



Material Possessions and Class Struggle: A Marxist Analysis of Albaydat Walhajar [*The Egg and the Stone*] (1990)

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a Marxist analysis to explore Albaydat Walhajar [*The Egg and the Stone*]. It is a film that critiques societal structures, class conflicts, and ideological transformations within Egypt. Anchored in Marxist critical theory, the study examines the historical narrative of class struggle, the construction of ruling-class ideologies to perpetuate domination, and the inherent contradictions within societies that fuel socio-economic tensions. It also examines the challenges of realizing communist principles, as reflected in the film. The theoretical section outlines Karl Marx's central ideas, the thinkers who influenced him, and contributions by prominent Marxist theorists. The practical analysis investigates the protagonist's partial resemblance to Marx, the ideological underpinnings of the text, character conflicts, societal contradictions, and the factors contributing to the failure of communist ideals. The film portrays the protagonist's ideological shift from proletariat advocacy to bourgeois support, symbolizing Egypt's broader transformation from socialism to capitalism under President Sadat. Through its bold, direct exploration of oppression, ideology, and exploitation, the film condemns ignorance and societal weakness, advocating education and self-expression as tools to resolve class conflict. By urging audiences to challenge the status quo and address societal issues, the film serves as a call to action, inspiring people to embrace active, transformative roles in their communities.

Woe to the world when the educated lose
their way and the cultured are led astray.

— Mahmoud Abu Zeid, *The Egg and
The Stone*

Introduction

The Egg and the Stone (1990) is a film

written by Mahmoud Abu Zeid (1941-2016),
directed by Ali Abdel Khaleq (1944-2022), and
starring Ahmed Zaki (1946-2005), Ma'li Zayed
(1953-2014), and Mamdouh Wafi (1951-2004).

Abu Zeid's works are distinguished by
their blend of philosophical and social themes,
presented in an engaging and accessible manner.

Known for his simplicity, directness and comedic flair, his creations have earned him recognition as one of the most prominent writers in Egyptian cinema during the 1980s. He has consistently sought to uplift society and foster greater awareness of positive change; he also attempts to "connect deeply the very personal with the universal" (Omar Abu El Majd 00.43). Therefore, viewers find a great similarity between his main characters and the writer himself, as is the case in: *Al Aar* [Shame], *Al Keif* [Drug Abuse], *Jari alwuhush* [The Monsters' Quest], and *Albaydat Walhajar* [The Egg and the Stone].

He skillfully employs some Quranic verses and the Prophet's Sayings in many of his works. This integration of religious elements deepens the impact of the storytelling, leaving the audience not only with an entertaining experience, but also a meditative experience: "Astrologers lie even if they tell the truth" [Even a broken clock is right twice a day]. Citing Al Quran Al Karim and Al Sunat Al Nabawia appears more in *The Monsters' Quest*, where it explores the dynamic and often contentious relationship between religion and science, examining their conflicting perspectives, underlying principles, and the challenges that arise when these two worldviews intersect.

This study presents a Marxist reading of *The Egg and the Stone*, examining several key points that reflect the themes and perspectives of Marxist criticism. First, Marxism views history as a series of conflicts driven by class struggle. The characters and their interactions represent different social classes or ideologies that conflict with each other (capitalism/socialism, religion/science, and reality/superstition). This conflict is represented in different forms, whether through characters who adopt capitalist or communist ideals, or through the broader societal context that the work depicts. Second, the paper examines the concept of ideology, as Marxism indicates that ideologies are the product of the ruling class for maintaining dominance. Third, Marxism emphasizes the contradictions inherent in societies, and these contradictions often lead to social and economic tensions, even among the people with the same ideologies. This can be seen in the conflicts between the Ministers of Interior

(Saleh Fayyad & Jasser Sahwan) and the clash of ideas as between asceticism and consumerism. Finally, it examines the reasons for the perceived impossibility of implementing communist principles. However, the study does not focus on the art of direction or its impact on the content of the work for a couple of reasons: scope limitation, specialization, and difficulty in attribution.

The approach followed in this study is theoretical and analytical. The first part deals with a brief overview of Karl Marx, the axis of his three ideas, the most important writers who influenced him, the main characteristics of Marxist criticism, and finally the most important thinkers of Marxist thought and the extent of their contributions. The practical part monitors the extent of partial similarity between the protagonist of the novel and Marx himself, the ideologies reflected in the text, the multiple conflicts between the characters of the work, and contradictions. Finally, the study investigates the perceived impossibility of applying communist principles, emphasizing Marxism's claim that capitalism generates conditions that obstruct its full implementation. It analyzes how these conditions manifest within the text, thwarting the characters' efforts to adopt communist ideals or compelling them to conform to the dominant ideology, whether capitalism, illusion, deception, or superstition.

Charles E. Pressler views the critic's role as uncovering and condemning anti-proletarian ideologies while highlighting their pervasive impact on the lives of the working class. More significantly, Marxists aim to demonstrate to the working class how they can overcome their oppression by embracing socialist principles. The goal is to inspire action, drive social change, spark revolution, establish socialism, and eventually dismantle capitalism (178). This may bring an end to exploitation, oppression, injustice, and marginalization, paving the way for a utopian vision that transforms society into an earthly paradise.

Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883)

Marx is well-known as an encyclopedist, a prophet of the working class, a moral atheist, and the first to call on philosophers to try to

change the world, rather than just explain it:

Marx declares that philosophy must become reality. One could no longer be content with interpreting the world; one must be concerned with transforming it, which means transforming both the world itself and human consciousness of it. This, in turn, requires a critique of experience together with a critique of ideas." (Henri Chambre & David McLellan *Par.* 2)

This is also what Mustata' Al-Ta'azi, the protagonist of the film, calls for when he stresses that "Philosophy should serve the needs of society" (minute 33.26). Both Marx and Mustata' seek to "uplift society as a whole and improve its collective consciousness, focusing on societal transformation rather than personal gain or self-change, while expecting nothing in return—an approach aligns with Stoic philosophy" (Ahmed Edesoki 08.51).

According to Dennis Igwe (2022), Marx is influenced by ancient Greek philosophers (Democritus, Aristotle and Epicurus), German idealist philosophy (Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, and the Young Hegelians), British philosophers and political economists (John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, and David Ricardo), utopian socialists (Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier), revolutionaries (Louis Auguste Blanqui and Louis Blanc), and, anarchists (Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin) and other influences (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Darwin, and Fredrich Engels) (49-81).

Marx's funeral was attended by only 13-25 people, led by Friedrich Engels. His death, as some analysts claim, was announced after the end of the burial ceremony to prevent a workers' revolution that spares nothing, leaves nothing intact, and burns/blackens the skins of capitalists and bourgeoisie.

Marx's theory centers on three key concepts: the transformation from quantitative to qualitative change, the unity and struggle of opposites between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the negation of the negation. They are most prominently reflected in his later works. In *Capital*, he examines the mechanisms of capitalist economies. In *The Communist*

Manifesto, co-written with Engels, he articulates the principles of communism and predicts the eventual collapse of capitalism. Finally, in *Critique of the Gotha Program*, he analyzes the transition from capitalism to socialism, emphasizing the role of the state in this transformative process.

First, Marx argues that revolution is inevitable, much like water naturally transitions from a solid to a liquid state when it melts or boils. He views the shift from capitalism to socialism as a qualitative transformation that follows a series of quantitative changes, such as significant growth in production, an increase in the number of revolutionary workers, the accumulation of wealth by the bourgeoisie, a steep decline in workers' wages, and similar developments.

Second, drawing from Hegel, Marx emphasizes that contradiction is the driving force behind movement, life, and all impactful phenomena. Contradiction is a universal feature of all entities, events, and living beings, where internal opposites coexist and struggle within a single entity. These opposites are interdependent, like the poles of a magnet. In various societies, classes such as masters and slaves, feudal lords and peasants, coexist in conflict. Contradictions inevitably lead to conflict, which, in turn, drives development and change. Without conflict, life stagnates and remains static.

Finally, Marx asserts that capitalism can be dismantled through the state assuming ownership of all means of production. This process follows dialectical progressions: a subject or idea (thesis) encounters its opposite (antithesis), culminating in their resolution or synthesis.

General features of Marxist criticism

Marxist criticism is a literary theory that analyzes literature through the lens of Marxist ideology, examining how literary works reflect and critique the economic, social, and political aspects of society, focusing on themes such as class struggle, historical materialism, ideology, and the role of literature in shaping collective consciousness. This approach sees literature as a product of its historical and economic context, exposes oppressive power dynamics, and calls for

radical social change.

Among the most important theorists of Marxist thought and the extent of their diverse contributions are: György Lukács (proponent of the theory of reflection and a staunch critic of postmodernist approaches), Bertolt Brecht (originator of the alienation effect term, advocate for the non-eternal nature of aesthetic laws, and challenger of Aristotle's critical ideas), the Frankfurt School (employing psychological aspects), Theodor Adorno (proponent of the concept of detaching literature from reality), Louis Althusser (advocate of the theory of social formation—where literature is not a form of ideology—employing scientific approaches to literature, and applying the ideological state apparatus in place of ideology), Terry Eagleton (Literature is a unique production of ideology rather than a mere reflection of it, and later embraces modern and contemporary critical theories), Lucien Goldmann (proponent of the idea that texts are not the product of individual genius but are constructed upon mental structures that transcend and surpass the individual), Pierre Macherey (advocator for emphasizing the unspoken elements within the text), and Fredric Jameson (unveiling the political unconscious embedded in the text to highlight dominant ideologies; he also substitutes philosophy with politics as a means of addressing global issues), and Antonio Gramsci (coined the term hegemony).

Historical materialism is one of the features of Marxist criticism. Marxist critics believe that the economic base of society—the means of production and distribution—determines everything else, including its institutions, social structure, and ideology. Literary works are seen as products of their historical and economic contexts. *The Egg and the Stone* serves as a quintessential example of a work analyzed through historical materialism. It employs a diverse cast of characters to symbolize various social classes in the Egyptian society. It critiques the emergence of capitalism during the era of President Sadat (1918–1981), often referred to as the "Era of Infitah" [Open-door policy].

Marxists see literature as a reflection of

the ongoing class struggle between social classes, and they analyze how texts represent and reinforce class hierarchies, as well as how these patriarchal hierarchies are overcome. *The Egg and the Stone*, for instance, portrays the sharp divide between the aristocracy and the impoverished majority, emphasizing the injustices endured by the lower classes, their fight for equality, and the efforts to resist exploitation, marginalization, and oppression.

Marxist critics study how literature can challenge or support the dominant ideology in society. They are interested in how texts perpetuate or subvert the status quo. The text under study aligns with capitalism and superstition while opposing communism and science, as embodied by the protagonist, who later rejects all his communist ideas. Neither does the film critique bourgeois values and societal norms nor does it employ alienation techniques, as Brecht does in his plays. It disrupts the audience's passive acceptance of the status quo and inspires action rather than passive emotional responses like lamentation or idle approval.

Economic determinism is the idea that economic relationships are the basis of all other relationships in society. Marxist critics look at how economic conditions affect the behavior and motivations of characters in a text. This study examines the consequences of the protagonist losing his job, being compelled to engage with and practice magic and sorcery, for exploiting people both financially and sexually in addition to clouding their perceptions and understanding.

Marxists analyze how literature is a form of cultural production, which is often commodified under capitalism. They look at how literature can be used to promote or critique capitalist values. *The Egg and the Stone*, for instance, uncovers the harsh conditions faced by the protagonist, highlighting how capitalism exploits both people and the environment to maximize material, financial, and moral gains.

Marxist critics are interested in showing how literature shapes collective identity and class consciousness. They analyze how texts can inspire social change by awakening the oppressed to their conditions. For example, the film's opening sheds light on the struggles of

marginalized groups in Egypt, advocating for a more inclusive and just society while urging readers to confront systemic injustice and explore ways to address it. However, the ending proves disappointing, highlighting issues such as the dominance of a single political party, the lack of genuine education, intellectuals neglecting their societal responsibilities, the absence of freedom, and people's fixation on basic needs like food, drink, and sex.

Marxist criticism, like other critical theories, provides a specific framework for understanding literature. It seeks to uncover underlying systems of power and spark discussions about societal change, focusing on economic and social contexts.

Applied Study

Idea of Conflict and Ideology

Marx's dialectical materialism critiques and departs from Hegel's idealism while adapting elements of his dialectical method. Hegel's philosophy posits that history progresses through the development of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. He views history as guided by a divine, metaphysical force. In contrast, Marx argues that material conditions, especially economic relations and class struggle, are the true drivers of historical change. He applies the dialectical process to the material world, focusing on the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. For him, history is firmly grounded in observable realities like labor and production, rejecting metaphysical or divine explanations. His famous assertion, "The history of all societies is the history of class struggle," encapsulates this view, tracing societal evolution from feudalism to capitalism and ultimately communism.

According to Dino Felluga, human societal evolution, as outlined by Marx and Engels, progresses through six stages:

Human history reflects an evolving progression of economic systems shaped by class struggle. It begins with communalism, the earliest stage marked by small, nomadic groups in Paleolithic hunter-gatherer societies collectively

sharing resources. The advent of agriculture introduced surplus resources and social classes, giving rise to slavery, where ancient civilizations like Egypt, Greece, and Rome exemplified systems in which masters owned land and slaves provided labor. Following the fall of the Roman Empire, feudalism emerged, with serfs working the land for feudal lords in exchange for protection and limited rights, fostering class conflict between nobles and serfs. As serfs gained freedom, capitalism took hold, requiring workers to sell their labor to factory owners, leading to wealth accumulation by capitalists and widespread worker exploitation, which ignited labor movements and strikes. Socialism arose as a transitional stage, with the state controlling production to redistribute resources, as seen in Soviet Russia and Maoist China, though challenges like state control persisted. Finally, communism represents the envisioned ideal of a classless, stateless society with collective ownership of production and distribution based on need, eliminating class conflicts and constructs like the state, religion, and politics. This historical progression underscores humanity's continuous struggle to reshape economic and social structures (*Pars.* 1-5).

The Egg and the Stone opens with a scene capturing the tension between Danush Bey, the building owner, and the rooftop residents, who symbolize the proletariat. The building itself serves as a metaphor for Egypt. Representing capitalism, Danush is determined to rent out a room on the rooftop to secure personal gains "by any means and at any price" (6:50). He unapologetically criticizes society, accusing it of ignorance, cultural decay, and the collapse of education, and framing the unrenting the room as a blemish on Egypt's reputation. He also demeans the inhabitants of the rooftop, referring to them as animals: "The bathroom is shared between you and the animals" (minute 9:22). He belittles Qamar, a woman who washes clothes for a living, calling her an *arashanna*¹ with a foul mouth and a corrupted mind, adding that all she needs is a tail to be a cow.

¹ A malicious woman who creates conflict and shows no mercy, whether through her words or actions (*Dictionary of Meanings*).

Referring to the residents as “animals” is a dehumanizing act by the homeowner, implying they are inferior and unworthy of basic dignity. This language reflects a lack of respect and sensitivity, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and asserting power over the residents. By diminishing their status, he creates an unhealthy power dynamic, portraying them as unclean or subordinate, and justifying domination and marginalization. This behavior highlights the concept of ideology and the exploitative relationship between the bourgeoisie and lower social classes, where the wealthy view themselves as privileged and entitled to control others.

The concept of ideology, first coined by Destutt de Tracy as the “science of ideas,” has evolved into a framework for understanding how beliefs, values, and ideas shape societies and maintain power structures. Marx critiques ideology as a tool of the ruling bourgeoisie to oppress the proletariat, creating a superstructure that perpetuates economic inequalities and obscures class realities. Gramsci expands this by exploring hegemony, where the dominant class shapes cultural norms and values, gaining the consent of the masses. Althusser further develops this idea with “interpellation,” describing how individuals’ identities and beliefs are molded by ideological state apparatuses like schools and media, ensuring the dominance of the ruling class without overt force (Pressler 168-74). Eagleton, aligning with Althusser, examines the intricate relationship between literature and ideology, arguing that texts rework ideological discourses to create a “realistic” effect, while Machery contends that literature produces unique ideology, necessitating criticism that investigates how ideological discourses are crafted within texts (*Criticism and Ideology* 42).

From a Marxist perspective, ideology plays a crucial role in sustaining the power of the ruling class. Classism, for instance, is an ideology that assigns a person's worth based on their social class. According to this belief, individuals from more privileged classes are deemed superior because excellence is seen as “inherited” by nature rather than earned through effort, education, or experience. This perspective portrays those at the top of the social hierarchy as

inherently more intelligent, responsible, trustworthy, and moral than those below them, who are stereotyped as lazy and irresponsible. Consequently, it is considered natural and justified for the upper classes to hold positions of power and leadership, as they are seen as uniquely suited to such roles and the only ones capable of executing them effectively (Tyson 59).

The working class calls the police to prevent the landlord from opening and re-renting that cursed room. From Marx’s perspective, capitalism heavily depends on the support of the state, government, and religion, leveraging its financial power to shape laws, ideas, and arts and to suppress revolutions.

Marx describes money as the zealous god of Israel, one that abolishes all other gods of humanity, reducing them to mere commodities:

Money is the jealous god of Israel, in face of which no other god may exist. Money degrades all the gods of man – and turns them into commodities. Money is the universal self-established value of all things. It has, therefore, robbed the whole world – both the world of men and nature – of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it. (*Karl Marx: Early Writings* 239)

Similarly, Sophocles highlights the destructive power of money, stating that it ruins cities, drives people from their homes, corrupts noble hearts, incites atrocities, and promotes scandals:

In all mankind there is no worse custom/Than money. It corrupts cities,/It drives men from their homes,/It seduces them and instructs their otherwise/Capable minds in the ways of savagery./It taught mankind wickedness./It makes every act ungodly./But every man who accepts such bribery/Will pay price at some point or other. (*Antigone* 13)

This idea resonates in the text of the study, where the government fully supports the homeowner and the representative of capitalism, protecting the oppressors while punishing the oppressed. In despair, Qamar cries out: “We entrusted you, O government, with the mantle of

our protection, yet you safeguarded the flames and left us to endure their torment” (minute 3:08).

This expresses a deep sense of disappointment and betrayal toward the government. It highlights how the oppressed, seeking protection and support, often feel abandoned and further burdened. People look to the government to shield them from exploitation and injustice, expecting policies that safeguard their rights, improve working conditions, and ensure fair wages. However, the government's actions often favor the capitalist class, prioritizing tax breaks for the wealthy and neglecting regulations that would benefit the working class. This results in heightened exploitation, deteriorating living conditions, and growing inequality.

According to Lukács, if individuals wish to reclaim control over their lives and livelihoods, they must collectively own the means of production (Selden et al. 88). However, the surface dwellers fail to unite and take decisive action, such as initiating a revolutionary uprising against the capitalists and bourgeoisies. This inaction is largely due to their preoccupation with personal and everyday concerns. For example, Qamar becomes distracted by her own struggles, such as addressing her spinsterhood and seeking quick, superficial solutions. Moreover, the ruling class perpetuates its dominance by promoting various ideologies—patriotism, national interest, religion, and theories of internal and external conspiracies—that divert attention from systemic issues and suppress revolutionary efforts.

Marx views religion as a human construct and describes it as the opium of the people. He argues that religious unhappiness is both an expression of genuine suffering and a protest against it. Religion serves as a sigh of the oppressed, the heart of a heartless world, and the spirit of social conditions that have stripped away the soul. As the opium of the people, religion is often wielded as a tool to subjugate the masses, persuading them to endure harsh lives with beliefs like, “Life is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever.” The tyrant’s primary goal is to impoverish the people, while the role of the tyrant’s cleric is to render them unaware of their plight:

Mustata': Have you ever seen a ghost?

Tawali: I haven't, but plenty of people claim they have.

Mustata': I doubt you could find anyone who truly has. Everyone hears about ghosts, but no one has seen one with their own eyes. It's all nonsense and superstition.

Tawali: You're always fixated on ghosts. These are topics even mentioned in religions.

Mustata': Religions describe ghosts as spirits of the dead, lingering and wandering around the places they once lived! (11.9)

Beliefs in ghosts and spirits are deeply rooted in villages, folklore, and traditional cultures worldwide, often intertwined with cultural, religious, and spiritual practices passed down through generations. Many traditional societies view the spirit world as an integral part of their reality, inhabited by spirits, ancestors, and supernatural beings that influence daily life. Ancestor veneration is common, with rituals, offerings, and prayers seeking guidance, protection, and blessings from ancestral spirits.

Sacred texts, myths, and oral traditions often discuss ghosts and spirits, providing explanations and guidance on interacting with them. Rituals to appease spirits may include offerings, chanting, drumming, dancing, and vows. Protective measures, such as amulets and space-cleansing rituals, are also prevalent to ward off negative energies. While spirits are revered, there is fear of their potential harm if disrespected. This fear influences behavior and avoidance of certain places. Spiritual specialists, such as shamans and priests, play crucial roles as intermediaries, performing rituals, offering advice, and navigating the physical and spiritual realms.

The critic's task, as Lukács sees it, is to show how the characters in the text are typical of their historical, social, and economic environment and the hero's worldview (Bressler 171). Mustata' is forced to leave his luxurious apartment with his lifelong companion Tawali because he cannot pay the rent and refuses to exploit students by brainwashing them or giving

them private lessons in philosophy, because he seeks to live freely despite facing challenging financial conditions. The friendship between them symbolizes the friendship between Marx and Engels.

The following dialogue between the hero and his pharmacist brother, Asi, shows the extent of the luxury that the former lived in, as his father inherits him an apartment consisting of five rooms, in which horses gallop:

Asi: You have become the laughingstock of all people. A room on the roof! You forgot who you are! You shamed all the Upper Egyptians.

Mustata': So I should steal!?

Asi: By God, brother, it would be more honorable for you. ... I wish you had gotten a diploma in industry, or even become a mechanic. At least you would have kept your mind. Instead of this madness." (25.46-26.25, 34- 35.8)

Asi's perspective aligns with Tawali's, but the hero remains steadfast in his stance, staying true to his principles, bolstering his self-respect and confidence, and striving to educate others. The characters' names carry significant symbolism as well: Asi represents someone tough and unyielding, as strong as iron, whose opinion of his brother and opposition remains firm. Tawali, on the other hand, symbolizes compliance, companionship, and submission. Mustata's symbolism lies in his potential and ability to accomplish his goals in life, though this is realized only after abandoning his past principles.

Epicurean philosophy places great value on friendship, emphasizing its importance as a source of pleasure and emotional support. Epicureans regard true friendships as offering comfort, trust, and companionship, considering them superior to romantic or sexual relationships. In the study's text, we observe a deep and enduring friendship between Mustata' and Tawali, marked by their decision to remain unmarried. This relationship offers a lens through which to examine the shifting values in Egyptian society during the transition from socialism to capitalism under President Sadat's economic reforms. The former represents a materialistic

perspective, viewing everything as a commodity, while the latter embodies traditional values such as honesty, integrity, and moral behavior. Their dialogue reflects the broader societal conflict between adapting to capitalist values, where material success often outweighs morality, and holding onto traditional principles.

This tension highlights the challenges individuals face in a rapidly changing society. Mustata' may find it difficult to uphold his moral principles in a world that seems to devalue them, while those aligned with Tawali/Asi's materialism achieve short-term success at the potential expense of morality and integrity. The dynamic between these characters invites reflection on the compromises and ethical dilemmas individuals confront in their pursuit of success, offering a nuanced exploration of the impact of societal change on values and ethics:

Tawali: Who can survive on just their salary these days?

Mustata': Then what am I supposed to live on?

Tawali: Find a way. Do something. Soften the situation. Offer some private lessons or write up summaries for students.

Mustata': Forbidden/ That's unethical.

Tawali: Really? Then why don't you do it? Is there anything forbidden that can't be done? It's a three-ring circus.

Mustata': What are you talking about?!

Tawali: The tinsmith is like a doctor. And it's a madhouse out there.

Mustata': By God, you're a ridiculous man. You can talk about nonsense all day. (10.5)

This dialogue embodies the moral dilemma and societal changes brought about by Egypt's transition from socialism to capitalism. It reflects a society in which consumerism and material success have become more important than traditional values of honesty and integrity. The suggestion of using tricks and deception to improve income, along with the devaluation of traditionally respected professions, paints a picture of society grappling with the consequences of rapid economic change.

Here, we recall Lukács's concept of "reification," which refers to the transformation

of everything into a commodity that can be bought and sold. The Frankfurt School critiques American society as saturated with mass culture and commercialism, which has infiltrated every aspect of life (Selden et al. 91). This phenomenon has extended globally, including to Egypt, where contemporary society seems to embrace the principles of Epicurean philosophy over the Stoic one. Consumerism, as Tyson notes, is another pillar of the American Dream, encapsulated by the ideology: "I am only as much as I buy." This serves two ideological functions simultaneously: it creates the illusion that I can be "as good as" the wealthy if I purchase what they buy or an affordable imitation (even on credit), while also enriching the wealthy who produce and sell these consumer goods and profit further from the 15 to 20 percent interest charged on credit card debt (60).

The protagonist suggests solutions to resist the grip of consumerism on humanity by either adapting to the environment or learning to live without unnecessary consumption:

Mustata': Social adaptation involves adjusting an individual's abilities to align with the social environment around them.

Dahi: But what if the social environment is corrupt? How does someone adapt in that case?

Second student: With a couple of smokes [drug use].

Mustata' (addressing the second student): This is in the cinema. Not in sociology. Oh, Qafa² [you bonehead]. (turning to Dahi) Sit down, Dahi. If the environment is corrupt, a person must rely on their intellect to avoid being influenced.

Third student: How does one rely on their intellect, teacher?

Mustata': By making it the master of their desires and the guide for their aspirations.

Third student: And how does someone

control their desires?

Mustata': By practicing moderation in consumption.

Third student: So, we stop eating, sir?

Mustata': No, we eat mindfully. Humans are naturally consumers, but if their consumption spirals into excess, their lives can spiral into chaos. It leads to anxiety, inner conflicts, and harmful behaviors. Ultimately, they lose the ability to truly enjoy the pleasures they relentlessly chase. (23.07)

This dialogue barges into the complexities of consumption in a corrupt social environment, emphasizing that we live to eat, not eat to live. It suggests that true adaptation and escape from corruption comes from controlling desires and appetites, consuming wisely, and engaging intellectually with the world. This critique of consumerism and call for mindfulness aligns with broader discussions about the impact of materialism and excess on individuals and society. The vision of Mustata' also reflects the principles of Epicurean philosophy, which values pleasure and enjoyment within reasonable limits and principles, the absence of pain, the value of friendship, and the lack of fear of death.

Mustata' begins his life as a staunch believer in the principles of communism, inciting students to revolt against exploitation throughout self-sufficiency: "Reducing consumption... This is blatant theft... contemptible exploitation... If something becomes too expensive for us, we leave it" (minute 24). Subsequently, his colleagues conspire against him, and the school cafeteria clerk makes a declaration: "You believe yourself to be Gandhi. This is absurd. You have a supervisor with ties/profits to the canteen" (minute 24.36). He takes the matter to the school principal, engaging in a dialogue that highlights the extent to which the text aligns with the principles of capitalism while attempting to

² The "bonehead," positioned opposite the face, is symbolic as a representation of human dignity and pride. While the face serves as the primary expression of identity and how individuals engage with others, the nape at the back carries a contrasting connotation. Dr Ali Laila, a professor of Sociology at Ain Shams University, explains that the nape's vulnerable location makes it an easy target, as it cannot be readily defended. This vulnerability renders it particularly susceptible to attacks that convey betrayal and surprise. In Egyptian culture, striking the nape is seen as one of the gravest insults, reflecting a deeply ingrained cultural sentiment. The Egyptians regard the inability to protect this exposed area as a significant affront, emphasizing the nape's unique role in the context of insult and respect (*Al-Youm Al-Sabea Newspaper* 6-8-2009).

dismantle communism and its proponents with uncompromising criticism and a lack of leniency or compassion:

Employee (addressing the school principal): You must find out a way to handle or deal with Mr Mustata'. This philosophy teacher.

School principal: Oh my God. He is such a jerk. What did he do?

Employee: Every day he's causing us problems. He's a "communist", sir.

School principal: What!

Employee: Believe me. He's a communist who spreads and spews.

Principal: He's spitting!

Employee: He is always talking on the Left. And he talks to the students about topics outside curriculum.

Principal: Topics like what?

Employee: Consumption. Exploitation. Surplus value. And all that red talk.

Principal: Oh, what a black day! (24.53)

This further underscores the resemblance between the protagonist and Marx, recalling the hardships Marx endured when he was expelled and exiled by various countries and governments. He resided in London's Soho district, known for housing the homeless and immigrants, as he dedicated his life to serving people and upholding his principles rather than pursuing personal gain. At the age of 24, Marx earned a doctorate in Greek natural philosophy from the University of Jena with a dissertation titled "The Difference in Natural Philosophy between Democritus and Epicurus" in 1841. Similarly, the film's protagonist is working on a doctoral thesis in philosophy:

Qamar: What are all these books?

Mustata': 'ana bahaddr risala³ [I'm working on a thesis].

Qamar: balash wenabbi tehader wa'ana mawgudda [For heaven's sake, please don't communicate with/or invoke the spirits while I'm around!]" (37.19).

Mustata' is referred for investigation, his name is removed from the payroll, and the legal investigator in the directorate accuses him of teaching his juniors communist principles, and inciting them to extremism in asceticism, Sufism, and carrying chains:

Investigator: Ustaz Mustata' Taha Al-Ta'azi?

Mustata': Yes, sir.

Investigator: Are you teaching students communist principles?

Mustata': What are communist principles?

Investigator: Please answer the question. Yes or no. This is an administrative investigation.

Mustata': The answer is still "no."

Investigator: Are you inciting students to extremism in asceticism, Sufism, and arming themselves by carrying a length of chain?

Mustata': What chains! Is there a communist Sufi!

Investigator: Please answer the following question.

Mustata': Sir! I have a principle in life.

Investigator: *kaman*⁴! [Also!]

Mustata': I fight high prices by being self-sufficient.

Investigator: And he admitted before us that he has a principle.

Mustata': By God! Come on, are you setting me up!

Investigator: The complaints lodged against you by your supervisors and colleagues are grave. They jeopardize state security.

Mustata': Me? A threat to state security? I live quietly, keeping to myself. I'm no more than one of society's overlooked insects (a cockroach).

Investigator: You say this in front of the Public Prosecution, State Security Investigations, and the authorities concerned with your activities.

³ In Egyptian slang, the word "bahaddr" can mean "working on a thesis" or "summoning spirits." Qamar, who is obsessed with ghosts, interprets it as the latter.

⁴ In the general Egyptian dialect, the word "kaman" or "kamana" means "also" or "in addition to." For example, one might say, "Ana kaman/kamana kharij," which translates to "I am also outside."

Mustata': My actions?

Investigator: You are hereby suspended from duty until the investigation comes to an end. (33.44)

This dialogue—which we will return to later when we compare this interrogation with the second one near the end of the film—reflects a common theme in history where communists or those associated with any principles are unfairly accused, mocked, and disenfranchised. It reflects the challenges faced by individuals with beliefs outside the mainstream, especially in societies where communism and others are viewed with suspicion or hostility. The protagonist's assertion that he is a "cockroach" highlights the often-humiliating social status and isolation suffered by those who are considered a "threat" to the established order, whether they are adherents of Marxism or Islamist groups.

Mustata' is compelled to adopt cunning and navigate between the fragile and the unyielding. Unlike the rigid pursuit of Marx, he embraces ambiguity, assimilates into society, and leverages his intellectual foundation by rejecting "the notion of Epistemological Certainty. Rather than retreating into philosophical monasticism or clashing with a society, he seeks quick, illogical solutions divorced from cause and effect" (Eldesoki M. 16.36).

The protagonist adeptly uses magic and sorcery despite initially threatening Kaoudeh and Sabata—assistants to the charlatan Sebakh al-Tibi⁵—with the words: "If you blackmail the people again, I won't hesitate to sever your heads" (19.21). His involvement in sorcery brings him substantial wealth, marking a transformation from a leftist opposing exploitation to an embodiment of ruthless capitalism, exploiting people's ignorance and fear of the unknown to amass millions. He declares, "Any customer who asks about Sebakh, I am here, O you thieves. ... If I am not a sorcerer, I will be one" (44.37) and "wemaqam seeddi alkatalunni, li'aleab bialbaydat walhajjar [By the esteemed status of my master, Al Cataluni, to perform tricks with eggs and stones]" (47.15). This shift serves as a critique of

some Marxists who abandon their principles for personal gain, a comfortable lifestyle, or to avoid conflict with oppressive regimes. It underscores the broader tensions between ideological commitment and the pragmatic compromises individuals often make to navigate challenging sociopolitical landscapes.

Mustata' establishes a magazine, called "Sananeer" [Hooks] for Tawali, serving as a front for advertising, money laundering, and cultivating both admiration and fear among the people of Mustata'. His ventures do not stop there, where he also builds up an extravagant shop for Tarouta, investing over 350,000⁶ Egyptian pounds to gather information that enhances his ability to commit fraud and deception. Thus, when the Minister of Interior summons him, he becomes overwhelmed with anxiety, fear and perplexity. In a state of panic, he turns to his friend and office manager, exclaiming: "Death has come to you, the one who neglects prayer. ... You gathered information? ... How can I face him? ... This is a disaster. ... We've signed, and what's done is done" (01:28:44).

Hegel observes that throughout history, human exploitation has taken extreme forms. In tribal systems, society is split into masters and slaves, while the industrial revolution reduces men, women, and children to mere cogs in a machine, working grueling 18-hour days under harsh conditions for meager wages. Workers are alienated from themselves, their societies and the products of their labor, a reality that Marx personally witnessed in English factories. This leads him to call for an end to human enslavement and exploitation, emphasizing the need for humans to live with dignity: "Workers of the world, unite. ... Poverty alone does not incite revolution; it is the awareness of poverty that sparks change. ... The workers have nothing to lose but their chains, but if they prevail, they inherit the world. ... Parasitic capitalism desecrates all that is sacred" (*Communist Manifesto* 12-34). Similarly, Plato advocates for a society free from oppression and exploitation. However, while the proletariat remains divided,

⁵ His name conveys dirtiness.

⁶ In 1990, the value of the dollar was 1.50, equivalent to 234,000 dollars.

those who exploit and plunder have found unity.

The pervasive exploitation among the lower classes is vividly depicted in several scenarios throughout the film. Early on, a conflict arises between Qamar and one of the maids over the cost of washing clothes. The maid rejects the new prices, accusing her of greed even though people pay far higher rates to laundry owners:

- The residents of flat no. 4 do not agree to the prices you've set.
- Tell them prices have risen for everything, why should cleanliness [cleaning service] be an exception? ... Cleanliness is no longer valued. And the stinky ones walk in swagger and arrogance" (20:12).

Mustata' also deceives Sabakh and steals half his fortune, so the latter laments: "Shame on us—we're all children of the same farmer. ... and yet, I am the thief among us!" (minute 01:04:57). Similarly, Tawali takes advantage of Mustata' by stealing a sum of money from him despite everything the latter has done for him. Kaouda and Sabata exploit the residents by demanding offerings in exchange for protecting them from charlatans and the supposed threat of goblins. Tarouta also manipulates his clients, using the information he gathers to empower the charlatan and maintain control over them. This underscores the transformative power of knowledge, as it equips individuals with confidence, the ability to challenge established norms, and the tools to exert positive influence; the pursuit of knowledge fosters personal growth, societal progress, and informed decision-making:

Tawali: What's up? How's your trip going?

Mustata': You've been missing. By the way, His Highness, the Prince, sends his regards.

Tawali: Oh, sure—without any perks attached!

Mustata': Not at all. He's already contributed a hefty check to support *Sananeer Magazine*, you opportunist.

Tawali: As usual, your net always catches fish.

Mustata': As natural. Stop being so

envious.

Tawali: Don't worry, blessed man—my admiration's envy-free.

Mustata': Ha! Everyone envies, my friend.

Tawali: (Laughing) Hahahaha.

Mustata': What's the deal with Tarouta these days?

Tawali: Ever since we published his photo in the magazine and crowned him the "King of Al-Jumidiyah," his ego's skyrocketed. No one can even approach him.

Mustata': Does he at least deliver the shop's income?

Tawali: Not at all. The guy expects a cut of every fee from customers he is referring to. Unbelievable.

Mustata': How does he even track what customers are paying?

Tawali: Beats me. He always finds a way to send them off elsewhere.

Mustata': As long as they're sent *our way*, it works for me.

Tawali: The shop cost us 350,000 pounds!

Mustata': I don't mind dealing with him. His customers are easy-to-work, and the profits are sweet.

Tawali: Of course, you're reaping all the benefits.

Mustata': Don't worry. I'll buy you a sando⁷ tomorrow—just to keep things fair.

Tawali: Really?

Tawali and Mustata': (Laughing) Hahahaha.

Kawdah: May God bring happiness to you both—and leave me out of it.

Mustata': You've always got your eye on me, huh? (1.09.18)

In addition, the hero exploits his clients, engaging in intimate relationships under the guise of treatment—whether to address illnesses or fulfill desires for pregnancy—manipulating them through his perceived ability to solve their problems. Finally, at the start of the film, Mustata'

⁷ Chest Pull Expander/ Muscle Build Stretcher with Wood Handles used by the hero to fight back spinsterhood and lust.

takes advantage of the landlord by negotiating a reduction in rent.

Contradictions in the Film

Lukács's view on accurately reflecting reality in literature transcends the mere portrayal of surface appearances. He critiques both naturalism and modernism, rejecting the notion that a random sequence of images can effectively represent reality. According to Lukács, such randomness may be interpreted as either objective truth, as in naturalism, or as purely subjective impressions, as in modernist works like those of Joyce and Woolf. However, he finds both approaches insufficient. Instead, he advocates for a genuinely realistic approach, where the writer presents images imbued with a sense of artistic necessity. These images should form a cohesive whole that mirrors the interconnected totality of the world. Reality, he argues, is not a disorganized collection of fragments but possesses an inherent order. The novelist's role is to reveal this order by portraying the richness and complexity of life. This does not involve imposing an artificial structure but rather presenting a narrative that captures the contradictions and tensions of social existence within a unified form. By embracing the complexities of life without oversimplifying or disregarding its inherent contradictions, the writer enables a natural sense of order to emerge. This allows readers to grasp the nuanced realities of lived experience, highlighting the depth and intricacy of social and personal existence (Selden et al. 87).

The film underscores significant contradictions by juxtaposing the lives of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, primarily through the protagonist's experiences. It also delves into the inconsistencies within the judicial system, as illustrated by the protagonist's involvement in two distinct investigations—one at the film's outset and another toward its end. Lastly, it highlights the philosophical tension between stoicism and hedonism.

The film contrasts two distinct portrayals of the wealthy—often characterized as the nouveau riche gaining their fortune through dubious means—and the proletariat or poor. This

division is powerfully illustrated in the song at the film's opening, highlighting the stark disparity between social classes, as the lyric states:

News carried from the trees, this world
teaches us all,
Some carve through solid rock, while to
wheel and deal.
The weary and the patient, they're called
gypsies by name,
Yet the thief and the usurper earn a
badge of elite acclaim.
The one who gives thanks, who praises
through their strife,
Finds blessings scarce, no carrots in their
life.
And the one who idly pecks, who speaks
without pursuit,
Moves through the world with ease, they
simply pass and loot.
The rule remains steadfast, unyielding in
its roots:
He passes and loots, yes, he passes and
loots. (04:18)

These contrasts emphasize the profound societal rift between those who wield wealth and power and those who lack it. Literature plays a pivotal role in addressing such divisions by encouraging individuals to reflect on revolutionary change. It prompts contemplation of the need for a fairer and more compassionate society. Through the protagonist's struggles and his stark contrast to the lives of the bourgeoisie, the film issues a call to action, urging audiences to pursue societal reform and work toward justice and equality for all. The narrative challenges viewers to critically examine the societal systems and structures that sustain inequality. It serves as a testament to literature's ability not only to depict reality but also to inspire transformative changes and motivate people to build a more just and equitable world.

Moreover, the text portrays the contradictions inherent in judicial systems and the police apparatuses. The protagonist's involvement in two separate judicial investigations serves as a narrative tool to highlight both "rebellion and cultural assimilation respectively" (Abu El Majd 07: 45).

The first investigation reveals the

protagonist's unjust treatment by a legal investigator. This encounter underscores systemic issues such as bias, corruption, or the failure to uphold the rights of the working class. This aspect has been previously discussed; the focus now shifts to the second investigation, which unfolds near the novel's conclusion.

In the second investigation, Mustata' confesses to all his crimes yet is not deemed guilty. This presents a stark contrast to the earlier scenario. By this point, the protagonist's social standing has shifted to that of the bourgeoisie, resulting in significantly different outcomes. This contrast offers a profound examination of how the judicial system operates differently for the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It also exposes the complexities and contradictions within the legal framework, particularly regarding class-based justice. According to Eagleton, this contradictory interplay can be attributed to a "deep ideological crisis" within contemporary society. For Marxist criticism, the focus has shifted from philosophy to politics, urging critics to dismantle traditional notions of "literature" and uncover their ideological role in shaping readers' subjectivity (Selden et al. 102).

The hero admits to being a charlatan, a fraud, and a thief. However, let us examine how the context of this second investigation unfolds:

Investigator: If you were an uneducated man, we might have dismissed you as a fraud or a charlatan. But you are a learned individual, holding a doctorate in philosophical sciences.

Mustata': That is precisely my disappointment.

Investigator: It is clear that you are very humble; you are a blessed worker of miracles.

Mustata': O respectable man, I am not a blessed worker of miracles.

Investigator: I seek forgiveness from God! You are the one who delivers sweet hope to people every morning. Who in the entire country hasn't read *Your Luck Today*, adorned by your words in every newspaper?

Mustata': It is all nonsense. Believe me.

Investigator: How to believe you though it

goes against my better judgment. Even I myself can't leave the house without checking my horoscope in the news.

Mustata': You are wrong.

Investigator: Doctor, the investigations reveal that everyone who has interacted with you agrees that you are a blessed worker of miracles and carry considerable weight in society.

Mustata': I feel as though I'm trapped in an iron suit. The more weight I gain within it, the more it suffocates me.

Investigator: So, you insist that you are a charlatan!

Mustata': Everything has become counterfeit—principles, ideas, people. Even scientific theories have crumbled under the weight of doubt as new research tears them apart daily.

Investigator: Honestly, you've left my mind in knots!

Mustata': People need certainty. For one fixed truth. And that's what makes them believe in a veil, a talisman, and a foolish dervish who laughs at them.

Investigator: What am I to make of this? Are you accusing society of ignorance?

Mustata': Not ignorance alone—weakness. Weakness that transcends education or lack thereof. It is this weakness that crafts the charlatan, elevating him willingly, just as they once sculpted a stone idol and chose to worship it. (01.32.39)

A third dialogue occurs with a Major General before the hero departs from the State Security Directorate. The Major General's tone remains consistent with the second investigation, offering repeated apologies and even escorting him personally to his car:

Major General: Remove the cuffs, Sergeant. I've made it clear that Dr Al-Taazi should never have handcuffs on his wrists.

Sergeant: Yes, sir.

Major General: Please, Doctor, go ahead.

Mustata': What's going on here?!

Major General: We deeply, deeply apologize, Your Excellency.

Mustata': Again with this! I've confessed and signed that I'm a charlatan. Just sentence me, imprison me, and put an end to this!

Major General: God forbid! Imprison you? How could we? You're an asset to us.

Mustata': Sir, I'm a charlatan!

Major General: God forgive me. Very well, Your Excellency. We are in your debt. And please extend our sincerest apologies to Saleh Pasha. Please, go ahead. (01.35.33)

However, lower-ranking officers adopt a stance that contradicts that of the prosecution and senior officials, highlighting the inconsistency in handling legal and judicial cases: “- Major: We will not let him go. - First Lieutenant: Just so you know, he's under surveillance” (01.36.28).

To comment on the above, several observations can be made. The first investigation appears highly aggressive, with the investigator bombarding the protagonist with questions, possibly as an attempt to intimidate or disorient him. Despite the protagonist's denial of the charges, the conviction seems predetermined, suggesting a biased or unfair process. The investigator's violent demeanor reflects a harsh and potentially unjust approach to the case. The protagonist's self-description as a “cockroach” conveys feelings of helplessness and insignificance. Furthermore, his transfer to State Security Investigations marks a significant escalation, signaling the involvement of higher authorities and the increased seriousness of the case.

In contrast, the second investigation presents a markedly different dynamic. Here, the investigator denies the charges even after the protagonist confesses, hinting at a lack of credibility or thoroughness in the process. The investigator's gentle demeanor and expressions of apology suggest a more respectful, yet arguably more inequitable, interrogation. The absence of questioning indicates a more casual or informal approach, creating a less adversarial atmosphere. The informal tone of the dialogue further reinforces this relaxed environment.

The protagonist's rise to the bourgeoisie

and the shift in how he is treated—being addressed as “Your Excellency”—might signify a newfound respect or recognition of his elevated social status. However, persistent surveillance by the lower-ranking officers, despite the leniency shown by higher-ranking officials, highlights systemic flaws within the police force, including a lack of coordination, inconsistency, or potential corruption.

Finally, Stoicism and Hedonism represent two contrasting philosophical approaches to life, each with distinct goals, values, and methods of achieving fulfillment.

Stoicism, originating in ancient Greece and Rome, is a philosophy centered on self-control, rationality, and virtue as the path to a fulfilling life. It teaches that external circumstances are beyond our control, and true happiness comes from mastering one's inner state and aligning one's actions with reason and virtue. The Key Principles of stoicism are control over emotions, living in accordance with nature, and focusing on what can be controlled. The Roman philosopher Epictetus, a former slave, taught that freedom lies in recognizing what is within our power (our thoughts, choices, and actions) and letting go of concerns over what is not (wealth, status, or others' opinions). A modern Stoic might calmly accept the loss of a job, focusing instead on how they respond to the situation constructively.

Hedonism, on the other hand, is a philosophy that identifies pleasure as the highest good and the primary goal of life. It argues that humans should seek to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. It highlights pleasure as the ultimate good, immediate versus long-term gratification, and subjectivity. Epicurus, a proponent of a refined form of Hedonism, argues that simple pleasures like good conversation, friendship, and a tranquil state of mind are the most fulfilling. A modern hedonist might prioritize leisure, fine dining, or pursuing enjoyable hobbies as the primary means to happiness.

At the beginning of the film, the hero exemplifies Stoic philosophy through his teachings to students. He advocates limiting consumption, practicing self-restraint, and

relying on reason rather than indulging in fleeting desires. The hero's guidance reflects the Stoic belief that true contentment comes not from external possessions or pleasures but from mastering one's inner state and maintaining a life of simplicity and discipline. This Stoic lifestyle serves as a moral anchor for the hero, portraying him as someone grounded in principles and immune to the temptations of excess. His teachings highlight the value of resisting consumerism and living in harmony with nature, focusing on what truly matters—inner peace and ethical living: "If something is too expensive for me, I simply leave it. ... Bring me the sando, the vanquisher of bachelorhood and the substitute for marriage" (10.15- 19.30).

In stark contrast, as the film progresses and the hero transitions into a bourgeois lifestyle, his actions reflect a complete abandonment of his earlier Stoic ideals. His dining table is laden with sumptuous and decadent dishes, symbolizing indulgence and the pursuit of physical pleasure. The luxury cars he drives and the palaces he inhabits showcase his immersion in materialism and ostentation. Reading horoscopes over a glass of fine wine further emphasizes his embrace of frivolity and the ephemeral, steering away from the rationality and virtue he once upheld. In this transformation, the hero embodies Hedonism, particularly its focus on sensory pleasure and material abundance as markers of a fulfilling life. His shift signifies a philosophical pivot from a life of restraint and inner focus to one of external gratification and self-indulgence. The transition serves as a critique of the seductive nature of wealth and luxury, illustrating how easily principles can be compromised in the face of societal status and opulence.

This juxtaposition between the hero's initial Stoic values and his eventual Hedonistic lifestyle creates a powerful narrative arc. It invites the audience to reflect on the tension between these opposing philosophies and the moral and existential consequences of abandoning one's ideals for material gain. The hero's journey highlights the fragility of conviction in the face of temptation and poses a broader question: can true happiness be found in external pleasures, or does it reside in steadfast adherence to inner values?

Reasons for the Fall of Communism

Has Marxism truly succeeded, especially in light of pivotal historical events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, and the rise of free-market liberalism, globalization, and multinational corporations? Some analysts argue that China has strayed from socialism, functioning instead as a capitalist economy under the guise of a socialist system. The immense wealth accumulated by figures like Mustata' and Qamar seems to contradict Marx's prediction that capitalism would decline, making way for communism to emerge from its remnants.

Thinkers such as Habermas and Gramsci have attempted to analyze this perceived failure and decline from a sociocultural perspective. They emphasize the role of societal structures, differences in thought processes, and the uniqueness of language in shaping individual and collective identities. Language and environment play a significant role in shaping a person's character, suggesting that revolutionary movements are not universally inevitable but are contingent on specific cultural and social conditions.

The Soviet Union stands as the apex of communist regimes. Upon rising to power, Lenin establishes the dictatorship of the proletariat, characterized by a one-party system where the Communist Party exclusively represents the working class. However, the flaws of Marxism, as outlined in Muhammad Al-Hamad's *Communism* (2002), can be summarized as follows:

- The persistence of class disparities, including wage inequality and differing levels of education.
- The sanctioning of incentives, which contradict communist ideals.
- The exploitation of workers under a forced labor system in factories.
- The ruling class indulging in luxury and comfort while the masses suffer.
- The domination, tyranny, and brutality of the ruling party, marked by acts of terrorism.
- Infighting and fragmentation within the communist bloc.

- The prevalence of espionage, strict censorship, and secrecy.
- The suppression of intellectual freedom and creativity.
- The degradation of women's dignity.
- The erosion and chaos of the family structure. (98–107).

Yamna Al-Kholi critiques Marxist theories for lacking scientific rigor, asserting that history is not a science akin to the natural sciences. She argues that neither nature nor any other field of study can be truly deterministic, and she questions the philosophical foundation of Marx's theories. The scientific validity of Marxist theories, particularly those of Marx and Engels, has been a topic of extensive debate. She highlights that Marxism is built on the notion of historical determinism, which posits that history follows a fixed trajectory divided into stages, patterns, or rhythms. Marx views these as dialectical stages, enabling predictions of historical outcomes. This concept, rooted in antiquity, can be traced back to Hesiod, Heraclitus, Plato, and the Jewish notion of the fate of God's chosen people. It has also influenced philosophers like Vico, Bossuet, Condorcet, Hegel, Spengler, and Toynbee. Despite its longevity, there is no empirical evidence supporting historical determinism. Furthermore, contemporary scientific advancements, particularly in relativity and quantum mechanics, have undermined the deterministic view of the universe. Why, then, does Marx believe that social science could fulfill the ancient aspiration of predicting the future? He envisions it as a replacement for priesthood and the Old Testament in forecasting humanity's destiny. However, since Marx's predictions have largely failed, Al-Kholi considers him a "false prophet." Moreover, Marx's reliance on historical determinism appears contradictory to his famous assertion that the philosopher's role is to change the world, not merely to interpret it. If history is predetermined, Al-Kholi questions, how can meaningful change occur? (43–48).

Marx's theory of historical materialism posits that material conditions and economic factors are the primary drivers of historical development. However, critics contend that the

theory lacks empirical testing and falsifiability required of scientific theories. They argue that it often involves retroactively interpreting historical events to align with the theory rather than making verifiable predictions about future developments.

Marxist theories often focus on economic determinism, asserting that the economic base fundamentally shapes the superstructure of society, including culture, politics, and ideology. Critics of Marxism argue that this perspective oversimplifies the complex interplay of various social factors. The deterministic nature of Marxist theory poses challenges for scientific testing, as isolating economic factors from other influences is difficult. Furthermore, they contend that Marxism reduces all social phenomena to economic factors, overlooking the intricacies of human behavior, cultural dynamics, and individual agency. Critics maintain that not all aspects of society can be adequately explained by economic relations alone.

Marx predicted that the proletariat would eventually overthrow the bourgeoisie, leading to the emergence of a classless society. However, this prediction has not been universally realized as anticipated. The dynamics and outcomes of class struggle are highly complex and do not adhere to a single predictable pattern, casting doubt on the predictive accuracy of Marxist theory. According to Marxism, societal change arises from the resolution of contradictions within the economic structure. Critics argue that dialectical materialism is more philosophical than scientific, lacking a clear methodology for empirical validation. As a result, it is often regarded as a heuristic framework rather than a robust scientific theory.

Critics argue that many of Marx's predictions have not been empirically validated. For instance, his theory that capitalism will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions has not materialized as anticipated. Instead, capitalism has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, often incorporating reforms that Marxists may not have foreseen. Examples include banning child labor, ensuring free education, providing healthcare, and offering unemployment benefits. Capitalism has proven to be more resistant to crises than Marx predicted.

Additionally, communism has been criticized for its inability to address emotions, values, and morals, as it is rooted in a materialistic and atheistic framework. Concerns include the lack of human rights, freedom of expression, multi-party politics, adaptability to global changes, and creativity and innovation, often hindered by the absence of material incentives.

Many of Marx's expectations do not align with reality. The power of the proletariat, rather than increasing, has declined due to factory mechanization. The peasant class do not vanish or merge with the working class; instead, tensions have emerged between these groups. This oversimplifies view of the peasantry contributed to catastrophic outcomes, including the deaths of over five million peasants, as the theory fails to reflect real-world conditions. Collective farming initiatives, intended to boost crop production, largely fail due to low output and widespread corruption among officials.

It is argued that Marxism, being ideologically driven, can lead to a selective interpretation of historical data and events to align with its theoretical framework. This ideological bias may compromise the objectivity necessary for rigorous scientific research.

Human societies are incredibly complex, and reducing their dynamics primarily to economic factors risks overlooking critical social, cultural, and political dimensions. Critics argue that this reductionist approach limits the explanatory scope of Marxist theory. As Karl Popper notes, the relationship between economic conditions and knowledge is deeply interconnected, making it overly simplistic to attribute the former solely to the latter. While economic conditions might be prioritized, Popper argues, the destruction of all means of production will not prevent the re-establishment of economic life if knowledge remains intact. Conversely, if knowledge were entirely lost, even a society with abundant material and economic resources would struggle to recreate an advanced economic system. Therefore, knowledge—not the economy—is the most crucial foundation and driving force of social life (Al-Kholi 50).

The primary standard for scientific theories is falsifiability, the ability to be tested

and potentially disproven. Critics contend that Marxist theory frequently lacks well-defined, testable hypotheses and is often adapted to fit varying outcomes, making it challenging to subject the theory to falsification.

Critics argue that Marxist principles, particularly the abolition of private property and profit motives, weaken individual incentives and stifle innovation. They maintain that competition and market forces are essential for driving economic growth and progress. Historical examples, such as the failures of Marxist regimes in the Soviet Union and Maoist China, are often cited as evidence of the impracticality and potential dangers of implementing Marxist ideals in practice.

In contrast, Pressler argues that despite expectations of Marxist theory fading after the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union, Marxism remains alive and continues to thrive in many academic fields. He explains what attracts intellectuals and politicians to Marxism: it offers a transformative worldview that proposes solutions for societal change and answers to fundamental questions about life and how to live it. Marxism continues to present a positive vision for humanity, suggesting ways to save people from despair. Therefore, even though the Soviet Union and communism have collapsed, Marxism's worldview should not be discarded, as it remains relevant and significant in contemporary society. To echo Mark Twain (1835-1910), "The announcements of the death of Marxism have been greatly exaggerated" (165-6). However, capitalism too experiences periodic violent shocks, which are becoming increasingly frequent and will eventually dissipate, with religion likely returning to regain its influence, fostering prosperity, progress, and psychological stability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the film serves as a powerful and poignant critique of societal dynamics, examining the struggles between social classes, conflicting ideologies, and moral principles.

Through the protagonist's evolution—from a firm believer in communism to a

complacent supporter of the bourgeoisie—the narrative effectively illustrates how external pressures such as oppression and hunger can wear down even the most deeply held convictions. The film shows that personal beliefs, no matter how steadfast they may initially appear, are vulnerable to the harsh realities of survival and societal expectations.

The film also explores the complex interplay of capitalism, religion, magic, and trickery, which together paint a picture of a society trapped in a vicious cycle of exploitation, ignorance, and false promises. These elements highlight how individuals, particularly the lower classes, are often manipulated by powerful systems that benefit from maintaining the status quo. The use of religion and magic underscores the ways in which such forces can be used to distract or control the masses, perpetuating cycles of subjugation. By weaving these elements together, the film underscores the urgent need for societal education and empowerment as the means to break free from these oppressive cycles. Knowledge and awareness are presented as the tools by which individuals and communities can challenge and change the systems that bind them.

Furthermore, the film's depiction of the shift in the Egyptian society toward capitalism during Sadat's reign is not just a social commentary but also a reflection of broader ideological shifts across the Arab world during that period. Sadat's economic reforms, including the *infitah* (open-door policy), has led to a dramatic transformation of Egyptian society, where the embrace of capitalism often clashed with the remnants of socialist ideals. The film portrays this tension, showing how political and economic shifts deeply impact individuals' lives and shape their identities. This contextual backdrop enriches the film, positioning it not just as a critique of individual choices but also as a reflection on the larger societal transformations of the time.

The film is particularly significant for its Egyptian and the like, offering a mirror to their own experiences while challenging them to go beyond mere consumption of art. It calls for active engagement, urging viewers to move beyond passive reflection and engage in

meaningful action that can catalyze change. The protagonist's journey from idealism to disillusionment serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of complacency, and the film invites viewers to learn from this journey by taking a proactive role in confronting social injustice and inequality.

Aligned with the author's intent, the film seeks not only to provoke thought but also to inspire action, compelling audiences to question the systems in place and to consider how they might contribute to positive societal change. The film's critique is not just about reflecting the state of the world but also about challenging viewers to reconsider their own role within it and to take responsibility for shaping a more just and equitable future. In this way, the film transcends its immediate cultural context, offering a broader call to action that resonates with universal themes of oppression, resistance, and transformation.

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