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Hunger and Subalternity in Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Food for Every Mouth* (1963)

Abstract

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Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's theory of subalternity, this paper attempts to culturally read the Egyptian modern playwright Tawfiq Al-Hakim's play *Food for Every Mouth*. It is taken from my Ph.D. dissertation, and it examines how the play universally exposes the problem of hunger by diminishing the bourgeois hegemonic control of the food market. In addition, it sheds light on food as a cultural element that mirrors traditions and subalternity by focusing on the interplay of food and power and examining how food policies of meat and coffee reflect power relations between the elite and the subaltern. This paper also sheds light on class and gender subalternity for it examines the reasons behind the subalterns' silence, lack of domination, and representation. Further, it investigates Al-Hakim's meta-theatrical technique of a-play-within-a-play, its definition, functions, characteristics, and how they are applied in the play. The paper endeavors to answer the following questions: to what extent can food shortage be a powerful lens on subalternity and social injustice? How can the interplay between food insecurity and power expose subalternity? How can the play be culturally read via food? Can cultural studies of food provide solutions to hunger and help to make the dream to free food come true? How can metatheatre in the form of a play-within-a-play technique affect social change and reform on Al-Hakim's stage?

Keywords: Al-Hakim, *Food for Every Mouth*, Spivak, hunger, power, subalternity.



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الطعام والتبعية في مسرحية الطعام لكل فم (1963) لتوفيق الحكيم

مستخلص الدراسة

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استنادًا إلى نظرية التبعية لجاباتي سييفاك ، يسعى هذا البحث إلى قراءة مسرحية *الطعام لكل فم* للكاتب المسرحي المصري الحديث توفيق الحكيم ثقافيًا كما يدرس كيف تكشف المسرحية بشكل عام عن مشكلة الجوع من خلال تقليص السيطرة البرجوازية المهيمنة على سوق المواد الغذائية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك يسلط البحث ، و المشتق من رسالة الدكتوراه خاصتي، الضوء على الطعام كعنصر ثقافي يعكس التقاليد والتبعية من خلال التركيز على التفاعل بين الطعام والسلطة ودراسة كيف تعكس السياسات الغذائية الخاصة باللحوم والقهوة علاقات القوة بين النخبة والتابع. يلقي هذا البحث الضوء أيضًا على التبعية الطبقية والجندرية حيث يبحث في الأسباب الكامنة وراء صمت التابعين ، وافتقارهم إلى الهيمنة والتمثيل. علاوة على ذلك ، فإنه يبحث في أسلوب الحكيم المسرحي القائم على استخدام مسرحية فرعية داخل المسرحية الأصلية ، وتعريفه ، ووظائفه ، وخصائصه ، وكيفية تطبيقه في المسرحية. يسعى البحث أيضًا للإجابة على الأسئلة التالية: إلى أي مدى يمكن أن يكون نقص الغذاء عدسة قوية على التبعية والظلم الاجتماعي؟ كيف يمكن للتفاعل بين انعدام الأمن الغذائي والسلطة أن يفضح التبعية؟ كيف يمكن قراءة المسرحية ثقافيًا عن طريق الطعام؟ هل يمكن للدراسات الثقافية عن الطعام أن تقدم حلولاً للجوع وتساعد على تحقيق حلم الطعام المجاني؟ كيف يمكن لتقنيات مسرح الحكيم أن تؤثر على التغيير الاجتماعي والإصلاح على مسرح الحكيم؟

الكلمات الرئيسية: توفيق الحكيم، الطعام لكل فم، سييفاك، الجوع، السلطة، التبعية.

Hunger and Subalternity in Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Food for Every Mouth* (1963)

Introduction

This paper is taken from my Ph.D. dissertation which is entitled *When the Subaltern Speaks: A Cultural Reading of Bertolt Brecht's Saint Joan of the Stockyards, Tawfiq Al-Hakim's Food for Every Mouth, and Suzan-Lori Parks' Venus*. It attempts to culturally read the Egyptian modern playwright Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Food for Every Mouth* (1963) by applying Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subalternity, expounded in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" It examines how the play discusses the problem of hunger universally as a powerful lens on class and gender subalternity. In addition, it celebrates food as a cultural factor that reflects traditions, customs, practices of power, and subalternity.

The paper provides a biographical sketch of Al-Hakim, the relationship of his writings to hunger and subalternity and the impact of socialism on him, it also focuses on food activism, science, and hard work as a way out of hunger, slavery, and social injustice. Moreover, the paper explains the interplay of food insecurity and power by examining how food policies (preparation, consumption, and distribution) of meat and coffee reflect power relations between the elite and the subaltern in the play. In addition, the paper sheds light on class and gender subalternity for it examines the reasons behind the subalterns' underconsumption, speechlessness, and lack of control and representation concluding that the female protagonist Samira is the most vulnerable subaltern who is always in men's shadow. The paper examines Al-Hakim's meta-theatrical technique of a-play-within-a-play and how it is applied in the play to effect social change and reform.

The intricate relationship between Hunger and Subalternity

The theme of hunger had been discussed in numerous literary works such as Kafka's *The Hungry Artist* in which the protagonist resorted to hunger strike as a method of non-violent resistance and protest to achieve a change in people's marginalized gaze towards the artist whose aesthetic craft is underestimated. In addition, starvation was used as a tool in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* to magnify recent starvation policies of European imperialism as a medium for barbarity and subordination. The universal problem of Hunger takes center stage in Al-Hakim's *Food for Every Mouth* for he dreamed of providing a suitable solution to eliminate hunger through science, work, and socialism. There had been numerous discussions and trials by Plato and Thomas Malthus to eliminate hunger. Plato's concept of Utopia as an imaginary place where social and economic conditions are perfect under the leadership of governments fails to eliminate hunger or poverty because no government has ever adopted it. And Malthus saw that the decrease in population was hard to achieve yet inevitable to eliminate hunger or the increased numbers would always be in dire need of food and poverty.

Al-Hakim illustrated in *Food for Every Mouth* that the elite controllers while in power take advantage of hunger using it as a means of subalternity and exploitation. As Al-Hakim notes: "HAMDI. Hunger is a weapon for control and slavery, SAMIRA. That's why the controllers won't give up their weapons." (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1963, p. 75).

Similarly, Spivak sees in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that "a conception of "power" is made possible by a certain stage in exploitation" (1988, p.289). Despite the exerted economic efforts in the 1950s to control the power of the capitalists like the Land Reform Law in 1952 which stripped capitalists from their lands allowing them only to own not more than 200 feddans of land beside the Nationalization of Suez Canal Company in 1956, Al-Hakim explains that power of upper classes is still practiced to keep the economic exploitation of the subalterns who fight hunger and oppression imposed upon them.

Although Land Reform Law aimed to eliminate capital industrial and commercial investments on the land, it increased the economic power of the wealthy landowners and the rich peasants class. These upper classes controlled the majority of the private enterprises of agriculture, industry, and commerce leaving the subalterns like poor peasants and workers in dire poverty, subjugation, and hunger. The elite avoided giving power to the workers and peasants, they also refused any transition to scientific socialism as a solution to the then social and political problems. Consequently, Al-Hakim introduced *Food for Every Mouth* as a call to the powerless low classes to awaken, dream, and effect change in the chaotic oppressing society ruled by the upper classes of the capitalists. He did not do this “call to the powerless” intentionally, yet he expressed it in an absurd fantasy play with a taste of sci-fi plot. He sees that the real change stems from the subalterns not the forged desires of the oppressors who deprive the workers of the real fruits of their labor. M. Sidebottom confirmed that “one of Al-Hakim’s recurring themes would be how the money spent on military conflict would be put to better use raising the standard of living of the average Egyptian citizen and eliminating hunger” (2007, p.39).

Al-Hakim exposed to what extent can food policies reflect class and gender subalternity via the paradox shaped by capitalism between the elite’s overproduction of meat and the subalterns’ hunger and underconsumption of meat besides their consumption of coffee and its resulting unfair distribution of food in general and meat in particular. The play showed how the subalterns always drink cheap cups of coffee with the dream of providing luxurious food (meat) for all the subalterns for free in mind. Al-Hakim employed this paradox to demonstrate the cynic mentality of the capitalist elite who deprive the subalterns of the fruits of their work and transform them to wage slaves instead of success partners. He agreed with the socialist thought that Michael Ellam saw in his essay “The Rise and Fall of Socialist Planning” as “a form of non-planned administrative or command economy” (2007,

p.22). Al-Hakim realized that controlling and blackmailing the lower classes via hunger discourages socialism and encourages the exploitation and speechlessness of the subalterns. Al-Hakim introduces hunger as one of the crucial causes of subalternity, that as long as the subalterns are inferior and silent, they will feel hunger pangs and lose their freedom and dignity.

Objectives

Through conducting a cultural analysis of hunger and subalternity in Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Food for Every Mouth* (1963), this paper hypothesizes that the subalterns in this play are emboldened and given a voice through excavating the capitalist powers of the elite which had buried certain cultural norms and habits about food. In making subalternity central to the study of hunger, the paper will endeavor to culturally decipher these cultural norms and habits. Drawing on the Indian philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" this paper will investigate how the use of hunger universally exposes class and gender subalternity in Third World societies which had suffered from the legacy of European colonialism. Through the study of how food and power unravel hunger and subalternity in *Food for Every Mouth*, the voices of these subalterns can be heard. Furthermore, the paper attempts to examine the drama techniques on Al-Hakim's stage such as meta-theatre in the play under question and how it is used to effect social change and reform.

Methodology

This paper is a cultural study of how the intersection between hunger and power practices in Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Food for Every Mouth* (1963) exposes class and gender subalternity. Based on the cultural theory of the philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the paper will explore how hunger and capitalist control muted the voices of the subalterns.

Before delving into Spivak's theory of subalternity, a brief background of cultural studies will be discussed.

The term 'Cultural Studies' was first coined by the British Academic Richard Hoggart in 1964 who founded The Birmingham UK Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies which became later the first international institution of cultural studies. Hoggart asserts in his book *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working class Life*. that this field is an "interdisciplinary approach that encompasses discussions from the approaches of feminism, Marxism, racism, postcolonial theory, political theory, social theory and so on" (1957, p.116). Later in the 1970s, this field had been developed at the hands of Stuart Hall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Andrew Edgar, and the theorist Raymond Williams whose writings on politics and culture laid the foundation of the cultural studies field. According to the political philosopher Andrew Edgar, Cultural Studies "investigates how cultural practices relate to the system of power associated with a specific social phenomenon such as food studies, ethnicity, gender, class structure, national formation and sexism" (2005, p.165).

The European colonizers had set out on their journeys to the east, claiming that all they wanted was to civilize the East, abolish barbarity, and set up global trade. To rule these new colonies, they established political order which was violently executed through military force. In his book, *Postmodern Encounters: Edward Said and the Writing of History*, Shelly Walia described the strategic plan of British imperialism as "accompanied by exploitation, annexation, and conquest. Its hegemonic power rested on creating the binary oppositions of self/other, white/black, good/evil, superior/inferior, and so on" (2001, p.77). In his book *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, Steven Morton explains how imperial practices continued to influence the economic, political, and social life in postcolonial countries. He added "Spivak emphasizes how anti-colonial nationalism assumed distinctively bourgeois character and was thus perceived by many to reproduce the social and political inequalities that were

predominant under colonial rule” (2003, p.1-2). In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak explains how the subaltern has no history and can’t speak because others do not have the patience to listen to them. She adds that “food shortage in subaltern’s culture, resulting from the unfair distribution of food resources in postcolonial countries, snowballed into food riots and labors’ violence” (1988, p. 292).

Spivak refuses the supremacy of the European colonizers and the western cultural hegemony over the East. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” she investigated the inferior place of the marginalized subjects in Hindu society such as the working class in general, and women, in particular. She borrowed the term ‘Subaltern’ from the Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci who used it to define “the unrepresented group of people in a society” (2004, p. 3). Spivak’s theory of subalternity explained how the subaltern Indian widows were muted at the hands of the patriarchal authorities and the colonial society which deprived them of their value, dignity, and voice. Although the poor Hindu women had a voice of dissent deep within themselves, they could not speak up their minds. The subalterns were compelled to food underconsumption and loss of their power and dignity. Via tracing the paradox of meat/coffee on Al-Hakim’s stage, the levels of subalternity are made clear to the audiences who thought, criticized, and effected a change.

Review of the literature

Several studies had been done before to study the relationship between hunger and subalternity such as the crucial theatrical food cultural study in 2012 titled *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* by Kyla Wzana Tompkins, which focuses on the usage of food during the 19th century with a special emphasis on racism and on food as a source of memory and nostalgia. The comprehensive volume *Food and Theatre on the World Stage* by Dorothy Chansky and Ann F. White in 2016 is also one of the latest and most

comprehensive volumes about the culture of culinary theatre. It consists of five parts that focus on the way food and theatre have intertwined for centuries as partners in performance, and literary making of meaning. Through various case studies from Japan, India, China, and France, this volume examines food as a transhistorical tool of social representation.

Likewise, this paper may contribute to the literature for two reasons. First, most of the cultural studies of food politics have concentrated on the significance of food as a marker of cultural identity such as *Understanding Culture, Food as a Means of Communication* by Nevana Stajcic in 2013, and *Food and Identity: Food Studies, Cultural and Personal Identity* by Gina M. Almerico in 2014, but few of them have focused on its role as a voice of the subaltern against the practices of race, hunger, and class such as *Can the Subaltern Eat?: Modernity, Masculinity and Consumption in the Indian Family* in 2013 by Ira Raja. Second, most of the African food studies have dealt with food violence and scarcity in South and Middle Africa such as *The Politics of the Belly* in 2016 by Praise Zenega which explores food riots in postcolonial Zimbabwe. However, this study will examine food insecurity in North Africa, namely Egypt, by applying Spivak's theory of 'Subalternity' to Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *The Food for Every Mouth* (1963).

Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898-1987) is an esteemed Egyptian pioneer of modern Arabic dramas. He was a descendant of the marriage of wealth and colonization because his father was a judge and land owner, and his mother was an aristocrat of Turkish origin. He studied law in France, but upon returning to Egypt in 1928, he started to write Arabic plays. Only then, he realized the backwardness of the Arabic theatre. In his book *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, Muhammad Badawi explains that this reason is two-fold, as he explains "on the one hand, the squabbles for power between the various political parties, which made politics and political journalism occupy the forefront of people's attention to the exclusion of the arts, and on the other, the growing world economic crisis, with its impact on the Egyptian economy"

(1988, p.14). Al-Hakim was influenced by these political and economic changes in Egypt such as the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and the Agrarian Land Reform laws which were issued in 1952

The importance of work appears to be a major theme in Al-Hakim's writings instead of depending on inherited wealth. This is what Christina M. Sidebottom stresses in her M.A. thesis titled *An Introductory Survey of the Plays, Novels, and Stories of Tawfiq Al-Hakim*. She explained that after the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, Al-Hakim stressed in his plays, "such as *Al-Aydi al-Na'ima* (Soft Hands) 1954, *Al-Sultan Al-Ha'ir* (The Sultan's Dilemma) 1960, that work rather than wealth is the basis for social order" (2007, p.35). Likewise, in *Food for Every Mouth*, Al-Hakim assured that science and socialism are the way out of hunger and the means for real change for the subalterns in the 1960s. That is why his Brechtian-style drama *Food for Every Mouth* is an apt choice for it urged the abolition of a world social problem like hunger.

With his first play *Āhl Ālkhf* (The People of the Cavern) in 1929, Al-Hakim originated intellectual theatre unlike the conventional one of Aristotle to effect a catharsis in the audience. Like Brecht, Al-Hakim's intellectual theatre was an anti-cathartic one, in which he did not rely on Aristotle's mimesis. Yet, he managed to urge the reader to be part of the action and then cause change for he encouraged his readers to find out the real world through his plays to produce a deep, conscious, and critical view of life and society

In his book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin explains that the Theatre of the Absurd reflects the human attitude towards the twentieth century after the two World Wars, which is greatly formed through "medieval beliefs that still held and overlaid by eighteenth-century rationalism and mid-nineteenth-century Marxism" (2001, p.19). The Absurd Theatre doubts the certainty of the basic assumptions of the former ages showing them as childish

irrational illusions. Consequently, Esslin also explained that some Absurd practitioners, “present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning” (2001, p.21). Likewise, Al-Hakim sensed the irrationality of the human condition of world hunger, because food is the most indispensable psychological and physical need ever, in the form of highly constructed reasoning of the causes and the solutions made by his characters in *Food for Every Mouth*.

In his book *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd: Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter*, Michael Bennett expressed that theatre scholars began to see The Absurd Theatre searching for the meaning of life instead of thinking of life’s meaninglessness. This is for “the reader or audience member is forced to confront his or her own worldview in order to create order out of the chaos presented in the plays” (2011, p.8). Bennett thought that human reasoning had been a must so that The Absurd play could find meaning of an absurd meaningless situation.

Al-Hakim wants to awaken the contemporary modern citizen’s consciousness of local and world problems like hunger: “HAMDI. You are right! . . . that was the obstacle in Tarek’s way . . . that’s why people have to be awakened. . . so they can prepare for that distant goal: The journey for the common food” (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p.75). Consequently, he sheds light on the implications of political events that make fun of and criticize the falsity of the practices of the corrupt political and economic regimes when Samira renders “The controllers won’t give up their weapons” (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p.75).

The play is set in a narrow room in an ordinary employee’s house named Hamdi Abd El-Bari. Hamdi is a trivial person with no goal in life, who spends his time with his friends at the café. One day, a water leak happened, leaving the living room’s wall stained. The leak has

developed into a painting that encompasses three characters: the scientist Tarek, his sister Nadia, and their mother.

Through the course of the play, Hamdi and Samira start to get that there is a crisis between the mother and her daughter who thinks that her mother kills her father and hides the secret from her brother. Later, it turns out that Tarek was in Europe working on a project with his colleague to stop world hunger. Tarek describes his project as the greatest achievement ever on the planet and he named it “food for every mouth”, he refuses to seek revenge on his mother, while his sister leaves their house. As Tarek demonstrates the dire need for all humanity to unify against hunger, it seems impossible because rich countries control the world via hunger to achieve their imperial goals. Finally, Hamdi and Samira move from triviality to thinking of solutions for public problems as food insecurity makes them turn their interest to valuable issues. Hamdi realizes his emptiness with the café group and decides to think more carefully about Tarek’s valuable project to feed every mouth.

The Critical Discussion

Drawing on Spivak’s theory of subalternity, this part discusses the universal dilemma of hunger and its influence on the protagonists Hamdi and Samira within the frame of the imaginative parallel story of the wall to stir the imagination and logical thinking. Moreover, this part deals with the coming points: how food policies (preparation, consumption, and distribution), specifically of coffee and meat, reflect the Egyptian food culture, the cultural identity, and the character transformation of the subalterns in the play. How hunger powerfully mirrors power relations between the subalterns and the elite and how food insecurity provides an aura of exploitation and oppression of the subalterns. It also explains how the practices of power over food demonstrate class and gender subalternity. This part

ends with proof of how the subalterns pay-back and resort to science and secularization to try to stop world hunger and end social injustice.

Providing food for every mouth for Al-Hakim is the essence of social reform as it ends slavery and ensures man's freedom and dignity. In the play, Tarek declares "When we eliminate hunger we will simultaneously eliminate man's slavery to man" (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p. 29). That is why food is kept at the forefront of attention within the play as food policies declare what Samira experiences throughout the play. Samira is linked to food preparation since her first appearance on the stage as we find her husband Hamdi asking her to prepare him a cup of coffee, "HAMDI. O, she gave me a big headache . . . please make me a good cup of coffee." (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p.17).

Al-Hakim's use of coffee reminds us of coffee history and its cultural symbols as Jonathan Morris notes in his book *Coffee, A Global History*, "Coffee eventually arrives at Cairo, capital of the ruling Mamluk sultanate, sometime during the 1500s, where it was first used by Yemeni students at Al-Azhar Islamic university . . . before studying or performing long rituals" (2018, p.34). The Egyptian students imitate them using it as a stimulant drink and a legal drug that elevates their attention before the activities that require high focus.

Within the course of the play, coffee appears again as a welcoming drink that reflects the Egyptian culture of generosity and welcoming the guests. It helps the protagonist Samira inside her house to socialize with and welcome her neighbor Lady Atiyyat. Hamdi and Samira try to persuade her to rewash her apartment to continue the story on the wall, when Hamdi says, "Good morning Mrs. Atiyyat . . . please sit on this comfortable chair . . Samira . . . bring some coffee for Mrs. Atiyyat" (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p.62). Moreover, outside the houses "coffee was widely used at the coffee shops which started to be socializing spaces where lower classes discuss the political issues, the matter which the ruling classes

refuse” (2019, n.p.) as Nour El Tigani explains in her article “Egypt’s coffee culture: from Roasted Beans to Social Revolution.” Consequently, coffee is not only used as a medicine, a stimulant, or a welcoming drink but also as a witness to socializing which is considered a byproduct of many social and cultural changes.

Food policies mirror how women are always responsible for household tasks and hospitality. Samira’s continuous preparation for coffee exposes how she asks her guests to be awake and to work diligently to reach a reasonable solution to the problem of hunger. In the play, coffee symbolizes empowerment and attention for it is always employed to make Hamdi awake and ready to solve problems, open discussions, and work more on his research.

Coffee reflects a person’s class and type as Harsh V. Verma explains in his article “Coffee and Tea: Socio-cultural Meaning, Context, and Branding,” “In British culture, coffee enjoyed connotations as a drink reserved for people with a certain level of intellect and wealth” (2013, p. 164). Consequently, Al-Hakim saves coffee for the intellectual researcher Hamdi and the wealthy house owner Lady Atiyyat. In addition, coffee symbolizes empowerment as it contains caffeine that helps people to become alert and produce more.

Al-Hakim concentrates on meat distribution; it is luxurious comfort food for the Egyptians. His insistence to provide the most expensive nutritious item for the Egyptians for free is a dream worthy of research and appreciation. In the East, meat consumption signifies celebration and merry gatherings and because of its ever-increasing prices, it is a sign of higher social income and a prestigious item for the Egyptians. It is also a sign of hospitality and generosity that the ancient culinary tradition of serving the guests numerous meat dishes continues to be practice in banquets among all classes even the ones with the lowest income.

Due to the major importance of meat in Eastern food culture besides the continuous increase of its prices during the 1960s, Al-Hakim makes Hamdi's book endeavors to provide the pound of it for one penny and even for free when Hamdi tells Lady Atiyyat:

HAMDI. Sure . . . wouldn't you like to buy a pound of meat for one penny?

ATIYYAT. Just one penny? . . . I think I heard that from you before.

HAMDI. Well . . . this is not a dream

(*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p.73)

After many years of economic mismanagement and local corruption in the east, most people suffer from malnutrition. Meat is a pricey nutritious item that is rarely served on the easterners' tables. So, from here, comes the dream that providing meat for every mouth will be reached one day. Such idea of the journey to free food and the dream of eliminating hunger reminds us of the famous demand of Shylock from Antonio. The fictional character of the Jewish moneylender "Shylock" in the Shakespearean play *The Merchant of Venice* lends money to his rival Antonio, and when Antonio could not pay it back, Shylock demands a pound of Antonio's flesh according to the agreement. "Pound of flesh" represents something invaluable. It is a "fantasy" and a dream that all countries should unite to achieve. In this sense, Al-Hakim's use of coffee preparation on his stage qualifies food to appear as a source of power that helps the protagonists to focus on how to supply this global need for the poor. That is why we find the cup of coffee always exists next to Hamdi while working on his book to provide meat for free.

In *Food for Every Mouth*, hunger is used by the capitalists as a medium of slavery and suppression. As Al-Hakim notes "HAMDI. Hunger is a weapon for control and slavery. SAMIRA. That is why the controllers won't give up their weapons." (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p. 75). Despite the exerted economic efforts in the 1950s to control the power of the

capitalists, Al-Hakim demonstrated that the power of the upper classes was then still practiced to keep the economic exploitation of the subalterns. The upper classes refused any transition to scientific socialism as a solution to hunger. Consequently, Al-Hakim introduces *Food for Every Mouth* as a call to the hungry to take power and affect social reform. Al-Hakim reveals that oppressing and blackmailing the subalterns via hunger discouraged social justice and increased the exploitation and speechlessness of the subalterns.

Being female, poor, and unemployed, Samira is silenced, forced to underconsumption, controlled by hunger, and doubly subjugated by both the men of higher class and those of her same lower class as her husband Hamdi. If Hamdi as a man is compelled to one level of subalternity due to class, then Samira faces a two-fold level of subalternity due to class and gender. Spivak comments in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” that “the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant.....thus the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (1988, p.287). Samira is also silenced even by those of her same gender as we find the rich owner of the house Lady Atiyyat always trying to silence her preferring to discuss with her husband about the leak on the wall: “ATIYYAT. Keep silent Samira! . . . Let your husband talk!, HAMDY. Be silent Samira!” (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p.15). Samira’s permanent attachment to coffee preparation and her dream of providing meat illustrate how she is doubly in a trouble with either men or women. Samira is silenced because of the absence of estimated activities or achievements that are always ascribed to her exploiters because of their social class and gender.

Consequently, the female subaltern is the most vulnerable subaltern who is set even farther than the margins of power and deprived of the real narration of her history or the true confession of her achievements. In his book *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, Steven Morton makes it clear that Spivak relates the gender subalternity of women to the failure of historiography to fully document their genuine contribution to society. In third-world

countries like Egypt, women have no right to think independently which is why their contribution to society is limited, “they were pleased with the role of man’s shadow which ends when the light fades away from the husband, then the widow finds nothing but to trace the dead’s shadow” (2003, p.132). Samira’s lack of representation takes her as a subaltern woman to deeper levels of inferiority and marginalization that urge her not to think independently or have a true contribution to her society. Her exploiters seek to make her feel inferior and neglected.

Al-Hakim is considered a “futurist” writer on the same footing as the French Jules Verne. In their book *Jules Verne: Four Novels*, JoAnn Padgett and Melinda Allman demonstrate that Jules Verne expresses a strong faith in “science as a means of surmounting obstacles and transforming the natural world” (2012, p.4) Jules Verne’s science-fiction novels such as *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas* (1870), and *Around the World in Eighty Days*, all think of science as the way out of the global dilemmas and achieving the unreachable dreams. Hamdi relies on historical, logical, and scientific proofs to verify the credibility of his dream project. Historically, traveling to the moon was a futuristic event predicted by Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), it really took place in 1969 by the US spaceship Apollo 11. It is also mentioned in the play as historical proof “Hamdi: People in the past couldn't believe that going to the moon was possible” (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p. 74)

When it comes to the logical proof, it makes the audience see that hunger is slavery that needs to be erased as “Hamdi: Even though eliminating hunger means the elimination of slavery” (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p. 74). Scientifically speaking, *Food for Every Mouth* is a “utopian,” “fantasy” drama, it imported the “invention of predicting the future” from the west. Al-Hakim sees that the scientific age needs scientific minds, as Tarek went on a scholarship to study in the west.

Colonial influence or the hegemony of the west over the east was rife in many literary works in the 1950s and 1960s. Scholarship to the west was the streak of influence, the scientist Tarek reminds us with Yahya Hakki's *The Lamp of Um-Hashim* where Ismail traveled to the west, Germany, to learn ophthalmology. Ismail refused the local methods of eye treatment, preferring to depend on the science of the west to treat his people in the east. He sees science as the most important factor that will solve world problems.

The Technique

This part deals with the metatheatrical technique in the play, its definition, function, and how it is used as a medium for effecting social change and eliminating hunger on Al-Hakim's stage. In his book *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, Patric Pavis explains that metatheatricality is a form of antitheatricality "where the dividing line between play and real life is erased. This hypothesis developed by Lionel Abel, who seems to have coined the term, is simply an extension of the old theory of a-play-within-a-play" (1996, p.210)

Metatheatrical technique is an old concept known since the Greek theatre as *mise-en-abyme*, which is a French term first coined by Andre Gide to refer to a-play-within-a-play technique. In *Food for Every Mouth* Al-Hakim depends on the wall in the apartment which acts as a bridge between reality, where the bourgeois controls food resources causing hunger and famine and fantasy where dreams of eliminating hunger could come true. In this sense, the wall is a gate between two worlds: the world of complacency and the world of scientific revolution; the world of triviality and wasting time and the world of the vindication of science over world problems.

In his book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Jerzy Grotowski illustrates that poor theatre can dispense costumes, props, and sets because it "proposes the substitution of material wealth by moral wealth as the principal aim in life" (2002, p.44), but poor theatre cannot dispense the

actor. Following the technique of minimalism, Al-Hakim uses a few stage resources such as costumes, sets, and props besides a number of actors, only six, in the play. This is because Grotowski sees that there is no need for a huge number of actors on the poor stage for “the actor multiplies himself into a sort of hybrid being acting out his role polyphonically” (2002, p.77).

Grotowski renders that “through their similarity, the costumes rob men of their personality, erase the distinctive signs which indicate sex, age, and social class; the actors become completely identical beings” (2002, p.64). Likewise, Al-Hakim depends on a few numbers of sets and props on his stage like the piano, the microscope, and the coffee cup, he uses a few costume like Hamdi’s shirt and sockets. In addition, Al-Hakim does not complete the imaginary story to urge his reader to focus on the effects of fiction on reality. Al-Hakim’s setting is the same room all the play, he depends on one theme and a few numbers of characters (only six), and he insists to introduce an absurd drama that solves world problems.

In their book *The Play Within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*, Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner define the theory of a-play-within-a-play as a theatrical device which

Describes a strategy for constructing play texts that contain, within the perimeter of their fictional reality, a second or internal theatrical performance, in which actors appear as actors who play an additional role. This duplication of the theatrical reality is often reinforced by the presence onstage of an “internal audience” which acts as a double to the actual audience

(2007, p.12)

Al-Hakim manages to add another layer of theatrical performance to his original one in which Hamdi and Samira as actors play an additional role by including the imaginative play of the

wall inside the original one. They act as the internal audience of this second performance thus adding another audience to the play besides its actual one. By doing so, the actors of the actual play add a third identity to the theatrical work for they appear on the stage both in their physical appearance and in a role they act, and play another additional role of the internal audience. This identity, in turn, is formed in the context of the third layer of performance, time, and setting.

Fischer and Greiner examine salient tasks of “the play within the play” technique. First, they think that this technique can be seen as a “particularly suitable aesthetic agency for the exploration of fields of social and historical interaction or exchange” (2007, p.12). Al-Hakim applies this technique as a gate between European and non-European theatrical traditions, so his play *Food for Every Mouth* comes influenced by history and western literature. This influence is the futuristic look at solving the problems of the world by what is called “a Deus ex Machina” or the probability of an imminent invention that will solve the problem of hunger. Although Al-Hakim seeks to introduce drama that addresses the local audience and reflects the national conditions of the Egyptian subalterns, he was influenced by the theatrical works of his western European counterparts like Brecht and Beckett who depend their plays on criticizing western plays.

In *Food for Every Mouth*, Al-Hakim criticizes two famous plays: Electra by Sophocles and Hamlet by Shakespeare. He sees that Orestes’ revenge on his mother and her lover, who both killed his father, is an act suitable for the old Greek age but not apt to their modern atomic age. If the play is to be read again in the context of the vindication of science over inherited traditions or morality: we will notice that in the modern scientific age, people are “secularized” by science which will feed the subalterns of the whole world. Consequently, Tarek does not take much care of his sister’s insistence to revenge on their mother.

In addition, Tarek criticizes Hamlet for wasting his life searching for the murderers of his father to revenge on them: "TAREK. we have to do something useful . . . Once while watching the play Hamlet, I said to myself that Hamlet's life was wasted for nothing" (*Food for Every Mouth*, 1984, p. 41). Al-Hakim sees that Hamlet misbehaves, for life should be invested in useful matters like the invention he seeks to achieve to eliminate hunger.

Secondly, Fischer and Greiner explain that this technique fulfills another task inside the performance, for it is considered as "artistic agency of self-reference and self-reflection, i.e. imaginative play that refers back to itself" (2007, p.12). Instead of using flashback or diegetic techniques to express the necessity of finding a solution to hunger and honor crimes, the play-within-a-play refers back not only to itself but also to the original theme of the actual play, i.e. universal hunger. Thus, the play-within-a-play works as a meta-theatrical means of expression because of its known nature as a play.

In *Food for Every Mouth* Al-Hakim manages to employ dialogue suitable to the epistemological aura of each character. He tries to make the language of the dialogue close to each character according to its references. On one hand, Al-Hakim uses the standard dialect with the character of the scientist Tarek, a well-educated person studying abroad. On the other hand, the language of the dialogue depends on colloquialism when it comes to the characters of the common people either with a simple governmental job like Hamdi or even housewives like Samira and Lady Atiyyat.

Within the course of action, the dialogue fluctuates between simplicity and length. It reflects the talkative nature of the Egyptian low classes who always kills the time through gossip and discussions. In addition, the interrupted sentences by Tarek's mother reflect her stress and fear of her son's revenge. In the play, Al-Hakim fully shows the consistency of the theatrical work through the dialogue which crystalizes the situations and occurrences.

The falling intonation of the female Samira, her simple and colloquial diction and her careful enunciation is her means to communicate with the permanent rising tone and the vulgar diction of her neighbor Atiyyat and the sharp and harsh diction of her husband Hamdi. Later, Samira's subordinate tone turns into a challenging one when she decides to be a food activist and piano player, and an important person who fights the underestimation of her husband Hamdi.

In addition, piano playing in the play is thought of as a leitmotif which has been repeated twice in the play. In his thesis titled *Williams and Wagner: The Leitmotif from Valhalla to a Galaxy Far, Far Away*, Conor Power revealed that leitmotif's "poetic/dramatic function is to signify the happenings on the stage; this function is recognizable to the listener" (2018, p.7). Al-Hakim's use of piano playing refers to the start of the main theme of the play-within-a-play and also its end, the melodious tone of Nadia's playing the piano refers to the start of the dream of finding a solution of hunger and its repetition at the end of the play reminds the main protagonists not to give up such dream.

The Conclusion

The paper concluded that the play is apt to be culturally read via the interplay of hunger and subalternity as it contains undertones about the food culture and the relation of its scarcity to the then prevailing power practices which the chapter endeavors to investigate. Al-Hakim fully understands the interrelatedness between food shortage and subalternity, as he examined providing food for every mouth as a freedom from the oppression and exploitation that the subalterns suffer from and dreamt of eliminating hunger.

Al-Hakim employed food as a factor that can reflect the cultural tradition of the subalterns in Egypt during the 1960s. The chapter stressed that food policies are also indicative of power relations among the subalterns and between them and the elite in

addition. Throughout the paper, food policies of coffee preparation and meat consumption and distribution fully transferred how the subalterns suffer subordination, silencing, and hunger. The meat/coffee complex reflected the struggle between the elite and the subalterns and the unfair distribution of meat urges the subalterns to abide by science and hard work to escape hunger and restore their lost voice and dignity.

Applying Spivak's theory of subalternity besides food policies as the methodology to culturally reread the play, Al-Hakim demonstrates hunger as one of the major causes of subalternity. He sees that as long as the subalterns are subjugated, they will be hungry and silent slaves. The chapter fully investigates the reasons behind the subalterns' hunger, lack of history, representation, and domination besides their silence and their attempts to regain their lost voice through food activism, science, and hard work. It sheds light on how food cultural studies can help to solve world problems like hunger and poverty which have been dealt with in different literary works besides numerous suggested solutions to end them. The paper celebrates the metatheatre technique in the play, its definition, function, and how it is employed in the form of the "a-play-within-a-play" technique as a medium for effecting social change on Al-Hakim's stage.

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