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## BOOK REVIEW

### **GOVERNMENT OF SHADOWS BY MONDHER AL-QABANI**

(Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc. Beirut, Lebanon, 2011)

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Al-Qabani's *Government of Shadows* examines how clandestine political organizations monopolize the discourse of intricate relationships between power and control. Indeed, the novel dissects the secrecy of shadow governments, and how such covert operations impact societal norms and public policies, without being accountable. Al-Qabani uncovers these clandestine organizations' techniques in keeping grip on power, by meticulously conducting research, telling compelling stories, and eluding democratic procedures. Al-Qabani's work is valuable for its perceptive comments and clear explanation of intricate political events and issues. The novel, which offers an insightful, thought-provoking perspective on the interplay between secrecy and authority, is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding the invisible forces that affect and shape our world.

Dan Brown's contemporary police stories had a contributive role in Mondher Al-Qabani's *Government of Shadows*. Indeed, the novel begins with a slightly different and mysterious tone. Initially, the author introduces various topics that may appear arbitrary to the reader, yet simultaneously entices them to continue reading, seeking deeper connections between these stories. The events soon intertwine seamlessly; however, the author maintains a sense of suspense and intrigue, luring the reader to uncover the truth. The author appears to be expert and skilled in conveying such idiosyncrasies owing to the use of simple language and a

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smooth narrative style, deploying expressions that appeal to the reader's senses, which gives the novel an artistic dimension.

The plethora of books that delve into political topics and matters related to homeland and honor is noticeable. However, Mondher Al-Qabani's novel, *Government of Shadows*, expounds the shadowy corridors of power, where secrets whisper and alliances shift. This novel masterfully weaves a tale that transcends mere political intrigue. It beckons readers to activate their analytical thinking to connect the chain of past events with the present. Al-Qabani asserts: "Coincidence justifies ignorance of what one does not comprehend." It is certain that those who fail to consider what is happening around them, do not review it, or fail to link it to its historical roots are considered ignorant. This is precisely what distinguishes the novel *Government of Shadows*.

The novel's plot swings between today's events and stories and those that happened in 1908 in particular. The story took place in Morocco, Egypt, Riyadh, Medina, the United Kingdom, and Canada in the current era, but it is confined to Istanbul, the caliphate of the ancient era, in 1908. With the story progress, the characters exhibit an overt intellect that draws deductions reverberating through time and bridging the chasm between different eras. The most capturing aspect in the novel is these characters' personal involvement in the game, though! Indeed, the labyrinth of shadows hides the interplay between hypocrisy and fate within which we all participate in framing secrets.

The political dimension also addresses the Palestinian issue and the Zionist entity's efforts to establish Israel in Palestinian territories. Sultan Abdul Hamid II resisted these attempts. The novel further explores attempts to undermine the Sultan's role, maneuverings by certain courtiers to overthrow him, and the attribution of Israel and Masonry to Turkey and the entire world.

As Al-Qabani aptly puts it: "Knowledge of history is the key to civilization, the present, and the future." Indeed, the novel's protagonists – Khalil, Na'im, and Tal'at – personify this axiom. They are not mere pawns but astute players who decipher the cryptic language of events. Their minds, honed by the echoes of centuries, discern patterns invisible to ordinary people. They are intelligent, quick-witted, and precise; and they consistently derive explanations for current events by linking them to the past. However, what truly piques interest is their "reflection" to understand the situation and attempt to simulate potential outcomes. Indeed, the quest for truth lies in questioning, for not all that glimmers is gold, and not every narrative is truth. Sound reasoning, historical context, and an unwavering gaze upon the present are the keys to unlocking the future. As Khalil, Na'im, and Tal'at unravel the unseen threads of history, they remind us that the past whispers, the

present beckons, and the future awaits those who seek. Particularly, the main character, Naeem Al-Wazan, is well-versed in historical events across various domains, enabling him to engage in any conversation and achieve his goals. We admire this character because it somewhat resembles us, especially in interactions with others. His deliberate approach to handling matters, active listening, concise speech, quick wit, and intelligence resonate with us.

“The world is changing; it is no longer as it once was, yet most people remain unaware,” says the main character, Na’im Al-Wazan, echoing the enigmas that have characterized the world for ages. These puzzles are woven in secrecy, understood only by their initiates. Throughout history, secret movements have emerged, notably the Donmeh Jews and the Masonic organizations. They have intensified their efforts to spread discord and, through hypocrisy, continue their quest to seize control of the world. Hypocrisy was the method employed by the first Sabaeans, who claimed Islam while plotting and fighting against Muslims. Hypocrisy has also enabled Muslims to uncover some secrets of rival factions. Muslims, too, have formed groups, including the “Al-Arwa Al-Wathqa,” with some members posing as Jews or adopting other guises to infiltrate enemy ranks, to expose the hidden hands that shape destiny, and to gain insight into their secrets and combat them on that basis. Thus, at its core, the novel grapples with the concept of hypocrisy – a weapon wielded by both the righteous and the devious. These covert movements, whether Jewish or Muslim, operate in the murky depths, and their true intentions are veiled behind masks of virtue. Their *modus operandi* is to strike at the heart of their adversaries, unravel their beliefs, and manipulate the course of history.

Throughout the novel, from its cover to plot, there is a dance of symbols. The novel’s cover bears symbols – glyphs etched in ink, resonating with hidden meanings. Each emblem points to a covert assembly, a movement operating in the shadows. Whether it be the Donmeh Jews or the enigmatic Masons, their agendas intersect at the crossroads of secrecy and deception. The novel introduces symbols and imagery that point to clandestine and secretive movements and organizations, whether Jewish or Muslim. Beyond its thoughtful aspects, the novel delves into politics, tracing back to the Ottoman Caliphate and the inception of the Masonic movement symbolized by “The Pyramid” on the book cover. References to the pyramidal dome in Dr. Abdul Qadir Benouzani’s house and the library of the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul, as well as the shape and name of internet cafés in Morocco and Egypt, all play a significant role. Additionally, the “All-Seeing Eye” is present. Each of the main characters has encounters with these symbols, as well as the method of execution known as “The Grand Builder” (Hiram Abiff), which is

used to punish Masonic members who deviate from Masonic teachings. Additionally, the novel point out to a network of “Golden Pyramid” cafés spread across the world. Through these symbols, the characters uncover continuity in a secret global movement, seemingly connected to secretive groups. It is said that prominent politicians and early American leaders were Masons. In 1909, the Union and Progress Party played a role in establishing Masonry in Turkey. This movement continues to expand worldwide up to the present day!

These movements have their origins and beliefs, but what makes them so secretive? What are their goals? Do they recruit members from various corners of the globe? Do they target individuals and elites regardless of their faith? Are we truly being observed? Many questions surround these clandestine movements, understood only by their members. As we turn the pages of *Government of Shadows*, history’s whispers echo through our veins. The veil lifts, revealing not just the past, but the pulse of our shared existence.