

Sonallah Ibrahim and Martin Amis: The Quest for Self in the New Market Trends

Dr. Khaled Abkar Alkodimi¹ & Dr. Noritah Omar²

Abstract

Forbes Magazine, in its recent annual report of the richest people in the world for 2014, listed the top eight richest Arabs from Egypt.³ This very much contradicts the current critical socio-economic situation in Egypt where the majority of population is below poverty line. This paper draws on Marx perspectives to analyze Sonallah Ibrahim and Martin Amis' satiric attitude of such contradictions, in their respected societies. Its primary concern is how Ibrahim and Amis make use of certain rhetorical devices to mock the 'increasing consciousness that social position is made rather than merely inherited', in late capitalist society, characterized by inequality, oppression and corruption. I would argue that the market system that prevailed in Egypt during this period of Arab history played a central role in widening the gap between the rich and the poor people of Egypt. The study concludes that Ibrahim and Amis, whose satirical perceptions have their roots in a Marxist critique of capitalism, have provided a dissident voice for the cultural dominance of the open market economy and its ramifications, and have critically utilized certain critical means to show how market system has redefined divisions and social identities.

Keywords: Ibrahim, Amis, market system, infitah, Marx, satire, allegory, Symbolism

1. Introduction

From a Marxist perspective, men very much fall under the influence of the social atmosphere in general, and the modes of production in particular. He rightly observes that "the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Hughes, John & Sharrock 2003, P.5). Max Weber, the German sociologist, strongly stresses the significance of economic factors in shaping social relations and identities and further argues that "class situation is ultimately market situation" (Tonkiss, 2006, Pp10, 129). Hence, Weber did acknowledge that "property and lack of property are the basic categories of all class situations" (quoted in Day, 2001, P.10). According to Gary Day, the emphasis in Weber's definition of class falls not on production, but on the constraints operating on a person's ability to earn a high income, to purchase high quality goods and to enjoy enhanced personal life experiences. Drawing on the views of the critics, referred to above, this paper examines how Ibrahim and Amis employ their satire to mock, in Raymond Williams' words, "the increasing consciousness that social position is made rather than merely inherited" (P. 61), in other words, the search for new social identities through material success. Their novels, *Dhat* and *Success* are very much concerned with the socioeconomic issues of the late capitalism of the 20th century. They satirically depict how the new market trends of the 1970s and 80s, did not solve the socioeconomic divide, but rather played a central role in increasing the socioeconomic differences, and in turn, nurturing the gaps and feelings of hatred among social classes.

¹ English Department, Faculty of Education, Alandalus University, Dar Salm, Taiz Street, Sana'a, Yemen. Tel: (+967-01-675567) ext. 143, Email: kaq2002@yahoo.com

² Associate Professor, English Department, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

³ Please refer to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8YMXCVfP8>

It should be noted, however, that though the quotes of Ibrahim's text is mostly taken from the translated version of Ibrahim's *Dhat* (Translated as *Zaat 2001*) by Anthony Calderbank, to facilitate the reference to the text for non-English readers, the analysis is based on both the original text⁴ and the English version. I would argue that Ibrahim and Amis employ satire to ridicule inequality and oppression as integral qualities of the free market system, and to further illustrate the agony of poor individuals through the search for power and money in an unjust socioeconomic system. Nevertheless, I will begin with a brief outline of the socio-economic system in Egypt, to establish the necessary background for the analysis.

2. Egypt and the Rise of Social Classes

Indeed, anyone writes about contemporary Egyptian society cannot help but consider two important factors that have very much influenced and shaped the social transformation of Egypt: the colonialist and the neo-colonialist eras.⁵ Since a detailed description of both are beyond the scope of this study, it would suffice to say that the very important fact of the neo-colonialist era, is the appearance of an elite group that had established itself as the bourgeoisie of contemporary Egypt. "It is however... influential parasitical groups who dominate the political and economic institutions and serve as the interlink between local and international capital" (Zaalouk, 1989, P.11). Like the Doctor in *Al-Lajna* (1982), those local capitalists had special privileges over the economy and politics of the country.⁶ As Zaalouk notes "Through loans, the western nations and America in particular have greatly encouraged and supported the creation of new classes in Egypt with whom they have close ties and shared interests". The new classes are highly parasitical and merely serve foreign interests. Interestingly, they have access to the state apparatus and are exceedingly influential politically (P.6). According to Zaalouk, the situation reaches its peak with "the open door policy launched by Sadat in 1977 and [the] American AID that have served to create and strengthen new socioeconomically and politically powerful groups" (p. 11). Zaalouk has rightly observed that the infitah policy has gradually transformed the centralized state capitalist economy of the past into a liberalized one enhancing free enterprise (P.77). More importantly, as they grew in wealth, so did their corruption and opportunism. Unfortunately for Egypt, this group was able to establish itself as the ruling class of the country. Hence, as Eliot Kahlil Wilson (1999) notes, in another context, the Egyptian government during this period ... permanently altered economic and power relations within Egyptian society and produced a totalitarian oligarchy of the major interest groups, and these elite groups held unprecedented control over government and the economy ... [and] unprecedented control over the lives of ordinary citizens. (P.201)

This group, the so-called upper class of Egyptian society, worked primarily to maintain its own interests. The majority of the Egyptian people became marginalized, oppressed and exploited, which served to widen the gap among the classes. From a Marxist perspective, the state acted to defend the rich and the powerful elite against the claims of the majority of poor people. This view is further emphasized by Hughes, Sharrock and Martin who claim on the oppressive state: [T]he state was acting not acting as expression of the general will of the people in Hegel's sense, but as the defender of particular, and powerful interest. Those who spoke on behalf of the state were motivated not by ideals of truth and justice, but by specific class interests. (P. 33) Moreover, the fact that Egypt had been under British colonization for a long time sheds light on the hegemonic influence of the British system over Egyptian people and society. Ibrahim hints at this when he directly accuses the United Kingdom of installing the capitalist elite in Egypt: "The British left the feudalists and capitalists behind them ..." (*Zaat*, 2001, P. 112). What needs to be emphasized here is that as a result, as Aijaz Ahmad claims, "consolidation, expansion ... increased sophistication of the bourgeois classes, including its middle strata, especially the modern petty bourgeoisie located in the professions and in the state apparatuses" (1992, p. 75).

⁴ Sonallah Ibrahim, *ذات* (Egypt: Dar Al-Mostaqbal Al-Arabi), 3rd ed. 1998.

⁵Neocolonialism refers to an imperial system of economic exploitation, in which the metropolitan centre drains the resources of the periphery while at the same time encouraging it to consume its manufactured products in an unequal, unbalanced system of exchange. Read, D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (London: Sage Publications, 2005) p. 48.

⁶The Doctor is a mysterious authority figure in Ibrahim's novella, *Al-Lajna*, who pretends to be a top nationalist person, but in reality he is no more than a profiteer, who originally came from a poor family but climbed the ladder and became rich. Read, Sonallah Ibrahim, *The Committee*. Trans. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

Ahmad also observes that: the key fact about the postcolonial history of this so called Third World is that each nation-state came under the dominance of a distinct national bourgeoisie (existing or emergent) as it emerged from the colonial crucible and was then assigned a specific location in the international division of labor as it is organized by imperialism, so that the period has come to be characterized not by greater unity but by increasing differentiation. (P. 16) According to Ahmad, the Third World experienced both colonialism and imperialism, and societies in formations of “backward capitalism,” like Egypt, are as much constituted by the division of classes as are societies in the advanced capitalist countries: “... socialism is not restricted to something called the Second World but is simply the name of a resistance that saturates the globe today, as capitalism itself does” (P.103). Hence, one can conclude that colonization and *infitah* (the open market policy) seem to be significant factors that greatly influenced class transformation in contemporary Egyptian society. As Zaalouk notes, “the conjuncture of internal and external factors has given rise to the emergence of an extremely distorted and parasitical capitalist class” (P. 158). It has also encouraged the spread of non-productive parasitical activity, all of which has been highly beneficial for certain classes in society who have succeeded in accumulating huge amounts of wealth. Similarly, in spite of Britain’s prosperity in terms of democracy, and the standard of living achieved in the post-World War II period, political as well as economic crises troubled successive governments throughout the 1960s until the 1980s. Their economic problems were more acute during this period, with economists and critics observing that the socioeconomic issues the country faced during late 1970s and early 1980s were due to large scale unemployment. Between 1970 and 1993, the UK manufacturing labour force fell from 7.5 million workers to 4.3 million, a drop of 4.5 percent (Kitson & Jonathan, 2000). This unemployment crisis was made worse by rising inflation. This is why the conquering of inflation was considered a necessary condition for economic success by Margaret Thatcher’s government, elected into office in 1979. To combat inflation, the government decided to improve the supply side of the economy by decreasing the role of the state and promoting the role of the free market. This involved the deregulation of markets, the privatisation of state-owned industries, and reform of trade unions. James F. English (2006) notes, “the election of the Thatcher government effected a sudden and intense acceleration in the space of change, aligning Great Britain with the fast track of free-market globalism” (P. 3). Hence, the Thatcherite⁷ years brought a number of changes to the social structure of the UK, such as the dismantling of the Great London Council in 1986, growing decentralisation of the metropolis and the opening of the Stock Exchange to overseas members, which resulted in the creation of a strong culture of consumerism.

However, as Michael Kitson and Jonathan Michie point out: The free-market policies pursued by successive conservative governments in Britain between 1979 and 1997 involved an additional price—as well as that of high unemployment—namely growing inequality with a concomitant increase in poverty for many of those in work as well as out of work (P. 127). The free market system increased the percentage of unemployment, which in turn caused an alarming growth of inequality and poverty in Britain, a situation replicated in many other countries. According to Kitson and Michie, while the richest in Britain have grown much wealthier, to become 60 percent better off since 1979, for the poorest, life continues to get worse. The gap between rich and poor people has grown wildly out of proportion, with wage inequality becoming greater than at any time since they began to be recorded in 1886. Homeless people sleep on the streets, there are record-high waiting lists for housing, and millions of homes are in need of urgent repairs. Yet, at the same time, almost 400,000 construction workers are on the dole (P. 129). Likewise, the free market system implemented in Egypt during the Anwar El Sadat era did not solve the economic crisis of the country, but rather created negative effects for people and the society. The shift to a free market economy was intended to attract “massive foreign capital into Egypt, and encouraging the revival of the private sector of the economy” (Vatikiotis & Panayiotis, 1991, P.415). Unfortunately, this market policy did not lead to serious economic changes in the country, nor did it create new economic structures. This policy merely “established and expanded a parallel market for foreign exchange ... and increased the participation of the private sector in the economy” (Vatikiotis & Panayiotis, P.430). The policy had two major negative effects on the country: the first being the transformation of Egypt into a consumer society; and secondly, it benefited only a handful of Egyptians, creating in the long run an elite class that had privileges over the economy and politics, at the expense of the poor, whose lives became worse.

⁷ The term “Thatcherite, is coined to refer to the period (1979-1990) when Margaret Thatcher has become the Prime Minister of Britain.

3. Zaat and Terry: The Quest to Belong

To begin with the titles, anyone reads the two novels can easily notice the subtle ironic twist of both. In *Success*, for example, Amis seems to mock the real meaning of 'success' in a society, where the ability to take revenge or to court women are considered important human qualities, such as in the case of the social climber, Terry. Similarly, Ibrahim's novel is titled *Dhat*. The Arabic word 'ذات' "dhat" means 'self' or 'being'. "The title is indefinite and suggests that it could be any self or perhaps all selves" (Mehrez, 1994, P.130). Obviously, the title unquestionably refers to Zaat's self-journey in search of her 'self'. Like Terry, Zaat's dilemma is to gain social identity through material success in business and life. Ironically, however, she ultimately realizes that she is a mere failure, as she finds herself still mired in a world unmerciful towards the poor. But, unlike Amis, who exposes the vacuity of the term 'success', Ibrahim's intention is to ridicule the myth of success through the journey of the 'self', in a world where only the dishonest can succeed, as will be discussed later. Indeed, the myth of success widely spread during this time, and become a part of the ideology among poor individuals, intensified by the open market and infitah policy. Many Egyptian people, as with their British counterparts, climbed the ladder and became rich and therefore joined the 'haves' (as opposed to the 'have nots'). What is at stake here is that those of poor family origins, who climbed the ladder like the 'Doctor' in *Al-Lajna*, referred to above, have inspired other people to search for success in order to improve their social status. However, while the chance of success is relatively great in the United Kingdom, it is much less so in Egypt. Society, for example, promises to offer success to everyone, but necessarily, opportunities are there only for the most aggressive and well-positioned. Ibrahim intertextuality stresses this view: "A millionaire admits that, eight years ago, he was a simple laborer earning fifty pounds a month and he is now worth more than 12 million pounds" (*Zaat*, P. 191). This idea has been later on textually confirmed through Umm Waheed who asks Zaat: "Why didn't she have the right to enjoy life like other people? Why didn't she have appliances like the simple Agriculture man? Adding: "Don't say it's all from the sweat of his brow. Nothing can be hidden, and he's as corrupt as they come" (*Zaat*, P. 336). Thus, success for many is not available, although the function of the ideology is to insist that it is.

Dhat and *Success* powerfully portray how new trends in the market system largely reshape people's concept of life. Their characters illustrate the market trend that stresses one's ownership rather than the origin of birth as a sign of the social identity. As Eagleton (1976) states, literature is "neither a product of pure inspiration nor the product of the author's feelings but is a product of an ideology which is itself a product of history" (P.169). Furthermore, Eagleton cites Marx's argument that history and understanding of people and their actions and beliefs are determined by economic factors (P.164). What we can draw from this is that market system very much affect people's minds, and thus the way they behave. Zaat, for instance, is a victim of the socioeconomic atmosphere whose consciousness of being a poor middle class individual leads her onto a quest to alter her social position, seeming very convinced that true social identity lies in the power of the individual, and that power can be acquired only by acquiring its source—money: "It was a period of great hopes, bold aspirations, and dreams: night dreams and day dreams in all their varieties ..." (*Zaat*, P.5). Zaat's ambition is motivated by many stories of success, such as ... her cousin Afaf moving up from damp basement flat to one facing north which the sun came into, the marriage of Zeinab without any flat and her immediate departure for the Gulf then her return with a fancy car and a deep freezer big enough for the needs of an entire restaurant ... (*Zaat*, P.3). Abdel Maguid too is inspired by the "stories of the huge fortunes, which were being made overnight, with great interest (he found in them a certain satisfaction, even though the fortunes weren't being made anywhere near him)" (*Zaat*, P.14).

He feels that "the door of the future lay wide open before him" (*Zaat*, P.5), hence, he ultimately changed his mind and sends Zaat out for work: "Then one day Abdel Maguid, in that same uncompromising tone of voice, said that her staying at home had no 'meaning' and that she would have to work like other women" (*Zaat*, P.10). Zaat starts to work, but this does not end her suffering in the slightest. Her struggle for success to ascertain her social position takes different forms. In addition to her job, she conducts some private activities: Zaat and her neighbor El Shanqeety and his wife, for instance, carry out different projects to better themselves and improve their life-style. First, the two families start to make and sell pans. Over the following days all four of them became pan carriers. The two men cooperated in supervising the manufacturing process in a nearby washing machine repair shop.

Abdel Maguid sold one to the head of the Savings Department in the bank, El Shanqeety sold another to the official in charge of licensing industrial premises in the local council, and Zaat sold two in the archives ... (Zaat, P.54). But, due to the failure of this project, the two families shift onto another: "The last step ... was enough to dispel the hopes and fantasies that had preoccupied Zaat and to direct them in other fields of self-reliance such as selling night dresses smuggled from Port Said or dealing in goods from the Ministry of Supplies" (Zaat, P.52). Marx argues that people "were not naturally competitive individuals but were, above all, shaped by their society" (Hughes, P.59). According to Marx, people are, above all, the products of the societies in which they live. Zaat and her husband are inspired by the stories of success that they hear of, thus they work hard to change their life. In modern times, writes Michael Ryan, "ideology consists of the belief that humans are free individuals rather than social beings, and as individuals they freely strive for success in an open economy" (1999, P.53). Thus, Ibrahim seems to criticize this social model, in which money becomes a source of power and social status. His view is further emphasized by Tonkiss, who points out Weber's contention that "capitalist societies were characterized by class relations derived from the market rather than by status relations," adding that "market logics, after all, do not recognize status hierarchies or questions of honor: just the color of your money" (Tonkiss, P.141). This, indeed, is reminiscent of the popular Egyptian proverb, 'You merely worth the amount of money you keep'. Ibrahim's assumption is that the free market economy—the capitalist system, in other words—turned Egypt into a class society, where poor individuals spent their lives in search of false dreams. This view is further emphasized by Weber, who claims that "modern capitalism is by definition a class society—market processes necessarily produce class divisions" (quoted in Tonkiss, P. 133). Tonkiss also observes that "recent shifts in economic organization and systems of production remade economic divisions and social identities" (P.129). Similarly, Terry, whose lifestyle is dictated by aristocrats, finds himself unable to tolerate their humiliation. He seems very much aware of his situation: "I look like educated lower-class ... the sort of a person you walk past in the street and never glance at ..." (*Success*, P.11). Such humiliation makes him very conscious and contemptuous of class category: "Well aware of the full corniness of my status (orphan of underprivileged, changeling of panic and disgust), my feelings about the proposed adoption could be fairly painlessly guessed" (*Success*, P.27). Terry feels strange not only in his new home, but even in the streets among the crowds. The ill-treatment and marginalization in and outside home makes him feel that he is totally excluded from enjoying life: "I try to like the way the world is changing, but [there's] no extra room for me inside" (*Success*, P.31-32). Being a poor fellow, nobody seems to be interested in his existence: "No one senses my presence; they walk on by, pass me one of these days; you wouldn't know it ... I am an abjectly faithful patron. I attract not the slightest notice..." (*Success*, P.32). He feels bereft of a real identity: the problem of being insignificant creates a dilemma in his mind, as Terry himself succinctly puts it: "This can't be alienation, can it? I want to belong. I am dying to belong" (*Success*, P.32).

Like Zaat, Terry's consciousness of his social class inspires him to toil for success in order to change his social position. Hence, as a reaction to his birth rank, Terry starts the search, to borrow a phrase from Ibrahim's *The Smell of It*, to "affirm his existence" (P.28), through material success. His class consciousness motivates him to rebel, until he achieves success. Indeed, due to the doctrine of individual 'freedom' in Britain, the chance to secure high positions is theoretically open to all, for members of the lower classes to compete on a level playing field, and succeed in their own business. Ultimately, Terry does succeed and gets the wealth he is searching for; therefore, he is no longer one of the poor, but one of the rich. This is obvious as he starts to bear the same contempt for the Ridings (who in contrast to him, fail) that they hitherto bore for him: I won't be scared of them anymore. I won't ever let them make me feel I've done wrong. They are the strange ones these days, to be pitied, allowed for and put aside. They don't belong anymore. What they belonged to has already disappeared; it is used up, leftovers, junk (*Success*, P.193). The changing positions of Terry and Gregory imply the process of class transformation in Britain towards the end of 1970s. While Amis does admit that one's social position is largely decided by his financial capabilities, his critical message, however, is that the rhetoric of freedom and the free market economy do not demolish the problem of classes, but will continue as long as the capitalist system remains. From a Marxist perspective, class struggle is the motivating force of history; the antagonism between the classes, based on their different relations of production, makes them conscious of themselves as classes, which leads to conflict, and therefore, changes (Hughes, John, & Sharrock, P.7). Nick Rennison notes that *Success* is a brilliantly satiric portrait on the meaning of success. The story revolves around the lives of two foster brothers who share a London flat. Gregory Riding is the apparently successful one, "a paragon of effortless superiority" as he inhabits a world of glamorous parties and women. Terry Service, on the other hand, "represents failure at large" (2005, P.8). As the story progresses, the roles are dramatically overturned. Gregory's life slips out of control just as Terry's begins to move towards success.

As Edmondson notes, the narrative of *Success* is “actually a contrapuntal construction of and by two protagonists, each giving his view of the other character in scathingly explicit and contradictory descriptions”, adding that the only facts that the reader can ascertain from this novel is that Terry is obsessed with Gregory and Gregory with himself (P.146). Most critics describe Amis’ *Success* as a critique on British class system during the Thatcherite era of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Graham Fuller, for instance, writes that it is “a parody of England’s class war, with Gregory and Terry symbolising the spiritual decay of the landed gentry and the greedy self-betterment of the ‘yobs’” (quoted in Finney, Martin Amis, 42). According to Finney, Amis himself claims that his novel’s concern is the great English disease—class—which for the author has created nothing but envy and hatred (P.42). Dern also stresses the greediness of the ‘yobs’, as he observes that the novel “satirises the greed of the oncoming 1980s” by demonstrating how the pursuit of the so-called success leads Gregory to be a hopeless liar, and turns another from “sympathetic yob to manipulative” (pp.70-71). Zaat, on the other hand, fails to achieve success in her life. At the end of the novel, Zaat is left crying in the toilet as she feels too helpless to achieve success or a change towards herself or the society at large. “Then she pulled herself together, left the kitchen, and headed with slow heavy steps towards the refuge of tearful withdrawal: the lavatory” (*Zaat*, P.345). Apparently, Zaat’s failure implies the absence of democracy and freedom in the Arab world. The market system that has been created serves only an elite group who exploit everybody else, making it virtually impossible for the poor to alter their social position. Fredric Jameson succinctly sums up Zaat’s situation when he notes: The seemingly hopeless situation of the third-world intellectual in this historical period (shortly after the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, but also after the bankruptcy of the middle-class revolution had become apparent)-in which no solutions, no forms of praxis or change, seem conceivable-this situation will find its parallel, as we shall see shortly, in the situation of African intellectuals after the achievement of independence, when once again no political solutions seem present or visible on the historical horizon (pp.65-88). By drawing upon a Marxist perspective, one can conclude that Ibrahim and Amis have created a vivid picture of the impact of the socioeconomic changes on their societies. Their characters are more or less an abstraction of the impact of the market system on social life. In short, Ibrahim and Amis satirically illustrate the dilemma of the period where people, due to the prevalent socioeconomic ideology, compete to raise their social position through material success. As Peck and Coyle assert, “every work of literature has a generic context. Every work has a historical context: that is, it belongs to a particular historical period. Writers at a given time tend to have similar concerns and, often similar values” (1993, P. 2). Ryan also stresses the social dimension of a literary work, when he notes that while a work of literature always possesses form and structure, it always “exists in time and space, history and society ... It must have a social dimension. In addition, a literary work always bears the imprint of the historical moment in which was written” (P.52).

4. Allegory and Symbolism

Fredric Jameson argued that “all third-world texts are necessarily” allegorical, and must be read as “national allegories”. While I totally agree with the second part of his observation that “third-world text ... project a political dimension in the form of ‘national allegories’” (P.69), I would argue that those countries have, in fact, suffered, and still suffering, in Jameson’s words, “the experience of colonialism and imperialism”, hence, such literary works express resistance of the hegemony and influence exercised by the first capitalist world over third-world nations (P.69). I would further argue that western text is not completely free from allegory in one way or another. The author under discussion, for instance, as will be discussed later, wrote many novels and most of them are allegorical, intermingled with politics. Amis’ *Success*, *Money: A Suicide Note* (1981) and *London Field* (1989) are a case in point where the story and the destiny of the individuals could be ‘an allegory of the embattled situation of the public culture and society’.

In *Zaat* and *Success*, allegory is the driving force of Ibrahim and Amis’ social criticism. A part from mocking the myth of success through Zaat’s characterization, discussed above, Ibrahim, further uses her to allegorically criticize a society where fashion and appearance become important signs of one’s class. “Consumption rather than production”, according to Weber, form the basis of social stratification in modern society (Pascal, P.81). Zaat’s search for social identity makes her very conscious of the significance of appearance in a fashionable consumer society, where “identity is increasingly drawn from consumption practices” (Butt, P.36). That is why Zaat “turn[s] her attention to a more serious matter: the march of demolition and construction (*Zaat*, P.46).

Her consumption practice is inspired by the processes of demolition and construction spread around her, as they become important signs of one's social status in Egypt during that time: The march of demolition and construction in the building began with the Ministry of Agriculture man when his fortunes began to take a turn for the better after competition flared up between the foreign insecticide companies that supplied the ministry (*Zaat*, P.47). The irony of the situation lies in the fact that *Zaat*, who despite being unable to afford the upkeep of her family, joins in the processes of demolition and construction, in the hope that she can alter her social position and gain higher status. Apparently, Ibrahim seems to criticize the fashionable society, where appearance and lifestyle choices are considered to be important signs of one's class or identity, and wittily enough indicates that only dishonest people like the 'Ministry of Agriculture man' are capable of doing. Thus, Ibrahim allegorically mocks the spread ideology which dictates that one can alter his status through consumption practices. He is, in other words, satirizing the materialistic society where social identity is drawn from material sources rather than personal merits, and is exposing and ridiculing the market system where chances are given to a chosen few. On the other hand, he seems to suggest that these chosen few invariably tend to be dishonest individuals, as in the example of the Ministry of Agriculture man, referred to above. Ibrahim intertextually stresses this view by providing several shots from the life of these elite, for whom success is guaranteed: "The court of ethics revalues the assets of Esmat El Sadat, which are threatened with sequestration, at 78 million pounds instead of the previous estimate of 126 million" (*Zaat*, P.93). Further, Ashraf Marwan, Anwar El sadat's former secretary, "who is estimated to have made 400 million pounds on arms deals, buys a huge number of shares in the London store Harrods" (*Zaat*, P.298). El Shaab newspaper: "A group of present and former senior officials have obtained land on the Bitter Lakes at a fraction of its true cost despite the fact that the land is owned by the state and cannot be sold under the law, and is in a restricted military area" (*Zaat*, P.102). The above intertextual quotes clearly illustrate that only certain type of people is capable of getting wealthier. Thus, while the disillusioned heroine appears to be very humiliated by her poverty and social status, the central message delivered by Ibrahim seems to be that the means by which the elite reach their exalted status is suspect, thus implicating the very process of social climbing. As Zaalouk Notes, "other members of the Egyptian industrial bourgeoisie had emerged from the state bureaucracy. ... They were high raking government officials, who by virtue of their position had acquired land and real estate..." (P. 158).

Similarly, allegory is the prime vehicle of Amis's ridicule where Terry is used to mock the search for social identity through material success in the free market economy. However, while Amis for the most part employs straightforward allegory to illustrate the class system in his society, Ibrahim, on the other hand, complements his allegorical method intertextuality and symbolism to do the same, as will be discussed below. Via the characters of Terry Service and Gregory Riding in *Success*, Amis is able to allegorically satirize the hatred, conflict and inequality among classes almost towards the end of the 1970s in Britain, with the stepbrothers' changing positions implying the shifting positions of classes during that time. It also shows the envy of the lower classes of the profligacy of the rich, as well as their thirst to exact revenge on their economic superiors, as Terry does as soon as he comes into wealth. This means that the majority of the lower strata will inevitably become more aggressive as soon as they get the money—and power, since money and power are inexorably linked: "the fact [is] that money represents or is a means of power in capitalist society, and that it therefore can be likened to all kinds of other social powers" (Nelson, 1999, P.18).

Indeed, Ibrahim and Amis, seems to criticize the belief that "class barriers can be breached by the acquisition of Great sums of money" (Doan, P. 73). They, in other words, ridicule the social injustice where individuals are classified according to their possession and non-possession of materials. Their views very much correspond with Marx's perspective that an individual's position in society is entirely dependent on his or her socioeconomic status. We have seen that *Zaat* works very hard to improve her financial circumstances so that she can 'belong'; Terry too is very much conscious of this fact: "I've got to lock myself away until I'm fit to live" (*Success*, P.52). And as soon as he gets the means of power, money, he considers the Ridings as the ones who do not "belong" any more, since they have lost their wealth. As Bertens notes, Marxist theory argues that the way we think and the way we experience the world around us are either wholly or largely conditioned by the way the economy is organized (2001, P.82). Other than using allegory and Intertextuality, Ibrahim also makes use of Nasser's image to illustrate his landscape. Indeed, Nasser is the symbol of social justice, freedom and equality, not only in Egypt but in the Arab world at large. His image is used as a hammer to mock the present. "Gamal Abdel Nasser would regularly turn away from her all of a sudden and charge into the kitchen, the pick up a hammer, and lay into the walls and cupboards, then move onto the bathroom" (*Zaat*, P.49). The author wittily depicts Nasser as a symbol of justice and equality which the current regime lacks.

It is also a source of inspiration for lower classes to struggle for their rights and social justice; in short, Nasser is both a symbol of justice and hope for poor people like Zaat and her husband. Against the picture of Nasser who appears to invite Zaat to revolt against her shabby poor life, Ibrahim cleverly introduces El Sadat era as merely the day of dreams and empty promises: “Gamal Abdel Nasser stopped coming with his hammer of demolition, but Anwar El Sadat continue his nocturnal visits with the popular ceramic tiles in his right hand” (*Zaat*, P.61). Ironically, however, Zaat misinterprets Nasser’s message. Instead of revolting against the regime, she rather turns her attention towards changing her life; but in the process of doing so, she forgets the actual source of her torture, the system. This is because, Sadat’s economic policy widened the gap among people in Egypt, as economy and power became more and more centralized in the hands of fewer and fewer people. The majority were left to struggle to affirm their own existence in the veritable jungle of the free market system. Zaat is a case in point. According to Engels, as time goes by, capitalist production will become concentrated in fewer and fewer large firms, which will also alter the social structure: “The middle class must increasingly disappear until the world is divided into millionaires and paupers, into large landowners and poor farm labourers” (Hughes, P.43). Ibrahim’s satire very much touches upon this reality. His novel depicts Egypt as being of two distinct camps: the rich and poor. The middle class, the working class and the peasants are classified as one single camp by Ibrahim, being the ‘poor’. Businessmen and officials, on the other hand, represent the other category- the capitalists or the ruling class. Even though the latter category has fewer members, they own the means of production, power, and the land—all the things of which the first group is totally deprived. Similarly, Terry’s resistance of the Ridings symbolizes his rejection of the aristocrats. Amis deals with this idea elaborately, as almost the whole novel revolves around Terry’s rejection of the Ridings, and their contempt and oppression for him. This is obvious as he declares that he has been at their ‘mercy’ since his arrival at their home. “I had no affection for the place, with its self-sufficient hysteria, nor gratitude for the people who worked there; I was at their mercy, or thought I was, so they all got to hate me a bit ... ‘Be polite, keep quiet, and think yourself lucky’ ...” (*Success*, P.27).

Like Terry, Zaat suffers from humiliation and negligence. She is boycotted at work, and completely isolated in her home due to her poverty, even within her own neighborhood. Her colleagues “neglected to invite her [even] for the communal tea ...” (*Zaat*, p.88). Thus, both Zaat and Terry suffer from total marginalization due to their social status, being treated as insignificant objects that do not warrant anybody’s attention. Hence, it can be seen then that both Zaat and Terry share something in common: oppression, a theme that both Ibrahim and Amis are deeply concerned with, and strongly criticise. However, unlike Ibrahim, Amis makes use also of distortion to sharply criticize bourgeoisie’s oppression and marginalization of poor people. The distortion is mostly carried out through Gregory, by way of his descriptions of the insignificance of lower class individuals. The disgust of aristocrats for poor people is depicted and distorted within a discourse of contempt: “Just look at the lower classes—look at them seriously. Naturally they stick to themselves. Who else wants them? They are made for themselves” (*Success*, P. 72). Gregory’s view is evidence that lower class individuals are utterly rejected and marginalized as if they belong to ‘another world’; a fact that is emphasized by Terry himself when he confesses the limits of his life: “There are women I’m allowed to talk to like café waitress and bus conductresses” (*Success*, P. 76). The use of the word “allowed” indicates that capitalist society has certain social norms which lower classes should not violate. It is an overstatement, of course, but it is indicative of the oppression of the lower class, a defining characteristic of capitalist society.

This picture is further sharpened when Terry declares that he is prohibited from attending Gregory’s parties, even though they take place at home. “... and if he brings back a party I feel strictly below-stairs and don’t dare go up” (*Success*, P.77). Hence, Terry is oppressed even in his own home, a microcosmic replication of the situation in the outside world. Being an ‘ordinary’ member of the lower class entails negligence and suffering, admitted by both Terry and Gregory. The antagonism does work in both ways, however, since Gregory is described by Terry as “a monster of conceit” (*Success*, P.59), this would indicate that the pride of people like Gregory hinders them from accepting and treating poor people like real human beings. Thus, through the characters of Terry and Gregory, Amis metonymically exposes and condemns the enforced suffering and institutionalized contempt for the marginalized ‘other’, namely, poor people. Like Ibrahim, he strongly condemns and criticizes the capitalist system. His satirical message lies in the fact that the free market economic policy has intensified class antagonism in Britain, conveyed through Terry’s painful stay in the Riding home.

However, while Ibrahim makes use of symbolism to inspire poor people to resist oppression and to change their situation, Amis uses overstated distortion instead, evident in the following excerpt: God, the horror of being ordinary. When I see them, other people—a woman who looks like a remedial art-therapist releases a soft gurgle of satisfaction as she and her colleague find seats at the wine-bar; a stroke of luck which considerably lightens her day; in the underground carriage a big man in a cheap grey mackintosh, breathing that bit too hard, is wrestling with a newspaper ...; the porter at my flat ... I think: you deserve to be what you are if you could bear to get that way ... No one will protect you, and people won't see any reason not to do you harm. Your life will divide up between the fair of madness and the panic of self-preservation. That's it: feed up for going mad. I'm afraid that's all we have to offer you (P.48). It is a mark of Amis' ironic wit that he uses a capitalist voice to ridicule the way capitalists perceive the life of ordinary people, with the intention of shocking the reader and forcing him to consider a situation he might hitherto have missed. For capitalists, 'other people' are from a different and horrible world, and deserves the contempt and oppression they receive. The world 'horror' symbolizes the cruelty and harshness of the life of poor people in the contemporary capitalist society. This view is further emphasized by the condescending capitalist voice: "... that's all we have to offer you." The plural 'we' represents the collective voice of contemporary capitalists, who are not yet ready to show mercy towards the lower strata. However, an important satirical message is directed at poor people themselves in the excerpt: unless they show an awareness of the existing situation, and subsequently resist it, nobody will care about them. Amis' intention, in other words, is to create a social consciousness among poor people to resist and struggle against the situation. His criticism suggests that people should not only reject their state, but actively work hard to change existing social affairs.

Yet unlike Ibrahim, who indirectly suggests socialism as an alternative system for capitalism in Egypt, Amis does not come up with an alternative. However, the way he presents the agony of lower classes implies his adoption of Ibrahim's ideology: one, in other words, can infer socialist whispers, which calls for the resistance of the existing situation. This voice of resistance is motivated through Gregory's diatribe above: "I think: you deserve to be what you are if you could bear to get that way (*Success*, P.48)." This phrase seems to have two intended messages: while it encourages poor people to revolt against their current situation through whatever means possible, it also insists on the responsibility of each individual to decide his or her own fate, in terms of working harder to improve his or her economic position, and therefore social position—a view that is carried over by the two novelists throughout the two texts. Such view is very much stressed by Terry, the speak mouth of the author, who, while explaining the meaning of the word 'chippy' to his sister, says: "it means minding being poor, ugly and common" (P.57). The word 'common' here is the equivalent of Gregory's 'ordinary'. This, indeed, takes us back to the Marxist view of a society divided along economic lines, where the social position of an individual is ultimately based on his economic status, of which Terry and Zaat seem to be very much aware, as they are the product of the same historical period, with nearly similar social circumstances: that of late capitalism. Hence, both of them work very hard to improve their respective economic status in order to achieve social advancement.

An important aspect of Ibrahim and Amis' satire is that they both highlight the extreme agony of the lower class individuals. The means by which they do so—their preferred satirical techniques—may differ, but the goal is the same: bringing to surface the reality that poor people are oppressed and deprived from certain social privileges. Zaat's misery, for instance, is most clearly expressed through the story of her sickness, to draw our attention to a serious problem, that of the struggle of lower classes with healthcare. Unfortunately, instead of achieving the economic success she dreams of, Zaat only finds misery awaiting her. As Zaat belongs to the marginalized poor class, she neither receives good medication nor is taken to a good hospital. She eventually ends up in the Ain Shams Specialization Hospital, where she is neglected "until one of them remembered there was a patient lying under the camera ... she begged them not to forget her under the camera ..." (*Zaat*, P.58). It was at the cancer or "Tumour" Institute ... that their wanderings finally came to an end among a crowd of peasants who had come from remote villages with swollen stomachs, necks, bladders, wombs, and breasts, squatting against the walls of a cold dark waiting room, which was enough in itself to cause the most malignant of tumours, where a number of young doctors willingly fiddled with patients ... under the supervision of a senior professor who was furious at people's passion for smoking. He reluctantly gave her a clean bill of health ... (*Zaat*, P.59). The negligent treatment of Zaat in the hospital serves to reveal the oppression that the lower classes face. By exposing this reality, Ibrahim intends to evoke contempt and hatred for the ruling class, who have completely deprived poor people from receiving good medication. As the story progresses, Ibrahim deliberately puts Zaat and her husband among the crowd of the peasants to suggest that this is the group in which they belong.

Even Though Zaat and her family live in the city, she is no different from the ghost-like peasants, since she does not have the quality to belong to the high class. In this sense, Ibrahim seems to re-emphasize his view, in line with Engels' assertion, that there are only two categories in Egypt, the aristocrats and the poor, the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Like Zaat, Terry suffers from class oppression: he is not only treated as an 'other', but he is looked down upon—to them, he belongs to a different world. Due to his lower class origins, Terry suffers total isolation and negligence even in the streets and on trains among the crowds. At home, he is converted into a mere object where he receives all kind of humiliation and negligence. In other words, due to their social class, both Zaat and Terry suffer from the norms of the capitalist society, where respect is only paid to the powerful, with power laying in "how much one has"; the more a person has the more powerful and therefore respectable, he or she becomes. Apart from focusing on the agony of the oppressed, Ibrahim and Amis also critically expose the psychological effects of such oppression through their major characters. This is obviously reflected in the characterization of both Zaat and Terry. Zaat, for example, due to her psychological agony, loses the desire for sex, so whenever Abdel Maguid forces her to perform sex with him she can only pretend to enjoy it: At first she resorted to the usual excuses ... but Abdel Maguid grew more resolved and there was nothing she could do except to surrender ... She sought help from her internal video and compiled a truly creative montage in which passionate kissing scenes from sixties Arabic films ... In this way she was able to achieve the required amount of participation to allow Abdel Maguid to begin the performance which she bore with a woman's usual patience (*Zaat*, P.82).

Moreover, due to her psychological state, Zaat loses her temper and accuses her husband of causing their financial circumstances. When Abdel Maguid says, "What do you want me to do? Steal?" Zaat responds, "Why not. What is wrong with that?" (*Zaat*, P.92). Hence, Zaat, under the hardships of life, forgets her principles and becomes confused as to what is right and what is wrong, asking her husband to steal to improve their lives, so that they can live like other people. She feels that she has the right to be equal with others. In other words, she feels she deserves to belong. This, indeed, re-emphasizes the author's view that only dishonest individuals can climb the ladder and become rich. Sexual failure is also an issue with Terry: "I am not a sexual success with women. I just am not" (*Success*, p.82). Psychologically, he is broken. This state of feeling leads him to enjoy talking to machines: "Thank you for letting me in, thank you for acknowledging my presence, thank you for taking my order, thank you for taking my money, thank you for giving me change" (p.33). Like Zaat who finds her new home a source of agony and pretence under the stress of her husband, Terry suffers under the microcosmic hegemony of his foster-brother, Gregory. In other words, Zaat and Terry seem to suffer from what Gregory calls the "madness" of lower class people. In the beginning, Terry appears confused and aimless, feeling only hatred for Gregory. Gregory too loses no chance to score points over him. "Let's have a laugh at Terrance's expense, I thought. That is what we're here for, after all—to have fun with him" (*Success*, P.22). Thus, Like Zaat, Terry falls under similar circumstances: both are affected by the market system, both undergo the inevitable social transformation, and both suffer from oppression and humiliation as a result of their poor family origins. But, neither Zaat nor Terry accept their lowly social positions, nor do they settle for compromise; instead, they strongly resist it and work hard to establish themselves and gain the social identity they are searching for. Their private individual destiny seems to be as an allegory of the embattled situation of the public culture and society.

5. Conclusion

As much as Edward Said does not believe that "authors are mechanically determined by ideology, class, or economic history" he does believe that they are "very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measures" (Said, p.70). Based on Said's observation and the critics cited above, including Marx, one can confirm that Ibrahim and Amis are more or less under the influence of the contemporary status quo. They react by means of satire, both embodying and condemning the individuals contained within, and have artistically portrayed their dark vision of their comparable socio-historical contexts of economic instability and social injustice. What is at stake is that the two authors have utilized certain critical devices to unpack the effects of contemporary market policy on their societies, thus provided a dissident voice for the cultural dominance of the open market economy and its ramifications. But, although allegory appears to dominate their works, Amis tends to aid his depiction distortion and comparison, Ibrahim's critical stance, however, is instead intensified through the use of subtle symbolism and intertextuality throughout the novel.

These literary devices clearly illustrate Terry and Zaat's struggle to better themselves in an unjust society. Significantly, Ibrahim skillfully integrates his intertextual and symbolic references to inject a sense of tacit authenticity given that Zaat's portrayal is definitely intended to thoroughly expose the disintegration of the Egyptian society rather than the story of a heroic failure. Indeed, this analogy is a metaphorical decoration not only for the individual drama but the society at large. And as noted earlier, Ibrahim develops his satire in such a way as to expose the oppression of three groups of people—the middle class, class workers and the peasants, all of whom are lumped together as 'the poor'—as well as the corruption of the ruling class. In this sense, the pendulum of his satire goes back and forth in such a way as to portray the marginalization and the negligence of such groups. The yoking together of reality with the imaginary is a technique also used by Amis in his novel *Money*, when Amis himself appears as a character in the novel. However, while Amis' technique involves, as he himself admits, "fucking around with [his] reader" (Morrison, P.98), Ibrahim's intention seems to be to demystify the fictitious world of his novel, thus making Zaat's story appears more authentic, and therefore, more appealing to the reader. This view is very much stressed by the use of Nasser's image, the former Egyptian president, who dominates almost the whole text. In Zaat's story, in other words, we sense the 'freshness of information' of the social reality of Egypt. A part from the analyses carried out in this paper, one might conclude that the central match between Marxism and our authors is that they all produce a critique of commercial society—a society such as our own—where the dominant ideological assumptions such as the 'free individual' and the 'free market' actively shape the minds and the life-style of the individuals. Interestingly, one can conclude that both Ibrahim and Amis' satirical perceptions have their roots in a Marxist critique of capitalism. Ibrahim's satiric vision in particular, in other words, is based on his Marxist perspectives. He seems to find inspiration in Marxist views to draw his sense of hope for a social change as he himself admits that Marxism helps him to assess life.⁸ Hence, his Marxism gives him a hope of ending the social injustice in his society. Amis on the other hand, is like Anthony Burgess, tends to write satire as the only way of dealing with a world beyond hope. His apocalyptic views in *Money: A Suicide Note*, *London Fields*, and *Time's Arrow* (1991), etc., indicate that unlike Ibrahim Amis seems to lose his sense of hope in a world that is controlled by a web of conspiracy as well as by digging its own grave through developing nuclear weapons to destroy its own live.

⁸Read, "A One-man development Plan", Cairo Times, Volume 5, Issue 24 (29 Aug. 2001), (accessed January 12, 2008).

6. References

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