laugh" (Shaheen, 2009). Imhotep, the Oriental villain, is portrayed as a cartoonish, exotic figure who wreaks havoc after being revived. The film emphasizes his mystical powers, underground rituals, and distorted face, underscoring his exoticism and danger, which distances him from the heroic figures. Imhotep becomes a representative of ancient Egypt, condemning an entire civilization to traits of magic, curses, and inherent evil, thereby tainting its legacy.

After revival, Imhotep embarks on a violent rampage to resurrect his lover, reinforcing his viciousness. Beyond his supernatural powers and motivations, Imhotep lacks personal agency; his evil plans are conveyed through Western characters, stripping him of voice. Said argues that the West has long governed the representation of the Orient on the pretext that the Orient cannot represent itself, thus the West must do so on its behalf (Said, 1978, p. 21). The film revives this tradition, reducing Egyptians to a "subject race" deprived of agency.

The remaining Egyptian characters consolidate the film's reliance on Orientalist stereotypes, expressed through cinematography and protagonists alike. The camera lingers on images of a stagnant, backward Orient—people in dirty, outdated clothes living in tents and riding camels—repeating stereotypes that have persisted since Hollywood's silent era (Shaheen, 2009). The Western protagonists confirm these clichés through condescending humor. For example, in the bazaar scene, after Jonathan bargains for a camel, Rick quips, "You could've probably got them for free, all you have to do is give them your sister" (The Mummy, 00:33:34). Later, Rick jokes about Imhotep "getting frisky with the Pharaoh's daughter," reducing Egyptians to hypersexual caricatures. Other lines dehumanize Arabs by

comparing them to animals; Jonathan's disdain for camels,"they are filthy, they smell, they bite, they spit" (The Mummy, 00:34:48), is immediately followed by a cut to a Warden spitting, perpetuating this animalistic imagery (Tim, 2016). Such comments teach viewers that Egyptians are akin to camels, reaffirming Orientalist stereotypes of uncivilized inferiority.

In short, Hollywood reduces Egypt to a stage for Western fantasies, where "figures appear whose role is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate" (Said, 1978). In *The Mummy* (1999), protagonists and "the Other" work in tandem to confirm identities of both poles: civilized and uncivilized, modern and timeless, rational and irrational. Most strikingly, the film constructs masculinity through these binaries. Egyptian male characters are portrayed as inherently hypersexual, violent, morally corrupt, and backward—traits positioning them as failed versions of masculinity. Western male protagonists, by contrast, are idealized as heroic, disciplined, and rational. Thus, the film not only reinforces Western cultural identity but also promotes a Western model of masculinity while marginalizing other masculinities

d. The Eroticized Egyptian Woman and the Virtuous Western Woman.

The eroticized representations of Eastern women precede the invention of cinema. In fact, such depictions were central to nineteenth-century colonial paintings and Western narratives, where the Oriental woman was objectified and demoted to an exotic, sexualized figure crafted to conform to white male fantasies (Lina, 2023). *The Mummy* reenacts the same fantasies through Anck-Su-Namun, the pharaoh's mistress and Imhotep's lover.

Anck-Su-Namunis givenlimited screen time, yet the brief moments in which she appears are sufficient to establish her role as the racial other. From the very beginning, the film attempts to objectify and eroticize her, as evident in the way the camera closes up on her half-naked body draped in golden paint, enhancing her curves, rendering her both enticing and mysterious for the characters and the viewers, and framing her explicitly through the male gaze.

In her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), Laura Mulvey defines the concept of 'the male gaze' as the act of representing women in cinema narratives from a male perspective. She argues that films tend to objectify female characters by panning and fixating the camera on their bodies, showing how a man actively perceives a woman, reducing her to a passive, objectified figure. These perpetuated images uphold male privilege in society while marginalizing women. In this respect, the camera functions as an omnipresent observer, presenting Anck-Su-Namun through a distinctly male perspective. Mulvey argues that the theory of the male gaze operates on three interrelated levels in films: the camera gaze as mentioned above, the character's gaze, which refers to how the characters look at and interact with female characters within the narrative, and the audience's gaze, which is shaped by the first two levels and influences how viewers perceive and consume these representations.

Within the narrative, Anck-Su-Namun holds no primary role, instead, she poses as a "passive" and "submissive" figure whose mere existence and value are defined by the Pharaoh and Imhotep, disregarding her agency. In fact, the film grants her no room to act independently or dictate her own fate. From the moment she appears on screen, Anck-Su-Namun is introduced as the 'Pharaoh's mistress', immediately reducing her to an object of possession rather than a fully developed character.

Her lack of autonomy is further emphasized in the scene when the pharaoh walks in on her and notices a handprint on her body, demanding "who touched you?" This moment

underscores the extent to which Anck-Su-Namun's body is a site of male control, something to be guarded and possessed rather than an extension of herself. Even her grand sacrifice, which could have been an act of self-determination, is immediately reduced to a narrative device that serves to propel Imhotep's story as a villain. The sacrifice is the only act she undertakes of her own will, giving her some sense of autonomy, yet the film uses this moment to build Imhotep's background story and further his evil schemes to revive her.

In contrast to the Oriental woman, the film presents Evelyn, the British librarian, through a polished and filtered lens. Unlike Anck-Su-Namun, whose presence is defined by her body and her role as a device for the males' desires and motives, the male gaze is largely absent in Evelyn's depiction. Instead, the focus centers on her moral and intellectual traits, constructing her as a respectable and elevated Western heroine throughout the narrative, Evelyn is rarely filmed suggestively, in fact, she is constantly displayed wearing modest and clean clothes that underscore her purity and virtuous nature. Even when she is shown in revealing clothes, such as her black dress in Hamunaptra or when she is wearing her nightgown in the boat scene, such moments are not regarded with the same eroticism prescribed to Anck-Su-Namun, sustaining her role as a privileged, respectable Western woman and upholding her superiority over the Oriental woman.

These depictions of Evelyn as intellectually capable and morally modest reflect a broader evolution in how Western women were portrayed in cinema. In the early stages of Hollywood cinema, Western women were often confined to the role of the damsel in distress. "Often their worth was determined through a romantic relationship with the male lead" (Price, 2024), and they were granted little agency or narrative autonomy. It was not until well into the twentieth century that Western female characters began to be portrayed in a more nuanced light, a far cry from the one-dimensional depictions. Still, even these portrayals frequently

remained tinged with romantic undertones, limiting their agency to the pursuit or fulfillment of love (Price, 2024).

A radical shift occurred during the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of Second-Wave Feminism emerged as a response to the limitations and dissatisfaction many women experienced in the post-Second World War era. This new generation of women brought with them new models of liberty. They challenged traditional gender roles, explored issues of sexuality and reproductive rights, and sought to dismantle patriarchal structures. Second-Wave Feminism's influence extended beyond politics and into the cultural sphere, transforming Hollywood's depiction of women and producing female characters "that were more multidimensional, bringing to the screen female protagonists that were able to convey leadership, physical agility, and intellectual curiosity" (Kaka, 2020).

*The Mummy (1999)*was released in the aftermath of this feminist shift and clearly reflects the evolving gender landscape through the character of Evelyn. She is far from being a passive or submissive figure. Instead, Evelyn is a central force in the narrative. Her intelligence and intellectual curiosity drive the plot forward, and her expertise in Egyptology becomes crucial to the expedition. She is not only able to defend herself but also contributes to the discovery of the hidden treasures and the Book of the Dead(Mahanna, 2024).

Furthermore, Evelyn openly challenges patriarchal authority throughout the narrative. She refuses to be silenced or thrown to the sidelines, standing her ground against both Eastern and Western men. Rather than submitting to the expectations imposed on her, she pursues her passion for Egyptology with courage. By the end of the film, she is able to uncover the secrets of Egypt that male Egyptian scholars spent decades searching for.

However, these gendered evolutions in representation are not extended to Eastern women, who remain confined within the rigid framework of Orientalist clichés. Antonia

Lant(1997, p. 96) argues that Western woman in Hollywood films, as embodied in Evelyn, is portrayed as liberated, intellectually capable, and morally upright, Oriental women are reduced to silent, passive figures, often defined by their sexuality, submission, or victimhood. The narrative does not grant them the same complexity or agency as the Western woman.

Eastern female characters are portrayed as perpetual victims of their culture. Anck-Su-Namun suffers under ancient Egyptian patriarchal norms, reinforced by Oriental male figures such as Imhotep and the Pharaoh. In contrast, contemporary Egyptian women face oppression from both patriarchy and Islam (Vohra, 2023). This is illustrated in the bazaar scene, where women appear completely veiled in black hijabs and niqabs, silent, passive, and blending into the background. By contrast, Evelyn emerges as a superior figure embodying Western ideals of liberation.

This paradigm of superiority extends beyond the Oriental woman, applying equally to the Oriental man. As Ella Shohat observes in her essay "Gender and Culture Empire: Towards a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema" (1997), the Western woman, within the framework of Hollywood cinema, is positioned in a relation of domination not only over non-Western women but also vis-à-vis non-Western men. Therefore, her authority works on two fronts: she is not only constructed as morally virtuous and superior to Anck-Su-Namun, but she also outshines the Egyptian male characters in terms of education and field expertise.

This dynamic of authority is highlighted through her interaction with the local inhabitants. Throughout the narrative, Evelyn constantly stays one step ahead of the locals. Her elevated level of expertise is particularly apparent in the quest for the Book of Life to defeat Imhotep. Evelyn effortlessly deciphers the hieroglyphs and the historical texts, even uncovering the lost city of the dead, tasks that even the most educated Egyptians, such as Ardeth and Terrence Bey, failed to accomplish. They rely on her as their primary source for the secrets of their land, positioning her as the gatekeeper of their own history. This dynamic

is further reinforced in a scene where Evelyn corrects Beni's flawed translation of Imhotep's words. When Beni translates "it is time to make you mine forever," Evelyn corrects him, "for eternity, idiot" (1:28:16), fortifying her intellectual dominance.

Moreover, her expertise goes beyond intellectual knowledge, as she also possesses a natural sharp wit, allowing her to outsmart the most cunning of Oriental men, like Hassan, whom she smartly tricks into a deal that allows her to save Rick from being hanged in the Cairo prison. Her educative and morally upright nature overshadows the Egyptians' intellectual expertise, reducing them to ignorant beings.

Chapter two*:* Rewriting Egypt in *The Yacoubian Building (2005).*

This chapter examines how Alaa Al Aswany rebukes Orientalist reductive representations of Egypt by weaving themes such as politics, social inequalities, corruption, and class tensions into the everyday lives of his characters. Special attention will be paid to the influence of these socio-political forces on the characters' personal choices, urging them to seek meaning and justice through radical and controversial paths and how Islam is maneuvered in Egyptian society. Moreover, the chapter will explore how female characters contend with the same oppressive structures, but more importantly, how Alaa Al Aswany portrays their agency; not necessarily through the lens of Western feminist thought, but often in a way that transcends both Orientalist representations of submissive Eastern women and Western feminist expectations

a. The Building as Microcosm of the Egyptian Multilayered Society.

> Every city has its distinctive landmarks, and each of these landmarks carries historical, cultural, social, political and symbolic meanings. However, these urban landmarks are not fixed or eternal. Rather, their histories are fluid and change over time. As urban space expands and transforms new city signs and landmarks are created these ongoing changes within the city's space and the continuous shifts in how its history and symbols are interpreted. (SamiaMehrez. The literary Atlas of Cairo. 2012)

Cairo and Egypt are often depicted through a static, exoticized lens typical of many Hollywood productions. These stereotypes are exemplified in the film *The Mummy (1999*). For instance, Egypt is shown as a fixed backdrop, mysterious, ancient, timeless, serving mainly as a stage for Western adventure and spectacle. Such depiction tends to freeze the city in a colonial imagination ignoring the complex layered social realities.

In stark contrast, *The Yacoubian Building (2002)* reveals Egypt as a vibrant, multilayered society shaped by historical transformations, social stratifications, and personal struggles. The building is not a fixed or neutral backdrop; it is socially produced and

constantly remapped by its diverse inhabitants. In other words, its physical and symbolic meaning "cannot be separated from the historical, socio-political and cultural context of the space and the individuals inhabiting them" (AysegulTuran, 2019 p. 03).

Built in 1934, the building initially housed the crème of the elite of Egyptian society- Bashas, ministers, and millionaires, symbolizing wealth and status. However, the 1952 Revolution transformed the social order. The aristocrats abandoned the building, which was then taken over by officers of the armed forces "who were the influential people at the time" (p. 12). With this shift, the building's purpose and the use of the rooms changed "the officers' wives began using the iron rooms in a different way: for the first time they were turned into places for stewards, cooks, and young maids that they brought from their village to serve their families to stay in" (p. 13). In the 70s the open door policy further altered the building's demographic. These military families gradually left the downtown area, renting the steward rooms to new residents coming from the countryside. A new community emerged on the building's rooftop, one that was "entirely independent from the rest of the building" (p. 14). This transformation underscores that Egypt is not a stagnated or timeless place; rather its changing spatial dynamic and the diversity of the generations it hosts show that Egypt is a society in flux where the past and modernization coexist (Elsheshtawy 2004)

Conversely, *The Mummy (1999*) focuses heavily on Egypt's past. At the beginning of the film, Cairo is presented through three timelines: the Pharaonic era, then leaping briefly to 1923, and finally 1926, where the main story unfolds. This time leap is not merely a narrative device but subtly conveys a nostalgic longing for a lost golden age. YesserElsheshtawy (2004, p. 05) defines this kind of architectural narrative as "Narrative Loss" which refers to the "traditional reading of the Middle East…showing it as an isolated entity somehow disconnected from developments occurring elsewhere in the civilized world" (p. 03). In

essence, it tells a story of Eastern cities in a way that emphasizes decline, decay, or disappearance from a former state of glory or greatness.

The Mummy (1999), thus, employs "Narrative Loss" to mourn a glorious past while the modern city is seen as degraded or fragmented. However, what such films tend to ignore "is that Arab cities have been part of modernization effort from the 19th century to the present, while they have been subjected to colonialism they nevertheless were able to grow, develop and contribute to architecture/urban design" (Elsheshtawy 2004, p 05).

Alaa Al Aswany captures this dynamic within a single urban space. Its history from housing the bourgeoisie to the military officers in 1952 Revolution, to tenants after the "Infitah", is not a story of decline but also of adaptation. It shows how people are able to adapt within this flux, blend and bring renewal, continually reshaping the building's meaning with each generation.

Understanding Al Aswany's emphasis on the buildings "spatial re-organization" (Turan, 2019, p. 06) is crucial. Once a symbol of social stability, the building eventually opens its doors to a new community introducing new culture and norms contrasting with the building's initial identity. Thus the building becomes a microcosm of Egyptian society itself, encapsulating the tension between elitism and marginalization.

This tension is vividly reflected in the building's physical layout, which resembles a reversed social pyramid: unlike the traditional hierarchy described by sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1927), where the majority occupy the base and the elites the apex, here the marginalized are pushed to the rooftop while the elite occupy the more secure and spacious lower floor. This not only mirrors Egypt's unequal distribution of power, but also symbolizes the social invisibility and vulnerability experienced by the inhabitants of these rooms (Tuarab 2019, p. 06) such as Busayna and Taha, who both struggle to find their place in the society.

"The severed connection between the iron rooms and the building's apartment" (p.14) indicates the absence of the Middle Class in the reversed pyramid, there is no hook to connect the top to the bottom (Lewis 2013). Busayna summarizes this fracture and classes conflicts in her words to Taha"Look, Taha. I know I'm a year younger than you but I've worked and work has taught me a few things, this country doesn't belong to us, Taha. It belongs to the people who have money"(p. 59)

This moment highlights not only the unbridgeable divide between the elite and marginalized, but also the struggle of the youth in a country that offers no future for them (Assaad Caroline, 2020) .This anxiety is both embodied in Taha and Busayna's journeys. Al Aswany introduces them in the beginning of the novel as optimistic young people with high hopes of employment and marriage, dreaming of finding a job and getting married but these dreams are later crushed by corruption and social exclusion. Their trajectories reveal a mounting frustration among Egypt's youth, caught between aspiration and exclusion.

This sense of disconnection is not only ideological but is spatial. The space is not a passive bystander or a mere stage where adventures happen, but its relation with the characters is reciprocating, where both affect one another. While characters change the meaning of the building with their presence and memories, the building shapes their experiences; "it fluctuates between being…as a refuge and a prison, a shelter and a cage, a space of belonging and a space of estrangement, a space of freedom and a space of confinement" (SamiaMehrez, 2012) Thus, it becomes a psychological as much as a physical terrain. Each character's intimate place reflects his/her position within a boarder system of power, exclusion and desires.

ZakiBey's (an aging aristocrat) apartment offers a fleeting sense of freedom and a sense of belonging, functioning as a private sanctuary. Yet this very space shows his desperate attempt

to reenact a bygone era that once confirmed his identity now marked by a sense of "out of place". For HaggAzzam (corrupt religious man) space becomes a place for sexual encounters hidden from the public scrutiny. For Taha the rooftop, once a place of hope, becomes a reminder of his social exclusion. For Busayna, her domestic space, once a cocoon, is now but a mere reminder of her economic burden and the daily exploitation and compromises she has to make. As for the women in the rooftop it reflects their social alienation. The severed stairwell mirrors the fragmentation of the society. These "intimate places" do not exist in isolation but are enmeshed with the larger power that determines who belongs and who does not.

Al Aswany conveys the characters' experiences through "a non-linear narrative structure, shifting abruptly between loosely connected storylines" (Turan 2019, p. 06). This deliberate strategy mirrors the characters inner struggles and the fractured state of Egyptian society. Sabry Hafez (2010) calls this form the "novel of the lost horizon" where narratives lack a middle ground or any clear resolution but instead it "consists of beginnings- and ends, undermining any syllogistic progression" (P. 61). This structure often mirrors a world where "naïve faith is not an option, their starting point is cynicism and frustration" (pp. 61, 62)

The Yacoubian Building (2002) exemplifies this structure. The novel opens with frustration and ends in uncertainty, and even when the possibility of hope emerges it is quickly squashed by the weight of socio-political realities. Taha's storyline, begins with ambition and faith, and ends in radicalization and tragic death, mirroring the burden and struggles of the youth in an authoritarian regime. Malak the opportunist remains financially stagnant, reflecting lower class's ongoing struggle to survive without the means of progress. HaggAzzam's ends abruptly and without resolution, highlighting even the powerful individuals in Egypt live in the same limbo of uncertainty. Rather than offering a realistic closure for Zaki and Busayna, Al Aswany offers instead a symbolic ending, their union is "a

somewhat romanticized hope that there might be an imagined future for the nation" (Naaman 2011, p. 160) where the coexistence of class can become true.

b. The Deconstruction of the Radical Arab Muslim.

> Literature is not a tool of judgment. It is a tool of understanding. I don't write literature to tell you that terrorists are terrible…. I write to tell you that nobody is borne a terrorist, but he could become a terrorist at some point and we should understand why. (Interview with Alaa Al Aswany by James Romm, 2017)

These words by Alaa Al Aswany resonate deeply with the character of Taha in *The Yacoubian Building* (2002). Through the journey of Taha, Al Aswany's message clearly challenges the clichéd binary of good and bad Arab that often saturates Western portrayals of Arabs, notably in films such as the Mummy (1999), eloquently stating that no one is born inherently virtuous or inherently malicious. Instead, individuals are shaped by their socio-political circumstances which push people, like Taha, to resort to radicalization and violence.

The Mummy 1999 overlooks these circumstances and their profound effect on a person's psyches, reducing the Egyptians to one-dimensional caricatures. Among the characters in the film, Ardeth ay stands out as a figure worth comparing to Taha, due to their shared identities of devoted Muslims and their association with violence. Ardeth in this sense embodies the "good Arab" trope: he is depicted as honorable and wise, yet the movie ultimately overshadows these traits by presenting him as a violent man quick to resort to bloodshed. His memorable presence stems less from his wisdom than from his violent actions. Through such depiction, *The Mummy* suggests that violence is second nature to Arab and rooted in Islam, perpetuating harmful stereotypes rather than exploring the deeper forces that shape human behavior. In stark contrast, Taha's violence and his descent into extremism are not a matter of inherent nature or the affiliation to religion, but rather secular outcomes of socio-political pressures.

To understand Taha's transformation it is necessary to trace back his life arc's to identify the pivotal moments that marked his shift from an ambitious student to a martyr. Taha El-Shazli is the son of the Yacoubian building's doorkeeper, who lives in shacks on the roof. He is a very devoted man, who since childhood aspired to be a policeman. To achieve his ultimate goal, Taha has to work extra chores in the morning and devote all nighters for studying and praying. Additionally, he has "also to put up with the meanness and arrogance of the building's [affluent] inhabitants" (p17) due to his social status. His "ambition to enter the police Academy as an officer is thwarted because his father is a porter" (AmalKabesh, p. 90). This rejection marks "the first traumatic experience of Taha"(Rashad Al Areqi, 2009, p. 72) one that not only shatters his dream but crushes him emotionally.

After going home he slowly "started to imagine fantastic scenes of revenge" (P. 60) where he "rebukes them [the juries] until they melted in shame for what they had done and apologize to him" (p. 61). This moment marks the first crack in Taha's internal world. His "fantasies" of revenge are not yet violent, rather, they stem from the yearning of recognition. So instead of going on a rampage of killing the juries as the Hollywood movies would most likely do, Taha writes "to the president of the republic to complain about the blatant injustice"(Gardaz, 2009) however his complaint gets rejected again due to his social background, therefore Taha completely gave up on his previous dream.

He uses his excellent grades to secure a place in the faculty of political "science and economy at Cairo University" (Gardaz 2009). He realizes that even in the educative sphere he is still defined by his poverty, rather than his intellectual abilities. He eventually joins an Islamic political movement after being recruited by an equally poor student.

This period marks a profound turning point in Taha's life. His poverty looms over him all his life. It is therefore not surprising that he gravitates towards Islamic political movement, not of sheer inherent malice, but of the sanctuary it offers. This shift is captured in the novel.

> He has come to love his brethren win the GamaaIslamiya so much that he would sacrifice his life for them. All his old, worldly standards have crumbled like an ancient fragile building and their place has been taken by a true, Islamic evaluation of people and things. The power of faith has filled his heart and made him into a new being, liberated from fear and evil. He nolonger fears death of holds any created being in awe, no matter what its strength or influence. (pp. 115-116)

Religious ideology becomes "an all-encompassing solution to Taha's needs" (Lewis 2013, p. 107). Feeling rejected socially, Taha withdraws from society and begins to see it as his enemy (Haroub, p. 03). This withdrawal is reflected in his growing hatred of the upper-class residents, who "he has started to hate…'in God" (p. 115) shifting the judgment that was once directed at him on other, judging them through a religious lens (Lewis, p. 2013).

> He has changed totally, as though he had swapped his former self for another, new one. It isn't just the matter of the Islamic dress that he has adopted in place of his western clothes, nor his beard which he has let grown and which gives him a dignified and impressive appearance…all these are changes in appearance. Inside, however, he has been possessed by new powerful, bounding spirit…gone forever are the old cringing timidity and meekness before the residents. Now he faces them with self-confidence. (p, 115)

At this stage,Taha shows no sign of violence. It is not until his arrest by the police during a student protest that Taha's violence is set in motion. Taha is not only tortured by the policemen but also brutally rapped, which heightens his feeling of shame triggering his violence. As the psychologist James Gilligan (2007) argues "the emotion of shame is the primary or ultimately cause of all violence" (p. 150) especially when a man is stripped from his dignity either through the act of belittling or through feminization, which he seeks to reclaim through different acts of violence such as homicide. This is expressed through Taha's words "I'm dead now they killed me in detention… they called me Fawziya. Every day they used to beat me and make me say "I'm a woman and my name is Fawziya". You want me to forget all that and do on living? (p. 190). Therefore, jihad becomes the only path through which he can find justice.

By portraying Taha with sympathy, Al Aswany makes it clear that the religious radicalization of young Egyptian men is not an archaic product but rather the outcome of the dual mechanism of social exclusion and political oppression (Janine Jones 2012, p. 04). This insight parallels Oliver Roy's (2005) argument that Islamic fundamentalism is not an

"expression of a traditional culture, of a traditional society, which feels under pressure from globalization and Westernization" (p. 10), a cliché that has been promoted by the West, and echoed in Hollywood cinema, such as *The Mummy (1999)* through the character of Ardeth bay. Roy instead insists that Islamic extremism is a modern and global phenomenon, emerging as a reaction to urbanization, globalization and the social dislocation caused by the clash between western and Islamic worldviews. Postcolonial Egypt is deeply scarred by colonial legacies and rapid modernization, leaving many individuals, especially the youth, in a state of cultural and psychological diaspora. As a result, they turn to religious fundamentalism, which presents itself as an everlasting solution, a means of reclaiming their identity, dignity and purpose.

At this stage of the analysis it is impossible to disregard the rigid use of religion; in fact, al Aswany does not absolve religious figures from contributing in the radicalization of young people. It is therefore necessary to engage with critics like Gardaz, (2009) who hones on Taha's path to jihad. In his reading, Gardaz (2009) argues that al Aswany offers jihad as a solution to "Egypt's present dreadful socio-economic situation" (2009, p. 19). Yet, such interpretation risks overlooking the nuanced critique embedded within Taha's trajectory. Al Aswany's choice of Taha as a character is far from coincidental. His journey is not only a commentary on political oppression and social exclusion. But also a denouncing of the disturbing "mobilization of Islam for self-serving purposes" (Lewis, 2013), cloaked in the language of piety. Roy (2005) explicitly explains "A sacred book is not…an insurance policy, where everything is put in uniquivalent terms…the key question is not what the Koran actually says, but what Muslims say that Koran says" (p. 10). This is documented through the character of Sheikh Shakir, Taha's religious guide, who "is often represented as controlling, seeming to coerce rather than teach" (Lewis 108)

While socio-political pressures create the conditions for Taha's vulnerability, sheikh Shakir's psychological manipulation plays a central role in sealing his tragic fate. Al Aswany subtly constructs this trajectory as an orchestrated process, beginning the moment he enters the mosque. Although never explicitly stated, the narrative offers enough crumbs for the readers to locate a disturbing pattern of manipulation. From Khalid's calculated approach and the relief he feels amidst the other members, "he noticed with relief that like him they were poor, most of them being apparently of rural origin" (p. 90), highlighting the movement's selective strategy in targeting individuals; who are often at the bottom of the social scale, exploiting their conditions for political reasons. The psychological manipulation intensifies when Taha meets sheikh Shakir. What initially appears to be spiritual guidance gradually unfolds to a calculated process of emotional reconditioning. As Taha begins to confess his struggles, and his attachment to Busayna -his childhood love, the Sheikh listens attentively, not out of compassion, but to locate the emotional cracks he can later exploit.

The confession in this topic is not an innocent act, but a psychological technique aligned with what Robert Jay Lifton (1961) describes as "thought reform". According to him, the process begins with confession, defined as the "exposure and renunciation of past and present "evil" (p.05). Once Taha reveals the intimate parts of his life, sheikh Shakir begins to remold this reality recasting it through a rigid, absolutist worldview, rigidly divided between the "true believers" and the "unbelievers". As Shakir firmly reminds him "I have said to you many times, how to love people in God and hate in God, for otherwise your Islam will never be complete" (p. 119). This dichotomy is further reinforced by the recurrent use of God's words "mystical manipulation", to further assert his authority and give his words the weight of sacred truth. AmalKabesh (2013) insight on religion and Egyptian proves effective in this context.

> Egypt is a society saturated in religious discourses. God is experiences, spoken of, and referred to as all-powerful and all-knowing. God is the recurrent reference point. It is to religion that people turn for explanation both of society and, importantly, of the self. (Kabesh, p. 70)

Yet Shakir realizes that Taha cannot fully commit to their political cause, as his love to Busayna may prove as a challenging obstacle. In order to sever the bond, Shakir gradually reshapes Taha's perception of her, framing Busayna as an impure temptation that threatens his path to God. He warns,

> By God, my sincere advice is for you to forget this young woman, Taha, because she is gone astray…and a girl who is Muslim like you would be better for you…what's become of your duty to Islam and the Muslims?...it is the duty of all young Muslims in Egypt to rise up against this unbelieving government..Are you willing, Taha, to hang back in aiding the Muslims, who are being killed..And occupy yourself with an eerring young woman who has deserted you in favor of abomination? God, mighty and glorious, will not ask you…about Busayna, but He will hold you to account for what you did to support the Muslims (p. 120)

The pattern of manipulation is unmistakable. He places Busayna on the side of non believers and repeatedly invokes the name of God to guilt, terrify, and isolate Taha. The sudden pivot to national and religious duty, imploring war, martyrdom and the suffering of Muslims, reveals Shakir's real agenda: not to guide the alienated youth, but to mold them into a tool of political ambitions, in order to raise them "against President Hosni Mubarek's regime and to establish an Islamic state based on Sharia" (Gardaz, 2009, p. 06)

Even after ending his relationship with Busayna, Taha is not fully under Shakir's control. It is only after his arrest and rape that he becomes more devoted to Gamaa al Islamiya. While the novel does not directly state that the traumatic event is a setup by Shakir, the details leave much to be desired. In factShakir sends him to a specific location, and then the police calling him by his name as if they were expecting him. But whether it was intentional or pure hazard, the results are the same; Taha is utterly broken.

Shakir uses this traumatic event to further control Taha. Rather than offering him empathy, the sheikh reframes his experience and the deep shame he feels as a divine trial, and that God intended it so, in order to bring him closer to the path of jihad as he clearly states:

> What happened to you in detention is not something peculiar to you. It is the destiny of all those who speak the truth in our unfortunate country. Those responsible are not just a few officers but the criminal and unbelieving regime that rules us. You must direct your anger against the whole regime that rules us.(p.168)

This moment marks a critical turning point. Following Shakir's "advice"Taha fully commits to the cause, believing that martyrdom is his fate. The ambitious, shy, and morally uptight boy that Al Aswany introduced at the beginning of the narrative is now erased. What remains is an angry, disillusioned man whose purpose is redefined. At this point, sheikh Shakir completes the second phase of Lifton's (1961) "thought reform" what he calls "the remaking of the man" (p 30). This stage consists of erasing the individual former self, and reconstructing a new self that fully conforms to the group's ideology, with a new sense of purpose, values, and even emotions, dictated by the doctrine (Trujillo, Lobato, and Moyano 2022)

ThereforeTaha's path to radicalization and the violence that ensued along with it did not happen in a vacuum, as *The Mummy* initially claims. It is a result of social marginalization and political oppression combined with the psychological manipulation of figures. According to Ports (1972) people who face social and economic disadvantage, such as poverty and social marginalization, are more likely to become radicalized. He adds that these marginalized individuals tend to adopt extremism as a way to find empowerment in society (as cited in ManataHashemi, 2015, pp.04, 05). Complementing Ports prespective, psychological studies recognize the radicalization of youth is driven by manipulation techniques exercised by the recruiters. This process follows three distinct phases: emotional radicalization, doctrinal radicalization, and violent radicalization (Trujillo, Lobato, and Moyano , 2020, pp. 105, 128).

c. Eastern Masculinity

When it comes to the Eastern masculinity, the west tends to treat it as a fixed biological essence and this is done by repeatedly projecting Easter men as stoic, hypersexual, and violent

beings. These reductive portrayals are strongly present in *The Mummy* (1999). Egyptian male characters are depicted as lustful men who attempt to control and abuse female characters; they are unapologetically corrupted and primordial atavists. The film offers no rational motivation for their behaviors, turning a blind eye to the role of external forces that shape their sense of self and impact their psycy.

Al Aswany challenges these reductive stereotypes of Egyptian as "dangerously hypersexual", instead he reveals how Egypt's ongoing political and social shifts shape their identity and masculinity. This perspective aligns with Michel Foucault (1982) insight on subjectivity and power. He argues that subject formation is not innate but happens through interaction with social institutions, cultural norms, and political contexts. These conditions are in constant shift. As a result, the subject's sense of self and men's perception of themselves, shifts accordingly. (as cited in PassentMoussa 2023, p. 09).

Building on this foundation, AmalKabesh (2013) situates this process with a postcolonial and authoritarian Egyptian context. She argues that masculinity in Egypt is neither stable nor natural, but formed in response to the various discourses in motion, religion, politics, history, and economic, which often promote competing and conflicting ideals of masculinity. Consequently male subjects are constantly vying to adhere to these standards, leaving them feeling inadequate and exposed.

This fragility and fragmentation of masculinity is poignantly captured in the character of Zaki el Dassouki, a wealthy elderly man who spends most of his time pursuing women and who maintains an office in the Yacoubian building. "iHe symbolizes Egypt's past colonial heritage" Gardaz 2009) What makes him a compelling character for analysis is not merely his hedonism, but his desperate clinging to a past that no longer exists. He maintains "a nostalgic view of Egypt's colonial past" (Lewis, 110), a time that once affirmed his cosmopolitan identity, which al Aswany makes clear from the beginning of the novel,

> To the residents of the streets he cuts a well-loved folkloric figure when he appears before them in his three-piece suit (winter and summer, its bagginess hiding his tiny, emaciated body); with his carefully ironed handkerchief always dangling from his jacket pocket and always of the same color as his tie; with his celebrated cigar, which, in his glory days, was Cuban deluxe but is now of the foul-smelling… his gleaming false teeth, and his dyed black hair whose few locks are arranged in rows..in the hope of covering the board, naked, bald patch. (p. 03)

It is evident from the detailed description above that al Aswany does not intend to frame Zaki as a stagnated figure. He invites readers to see him as a man who is simply disoriented and displaced. His out-dated clothes function as a mask; shielding his vulnerability from the outside world. Expressions such as "its bagginess hiding his emaciated body", "false teeth" and "covering his naked body" subtly expose his psychological state. They in fact mirror Zakki's denial in living in a world in which his cosmopolitan identity is exclude

To understand the source of Zaki's disorientation and understand his current psychological state, it is necessary to explore his past. The present, after all, cannot be fully grasped without the weight of history, as the past"bears down on the present and involve unyielding repetition despite our best" (AmalKabesh 2013, p. 13).

Zaki is the son of a former minister and aristocrat. His social background allowed him to spend his "whole life with foreigners" and mingled with people of a "certain niveau"(p. 162). Educated in France and surrounded mostly by foreigners, Zakki developed a Eurocentric, cosmopolitan identity. His masculinity rooted in a pre-revolutionary, aristocratic model, centered on charm, leisure, and sensuality. Such model was considered ideal for that time and Zaki took pride in it. However, "the revolution suddenly came and everything changed" (p, 04)

To fully grasp what Al Aswany infers by "and everything changed" it is necessary to contextualize Zaki's nostalgia within boarder historical events and examine explore how impact masculinity in Egypt. Zaki's nostalgic attachment to the colonial past is not merely personal but triggered by the revolution of 1952 which toppled the king Farouk, dismantled

the monarchy, and ended the British occupation (Galbraith, Al-Sayyid-Marsot 1978). This historical event marked a turning point for Egypt's political, economic, and social landscape. In 1954 under Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency, Egypt underwent major socialist reforms that promoted the redistributions of aristocrats among common people (Felahin) to erode the aristocratic privilege which Zaki once enjoyed as a result "the country side and its culture dominated the state compared to the time of the monarchy" (Tahear Mansour 2022) So the country saw a large rural exodus thus overpopulating the capital of Cairo.

In the 1970s, following the death of Gamaal Abdel Nassar, Sadat took the leadership he moved decisively to break with his predecessor [Abdel Nassar] by reopening Egypt up to foreign investment (Ibrahim 2021, p.3, Ottoway 2020) by issuing the policy of Infitah also known as The Open Door Economic Policy. This policy was supposed to better the economic state of Egypt, but it only deepened the class hierarchy, benefiting the small class of elites and marginalizing the lower class (PassentMoussa 2023, p. 89). And 1981 saw Mubarek's long authoritarian rule further entrenched a political environment where traditional and religious norms thrived disposing of Zaki's obsolete cosmopolitan identity.

The building itself becomes a microcosm of these transformations. Once a symbol of bourgeois cosmopolitanism, is now hosting a new community, whose culture, norms, and values are rooted in a religious, conservative and rural traditions. Thus the rooftop of the building comes to "resemble any popular community in Egypt" (p. 14). As a result a new model of masculinity is presented- one that emphasizes male dominance, display of power and patriarchal in stark contrast to Zaki's obsolete, an Europhile identity.

This profound shift in social and cultural dynamics precipitates a deep loss for Zaki, who finds himself in a state of uncertainty within a world that no longer affirms his cosmopolitan masculinity that once was a source of pride for him. Amalkabesh perception of loss in a postcolonial context helps illuminate the effects of loss on Zaki's psychology. She

argues that when a man loses his sureness of place, time, space and authority, the effects on his mental health and sense of self can be profound. This loss often triggers intense anxiety and depression and feelings of alienation that manifest in his everyday life, as men struggle to reconcile their diminished control and disrupted identities with societal expectation with masculinity (2013. p. 22). This grief lies at the heart of his confession to Busayna:

> ...when I was your age, I used to think that I could do whatever I wanted. I used to make plans for my life and I was so sure about everything. When I got older, I discovered that man controls almost nothing. Everything is fate (p. 137)

The symbolical loss Zaki undergoes causes him deep anxiety and a profound sense of alienation, as he struggles to conform to a new model of masculinity that clashes with everything his upbringing once affirmed. To adopt this emerging identity would require him to abandon the liberal, secular and cosmopolitan values that once shaped his sense of self. As previously mentioned, postcolonial Egypt is saturated with Islamic conservatism. Conforming to this new order would not only mean relinquishing his past but also erasing the very identity that once gave him coherence.

> I lived through beautiful times, Busayna… I had my station in life , my money, all my friends were of certain niveau, I had my special places where I would spend the evenings.. what times! Every night was filled with laughter and parties and drinking and singing..until Abdel Nasser...(p. 162)

Zaki's crisis emerges from his inability to balance between the values of his old world and the traditional one, causing him to be increasingly disconnected from his own culture. Alaa Al Aswany reflects this crisis in Zaki physical body, drawing attention to its deterioration through vivid, intrusive descriptions: "emaciated body"(p. 03) and "bald patch"(p. 03). These images emphasize masculinity in decay, suggesting that the crisis is not only psychological but also somatically lived.

Zaki thus develops distinct coping mechanisms to overcome his fractured sense of self. His obsessive attachment to the past is not just nostalgia for a lost era, but a desperate

attempt to preserve his sense of self. thus the “memories about those days and his effort to maintain the same lifestyle despite his failing body indicate a desire to keep that part of Cairo and himself alive within the walls of his apartment in the Yacoubian Building” (AysegulTuran, 2019, p. 06) because simply the past represents everything that is familiar, stable, which allows Zaki to re-inhabit a model of masculinity that no longer finds affirmation in the present. However, memory alone does not sustain him; Zaki turns also to sex as a way to assert a version of his masculinity.

Zaki’s relationship with women is seedy and exploitative. In fact he uses his wealth and power to exploit women from different classes including “high class women, secondary school girls, university students and even a beggar woman “(Rashad Al Areqi, 2008, p. 74). At first glance his womanizing appears to be merely an act of indulgence and power. However, Alaa la Aswany encourages readers to look deeper: Zaki’s sexual pursuits are not aggressive assertions of control but reveals his psychological fragility. Striped of his masculine identity, Zaki seeks comfort and validation through women (Lewis, 2013), hoping to reconstruct his lost Sense of self. His exploitation and “the objectifying of women” is not a inherit act of hypersexuality but rooted in the social-political conditions, and the alienation that many men under the same circumstances feel, seeking a sense of belonging through the limited choices that their environment gives them.

This individual crisis reflects a border cultural dynamic. As Rachad Al Areqi observes, “culture controls people behaviors and values so that the West Knows this fact and therefore attempts to distort and hybridize the Eastern culture to cope up with its own life style” (2008, p. 70). This ongoing cultural distortion exasperates identity fractures in postcolonial subject like Zaki. Indeed, his identity crisis can be traced to the legacy of colonialism. In the postcolonial contexts, the impact of colonial history cannot be disentangled from the present; its haunting presence continues to shape social, political, and

psychological realities. Zaki's European upbringing and education reveal how colonialism instilled western values in the colonized subject. This internalization underscores how colonial domination extended beyond political control to affect the very psyche of individuals. Therefore many individuals like Zaki find themselves in the no man land unable to belong to any of the other sides.

HaggAzzam serves as a compelling counterpoint to Zaki el Dessouki offering another angle on the fragility and constructed nature of masculinity in postcolonial Egypt. While Zaki's crisis is rooted in a loss of cosmopolitan identity and the psychological residue of colonial legacy, Azzam's masculinity is shaped by conservatism, social mobility, and political opportunism. HaggAzzam is a former shoe shiner who he has transformed himself into a wealthy entrepreneur and aspiring politician. He owes multiple shops in the Yacoubian building neighborhood, though his wealth is rumored to have originated from drug trafficking, which he cleverly conceals behind legitimate business ventures, and behind the façade of religious piety. He manipulates Islamic law to justify his behavior, including taking a second wife, Souad, a poor young widow. He imposes on her terms and conditions in their marriage contract, forbidding her from seeing her son and getting pregnant under any circumstances. When Souad becomes pregnant Azzam uses different tactics for her to abort, violence, threats, even pays a sheikh to advise her about abortion in the name of God, that women should abide to her husband. He then uses his money and abducts her and forces her to have an abortion.

As Janin Jones (2012, p. 3) insightfully points out, "… despite Azzam's ruthless and apparent lack of conscience, even he can be played by men who are more powerful." This observation reveals the fragility of Azzam's masculinity. Despite his fortune and apparent dominance, he remains vulnerable to humiliation by those above him. His obsessive pursuit of wealth and political power can be interpreted as a reaction to the social humiliation he once endured as a poor man. Which is reinforced by his decision to open stores in the

neighborhood that once witnessed his poverty “as though to stress his new situation in the area that had once witnessed him as a poor down-and out”. (p. 50)

Azzam’s anxiety can be attributed to the reproduction of past humiliation rooted in class oppression and powerless. To ward off the possibility of reliving such humiliation and shame he resorts to the “exploitative use of other human beings” (kabesh.2013, p.86). as Lewis (2013) notes, his “psycho-social degradation influences his efforts to define and assert dominant forms of masculinity” this is particularly evident in his relationship with his second wife, Souad. Azzam dominates her not only sexually, objectifying her, to satisfy his sexual urges and assert his manhood, but also restrict her personal freedom, imposing on her terms and conditions that serves his personal interest and maintaining a polished public face while depriving her of seeing her son and controlling her productive right. And when the terms imposed are breached, when she got pregnant, he mobilizes his wealth and political connections to force an abortion, with complete impunity.

Azzam’s masculinity is not merely a personal failing but a reflection of the gendered legacy of colonialism. His need to control Saoud and assert his authority mirrors the boarder neo-colonial system’s reliance on patriarchal and authoritarian structures to compensate for the psychological and social degradation.

By doing so al Aswany rebukes the idea that the arrogance, aggressive, and authoritarian behavior of Eastern men are inherent traits or attributed to Islam. Rather, these traits are closely linked to the authoritarian political system that has dominated postcolonial Egypt. This system, as Natasha Lindstaedt (2025) notes, concentrates power in the hand of small elite, while exercising power and repression on the general population through emergency laws (issued by Gamal Abdel Nasser.). This regime can be traced back to the British occupation in 1882 which laid foundation to the coercive institutions in Egypt (Gorman 2021, p. 14). The British often relied on trickery and manipulation to secure the

cooperation of local rulers who accepted colonial domination. However, if they were met with resistance they swiftly removed them and were replaced by individuals of low social status or even outcasts who would normally never come close to positions of leadership (Jallow, 2024). These individuals later formed the postcolonial elite in Egypt. Franz Fanon (1961) critically observed that the local elites fail to dismantle colonial structures; instead they reproduce the same colonial dynamic and act as dependent bourgeoisie, prioritizing personal gain over genuine national liberation. They maintain their dominance through corruption, repression, and exploitation of subordinate individuals perpetuating the former colonial rules.

These patterns are easily discerned in HaggAzzam's life arc. Once a poor shoe shiner, he escalated the social and political ladder through corruption and bribery, not to serve the collective good but to consolidate his personal power. His oppression of subordinate individuals is a reproduction of the colonial system.

Masculinity therefore is not a fixed or inherent identity. Rather, it is constantly shaped and re-shaped by boarder socio-political and cultural forces. Consequently, masculinity in postcolonial context is in a state of constant anxiety, struggling to conform to the shifting ideals imposed by political authority, cultural traditions, and colonial history. Therefore their need for control-especially over women is not derived by hypersexuality or innate aggression. Instead it is a reaction to deeper crisis of identity, emasculation, and humiliation. Their inability to conform to these ideals and assert autonomy in public spheres it redirects male frustration inward to the private/domestic spheres.

d. Redefining Eastern Women's Agency

Popular Western media has always depicted eastern women through the lens of passivity and oppression reinforcing Orietalist stereotypes. *The Mummy (1999*) reenacts this tendency by depicting the Egyptian women as submissive, eroticized and silent figure and this

is exemplified through the character of Ack-su-namun. She is depicted as willingly submissive, controlled by male-dominated forces, and lacking autonomy and agency. In stark contrast, the western woman, Evelyn, is depicted as intelligent, independent and superior embodying western ideals of liberation.

These contrasting depictions are at the heart of feminist studies of eastern women. While their studies prove to be crucial in exposing the patriarchal system that oppresses women both in the East and the West (Ananya Vohra.2023), their engagement with Eastern women's experiences is often ambivalent. They more or less subconsciously reproduce the same 18th and 19th century Orietalist discourse, by constantly depicting eastern women as passive, submissive, victims, lacking agency (Mahmood 2006, p. 43). Therefore placing themselves as savior of these women, perpetuating depiction of the east as a constant victim in need of western intervention (scharff 2011, p. 130). Western feminists often promote a universal view of agency, deeply rooted in secular, liberal, and individual ideals, which do not fit all cultural contexts as a result ignoring other modes of agencies.

Against this backdrop, Alaa al Aswany does not depict his female characters as simple victims of their culture or liberated in the western terms. He explores how they handle their lives in a web of patriarchal, cultural and economical constraints challenging both the orienatalist clichés- that wrongly assumed that women's desire for submission is a fixed natural and timeless part of their culture (Saba Mahmood. 2006), and the boarder feminist understanding of concept of agency. Women agency is deeply influenced by Egypt's socio-political, cultural and economic conditions. These conditions limit women's options, but also they create the territory in which women act and define their agency as exemplified through distinct female characters.

Busayna is Taha's childhood friend, and his girlfriend. She lives with her family on the roof of the Yacoubian building. She is an optimistic woman who has great dreams for her

future, getting her diploma and then marrying Taha. However, her dream is cut short when her father dies and she is burdened with financially supporting her family. She hunts for jobs but every time she quits because of sexual harassment. But her mother's hunting words remind her that she needs to feed her siblings

> It also became clear to her that year that her mother had changed completely; for whenever Busayna left a job because of the men's importunities, her mother would great the news with silence akin to exasperation…she told Busayna as she got up to leave the room "your brother and sisters need every penny you earn. A cleaver girl can look after herself and keep her job". (p. 42)

As a result, Busayna finds herself trying to balance survival and personal dignity. Her financial situation coerces her to give sexual favors for her bosses in exchange for some money. Despite these humiliations, Busayna does not fully s while men in her society see her body as something to control and exploit, Busayna uses it strategically for her personal gains.

> She discovered…that her beautiful and provocative body, her wide, dark-brown eyes and full lips and her voluptuous breasts and tremulous, rounded backside with it soft buttocks, all had an important role to play in her dealing with people. It became clear to her that all men…were utter weaklings in front of a beautiful woman… [she would] stick out her voluptuous breasts, then immediately enjoy…the way men panted after her gave her a gloating pleasure similar to that of revenge (p.42)

This awareness marks a shift from a passive victim to active agency, she works within the same norms imposed on her to negotiate and assert her power and control. The description of men as "utter weakling" underscores the weakness of a man in the face of a beautiful woman, and Busayna wittingly picks up on it and uses it to her advantage as "revenge". This shows that even though men hold social and economic power in patriarchal society, women in turn are not utterly helpless. Instead, they exert a different kind of influence through certain social and cultural practices, such as sexuality, which provides them with a form of empowerment in non-liberal contexts. (Ahmed 1999 as cited in Saba Mahmood 2006, pp. 40, 41)

She later leaves her job and works with MalakKhila who persuades her to deceive ZakiBey so that Malak can take possession of his apartment. Busayna take the job thinking that Zaki is just other perverted old men who she won't hesitate to misguide. However, her deep involvement with Zaki makes her realize that he is not "a bad men", and he makes her feel wanted and cherished. With all this new realization, guilt comes crashing on her, changing her perspective.

> Busayna had started working on Zaki El Dessouki, waiting for the right time to trick him into signing the contract, but it wasn't an easy matter because he wasn't the hateful old man that she'd imagined…he was kind…treated her with respect. She never felt with him that she was performing a job..Their encounters in bed didn't leave her with the feeling of disgust..However, her growing admiration for him irritated her somewhat because it called up inside her feeling of guilt. He was kind to her and she was betraying him. (p. 160, 161)

After the realizationBusayna calls off the deal with Malak, unable to carry on with the scheme. This act of undoing the trap set for her aging lover once she realizes his kindness shows that Busayna is not a passive victim caught in the web of circumstances that are beyond her. Rather she is a woman who can decide for herself and act up for what she believes is right. The way she negotiates within her society reveals her multidimensional identity; she thinks feels and knows when to walk off from things that are against her morals.

In this light, Western feminist conception of agency often "sharply limits our ability to understand and negotiate the lives of women whose sense of self, aspirations, and projects have been shaped by nonliberal traditions" (Mahmood, p. 33). Rather than equating agency solely with the act of rebellion and outright resistance domination, Mahmood urges us to rethink it "as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (Ibid). This means recognizing that women's agency can include inhabiting the oppressive norms and negotiate within them rather than subverting them. These acts can emerge unexpectedly in surprising places, and might take forms that might not look like traditional resistance.

One significant site where agency emerges is in sexuality. For many feminists, sexuality "is seen as the primary means by which men control women and maintain their power over [them]" (Diane Richardson, p. 74). This observation is partially true, in the novel many men like Zaki, and Azzam use sex as a cite of domination where they reclaim their identity in the expanse of women characters. However, sexuality is also where women agency emerges. It is within this space that these women find their voice, their sense of self and financial support.

Early in the novel, Busaynais burdened with the heavy responsibility of financially supporting her family. As a result she has been struggling internally with feelings of guilt, shame, and moral distress over the compromises she has to make to survive that often clash with her religion or personal beliefs.

> As time passed her rendezvous with Talal in the storeroom had an impact on her that she would never have imagined she found herself no longer able to perform the morning prayers… because inwardly she was ashamed to face "our lord" because she felt herself unclean, however much she performed the ablutions… this violent feelings of guilt left a legacy of bitterness and cruelty. (pp. 46, 47)

However, her later intimate encounters with Zaki mark a turning point in her emotional and spiritual turmoil. She experiences different kind of love where she does not feel used or dirty, but makes her feel liberated and transformed.

> She cannot describe her feelings with any other word than love. It wasn't the hot, burning love she'd felt for Taha but another different kind of love, calm and deep-seated, something closer to peace of mind, and confidence, and respect. She loved him [zaki], and having worked that out she was freed forever from her misgivings. She began to live carefree and happy and started spending most of the day and a good part of the night with ZakiBey. (p. 188)

This underscores how sexuality in the novel is explored not only a site of domination, but also, as Busayna's feelings indicate, as a source of compassion, transformation and empowerment within constraining social structures.Other women in the novel experience this terrain differently. Souad's experience, for instance, offers another perspective on this complex terrain. Many scholars when reading her character tend to project

her as a "sex slave" (Lewis, 2013) tethered and controlled by HaggAzzam. This interpretation is partly accurate reflecting the rigid power dynamic in a patriarchal society where men have the upper-hand and women's bodies are compromised. However, such readings risk overlooking the significant and subtle ways in which Souad exercises agency within this oppressive framework.

Souad agreement to marry HaggAzzamshould be understood not as a submission but as a mutual arrangement shaped by her harsh financial realities. Souad endured extreme hardships and hunger while trying to raise her child as noted in the novel.

> She'd endured hardship and gone hungry to raise her son and though men all had different faces, bodies, and clothes, their look was always the same- violating her, undressing her promising her everything if she'd say yes. She had resisted fiercely and with difficulty and feared that one day she might get tired and give in… the wages were poor, the child's expenses grew, and the burden was as heavy as a mountain (p. 127)

This passage highlights the brutal economic and social pressures that force Souad into precarious and exploitative situations in face of limited options. It also stresses how Souad is not a passive victim without autonomy, like *The Mummy's* character Ack-Su-Namun, she resists the perverted approaches of men fiercely and is able to preserve control over her body. This demonstrates strength that is frowned upon by feminists and western media. Nonetheless, Souad can only endure so much of her situation. Therefore, HaggAzzam's approach of marriage comes like a once in a life time deal, a way out for her from her actual situation.

> …and when HaggAzzam asked for her hand in legal marriage, she worked things out minutely. She would give the Hagg her body in return for her son's expenses…the days of emotions were over and the whole thing was now calculated- one thing in return for another, by agreement and mutual consent. (p. 128)

Within the polygamous marriage built on sexual pleasure that often seems one-sided, Souad is not completely helpless; she negotiates covertly within this limited option of her. She approaches the marriage pragmatically, calculating how to manage the relationship to her

advantage to keep both parties satisfied. Although Azzam might seem in control of her body, she skillfully manipulates the situation to maintain her own interest.

Sexuality can also become a site of survival and negotiation when the situation calls for it. Thus one should understand why Souad accepts such deal; it is not because she is a victim of her culture, but because here economic situation coerced her to compromise her values in exchange for financial support. It is worthy to note that sexuality in the novel is explored by Alaa Al Aswany as "a mutual interest albeit the purpose is different" (Al Areqi, p. 74) where women sacrifice their reputation for money and men like Azzam and Zaki use it to get pleasure from it.

The complexity of Souad's agency is further highlighted in the novel's climax, when she gets pregnant and Azzam tries to force her to abort it. rather than submitting to his threats, she fiercely resists and fights to keep the child. However, Azzam abducts her and pays people to abort the fetus by mobilizing his wealth. This shows the unequal distribution of power in Egypt, where the wretched are but mere scapegoats for the small elites.

The women on the roof experience sexuality in remarkably different ways. Their sexuality is less about calculated exchange or protection and more about personal freedom and the assertion of identity. Al Aswany highlights it by focusing on the desires "of the women dwelling in the rooftop of the building" (Lewis, 2013):

> As for the women and without regard for their degree of religiosity or morality, they all love sex enormously and will whisper the secrets of the bed to one another…they do not love it simply as a way to quenching lust but because sex, and their husbands' greed for it, make them feel that despite all the misery they suffer they are still women, beautiful and desired by their men folk…do these brief hours of pleasure not furnish her with proof that her wretched life is somehow despite everything blessed with success? It would a skilled painter to convey to us the expression on the face of a woman on the roof of a Friday morning. (p. 15)

The way women perceive their sexual relationships with their husbands significantly shapes their self-understanding and informs their sense of identity and position within a

patriarchal society. In a way, these brief moments of intimacy with their husbands are moments of camaraderie and affirmation of their youth and desirability in the face of social invisibility. Thus their agency emerges within this man made terrain, and it becomes “the only space within which they have a voice in the building from which they can exercise and assert their power” (AyobamiOnanuga, p. 98).

Women’s agency is not only expressed through outright refusal or direct challenge to oppressive norms. It can also exist within the very systems that appear to enforce submission and oppression. What may look like compliance or victimhood on the surface can actually be a way women access and exercise their agency, by negotiating, embodying, and sometimes transforming these same norms to their benefits. In *TheYacoubian Building (2002),* this form of agency emerges in spaces created by men to control and oppress women. Yet, the women work within this system and experience it differently, finding in it sources of pleasure, financial support, compassion, and reaffirmation of their youth and potency.

V. General conclusion

This comparative study of *The Mummy* (1999) and *The Yacoubian Building* (2002) has examined the representation of Egypt through Orientalist and Postcolonial frameworks. These works reveal contrasting portrayals: *The Mummy* reproduces Orientalist stereotypes aligned

with Western geopolitical interests, while *The Yacoubian Building* offers a nuanced and authentic depiction of Egyptian society that reflects socio-political complexities.

Beyond highlighting these contrasting portrayals, this research has shown how authentic cultural texts can resist Orientalism, by foregrounding lived realities, the dynamic between power and subjectivity, and the implicit forms of agency in non-liberal contexts that are often misunderstood from Western perspectives. By applying multiple Egyptian theoretical frameworks, the study emphasizes the inseparability of socio-political conditions from everyday life and urban spaces in Egypt.

This study contributes to existing research by providing a comparative analysis that brings Western media representations and Eastern literature into literary dialogue, addressing the gap in previous research by offering an alternative means of subverting Orientalism beyond merely identifying stereotypes. Ultimately, this investigation affirms that resisting Orientalism requires the promotion of authentic narratives that challenge stereotypes and promote a deeper understanding of Eastern societies.

Future research could expand on these findings by exploring other cultural texts and media forms to further deconstruct the stereotypes imposed on other Eastern countries, giving them a voice to redefine their identity, ideally through theoretical frameworks rooted in their specific cultural, social, and political contexts.

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