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تحية طيبة وبعد ،،،

تتقدم إليكم جامعة بدر بالقاهرة بالشكر على ما تبذلونه من جهد مادي ومعنوي لإصدار المجلة،
فتميزكم المشهود خير قدوة، ممتنين لعملكم الدؤوب وتفوقكم الباهر، ونتمنى لكم المزيد من
النجاحات المستقبلية.

تحريراً في يوم الأربعاء الموافق 2024/08/07.

رئيس مجلس الأمناء

د/ حسن القلا

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**Cultural Encounters on Stage:
Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm's *Hamlet* Revisited in *Qālibunā al-masraḥī***

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Introduction

While engaged with "Towards an Egyptian Theatre: Syncretic Aesthetics in the Works of Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm and Yusuf Idris," co-authored with a colleague from AOU-Egypt, I was particularly impressed by Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm's remarkable creativity and resourcefulness in fostering connections between local and global literary traditions. This theme resonated with the focus of the 2024 ACLA conference. Consequently, I opted to revisit al-Ḥakīm's *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* again and to conduct a thorough analysis of another excerpt - i.e. *Hamlet* - reworked and included in this seminal theatrical project, in a way that fit the theme of the panel which is "Local/Global Literatures and Cultures".

Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987), is a towering writer, critic, and theorist, whose literary and theoretical work offers a rich and complex exploration of the postcolonial experience including the cultural encounters between the local and the global. His innovative literary style, his critique of colonialism, along with his exploration of cultural hybridity and identity make him a leading figure in the history of Arabic literature and a valuable contributor to the broader field of postcolonial studies. In addition, al-Hakim played a pivotal role in decolonizing Egyptian theatre as many of his plays challenge the dominant colonial narratives, subvert stereotypes, celebrate Egyptian heritage, and introduce new themes and forms that reflect the experiences and aspirations of Egyptians.

Furthermore, many of his plays negotiate cultural encounters and negotiations across languages, traditions and varied historical experiences. Cultural encounter is used in this paper to showcase al-Ḥakīm's navigation of the intricacies of the local and the global theatrical conventions and how they overlap and transform each other, and how they compete and grapple with one another in co-constitutive contact zone. It also refers to al-Hakim's grappling with the sense of self and cultural identity particularly kindled by the spirit of nationalism which was sweeping the Arab world in the 1950s and 1960s and the pride in the rediscovered Egyptian heritage.

The awakening of the pride of indigenous roots coincided with postcolonial and anticolonial calls by intellectuals like Franz Fanon (1925-1961) who encouraged native writers and thinkers to delve deep into the "dignity, glory and solemnity" of the past and to use the past "with the intention of opening the future" (210, 232). Al-Ḥakīm responded to such local and global stimuli by turning to his indigenous performance traditions "as a counter-balance to the ... almost total dependence upon European models" (Amine and Carlson 72). He took the past as the cultural frame of reference and hybridised what he resurrected from the indigenous folk theatrical conventions with what he borrowed from the Western theatrical forms and came up with his own theatrical mold, which exists in the liminal space between the indigenous and Western theatrical traditions. His mold inextricably involves the interplay between European epistemology and the pursuit of a distinctive local identity. Al-Ḥakīm's literary processes of decolonization of the Egyptian stage included not only negotiation, appropriation, and revision of many canonical plays,

but also dismantling of the European theatrical conventions and models. They also interrogate the supremacy of the canonical discourses in terms of language, point of view, dramatic structure, and characterization.

1. Aims of the Paper

The aim of the research paper is to examine al-Ḥakīm's *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* as a site for cultural encounters between local performative elements and the European ones. The paper, also, investigates how these cultural encounters that occur in all the excerpts he reworked in *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* (including *Hamlet*) are central to Pratt's "contact zone" and Anzaldúa's "borderlands" as all the excerpts show processes of negotiation, interaction, and meaning-making that highlight al-Ḥakīm's co-presence, and his endeavours to "recreate local identity" (Tiffin 17). Moreover, the paper aims to examine counter-discursive strategies that al-Ḥakīm uses to subvert the canonical literary texts he revisited in *Qālibunā al-masraḥī*.

In *Qālibunā al-masraḥī*, al-Ḥakīm challenges the long-standing European theatrical discipline in his reworking of many canonical plays. In this regard, the study takes *Hamlet* as a touchstone, though not Shakespeare's *Hamlet* but al-Ḥakīm's appropriated and produced in *Qālibunā al-masraḥī*, translated into Arabic by Khalil Mutran. The theoretical concepts of appropriating, cultural encounters, contact zone, borderlands, and counter canonical texts are employed to describe how al-Ḥakīm "dislocate[s] these classics from their authenticity as European classics and mixes them with indigenous ontology and epistemology which led to the emergence of his theatrical mold (Hasabelnaby 3). In this way, the playwright makes his play bear what Louis Owens refers to as "the burden of one's own experience" (xiii). In other words, the research paper explores the cultural contact that takes place in *Hamlet* in terms of Egyptian culture specifics. The paper concludes that instead of being owned by the Western theatrical dramaturgy with its hegemonic forms of colonizing the stage, al-Ḥakīm owns it through the strategies of appropriation and indigenization.

The researcher chose *Hamlet* out of the seven excerpts visited by al-Ḥakīm because it is an Elizabethan tragedy that is still suitable for the postcolonial times. The power struggles depicted in *Hamlet* are often mirrored in the context of colonial oppression. Claudius's usurpation of the throne is analogous to colonial takeover highlighting the moral ambiguities of authority and legitimacy. *Hamlet* can be viewed as a symbol of resistance against oppressive structures; and his indecision may reflect the paralysis experienced by people in colonized / postcolonized nations who still face systemic injustice. Ophelia can be reinterpreted as a representation of marginalized voices; and her silence can represent the silencing of women and many disenfranchised groups. By employing Arabic, the play becomes more accessible to Egyptian / Arab readers / audiences. Moreover, using traditional storytellers serves as a form of resistance against the elitism associated with Shakespearean productions. By exploring power dynamics, cultural identity, and ethical dilemmas, al-Hakim's appropriation not only critiques historical injustices but also resonates with contemporary struggles for agency and representation.

2. Theoretical Underpinnings

Al-Ḥakīm's approach to cultural encounters in theatre goes beyond simply depicting a clash between the East and West. As he delves deeper in the understanding of the complexities involved, his literary texts become contact zones or

borderlands i.e. sites where different cultural and artistic aesthetics, forms, molds, and ideas meet and negotiate with each other. The concept of “contact zone” introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in *The Art of the Contact Zone* (1991) is an important term which captures the complex dynamics that arise when cultures encounter each other. Pratt defines the “contact zones” as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today.” In the paper under study, the researcher regards these “zones” not only as social spaces but as artistic ones where literary texts travel from one culture and language to another, affecting and being affected by each other. Literature in general and theatre in particular can be regarded as “contact zones” which allow artistic, creative cultures, previously separated, come together and establish ongoing relations. Since historically speaking, these “zones” have grown out of colonial domination, they have been characterized by “conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict” (Pratt 6).

As for the concept of borderlands, it is used in this paper as a cross-cultural metaphor, which emphasizes the notions of hybridity within cultures, literary genres, and languages. It is a term of translation for imagining connections between cultures and consequently their literatures. Borderlands literally speaking refers to the in-between places, the contact zones which are characterized by the flow of people, capital, information, and cultural products across borders, physical or otherwise, both within and between cultures. Figuratively, borderlands suggest those spaces, moments, and situations where preexisting lines of demarcation are crossed, blurred, disrupted, and where new ones are continually being mapped. From the cultural perspective, borderland implies hybridity and theoretical space that allow for a creative construction of identity. As Renato Rosaldo observes, “the borders between nations, classes and cultures ... seem to be a little of this and a little of that, and not quite one or the other” (209), which is the case of *Hamlet* as revisited and appropriated by al-Ḥakīm which is “not quite one or the other” but something new.

In the literary “contact zones” and “borderlands”, al-Ḥakīm like many other postcolonial writers engage in a process of negotiation between the local and the global. His dramaturgy exhibits “interplay of indigenous and European aesthetics” (Abdel Hafeez and Abd Elhafeez 387). In his literary production, al-Ḥakīm appropriates traditions of colonial theatre and produces texts that affirm the uniqueness of the indigenous culture and reduce the European elevation. Bill Ashcroft et al. observe that appropriation is used to “describe the ways in which post-colonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture – language, forms of writing, film ... to resist its political or cultural control” (15). Al-Ḥakīm in *Qālibunā al-masrahī* appropriates seven excerpts from canonical plays, alter them to satisfy the local readers / audience, and thus “reverse the orientation of power in the relationship” between the colonizer / colonized, global / local (Ashcroft et al 209).

The appropriation and interplay have allowed him to create “discursive stratifications and ephemeral formations” (Derrida 1994, 118) that produce “canonical counter discourse” (Tiffin 22). Gilbert and Tompkins have defined “canonical counter discourse” as the “process whereby the post-colonial writer unveils and dismantles the basic assumptions of a specific canonical text by developing a ‘counter’ text that preserves many of the identifying signifiers of the original while altering, often allegorically, its structures of power” (16). The researcher will focus in part 5 on how

al-Ḥakīm engages with *Hamlet* to challenge its colonial legacies and creates a new narrative that not only reflects local perspectives and experiences but also privileges the indigenous mold with its performers over the European dramaturgy. Thus, al-Ḥakīm destabilizes our understanding of *Hamlet* along with the other excerpts in *Qālibunā al-masraḥī*. He also offers a more local interpretation which challenges Eurocentric dominance in theater and highlights the potential for cultural encounters which enrich our understanding of classic works.

3. *Qālibunā al-masraḥī*: A Site for Cultural Encounters

Qālibunā al-masraḥī, a theatrical mold retrieved from the Egyptian soil, can be rightfully described as a site for cultural encounters between the local and the global. In other words, it is a contact zone of exchange and dialogue between the seven excerpts appropriated from canonical Western plays and al-Ḥakīm's postcolonial dismantling of them. *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* can also be considered a borderlands narrative as he challenges European hegemony through counter-discourse and offers an alternative view of the self/other interrelationship by revisiting and reworking timeless themes within a traditional mold. This cultural mediation practices have definitely created new artistic spaces which is neither Western nor Egyptian. In other words, *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* synthesizes globalism and localism to create an alternative theatre, which is hybrid in nature and explores and articulates cultural interactions and revisions of power relations across cultures and languages.

Al-Ḥakīm in *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* works across-borders of different epistemologies and artistic practices belonging to self and other. In the Introduction of this book, which represents al-Ḥakīm's theatrical manifesto, he contributed to the heated debate that was ignited in Egypt as well as the other Arab countries about the possibility of returning to an authentic state and creating a theatrical "mold" that is rooted in the "tapestry of our soil and cultural inheritance" (12-13)ⁱ. To respond to this debate, he experimented with both the Western and Egyptian theatrical traditions and created cultural, artistic, and aesthetic links and encounters between the Egyptian traditional theatrical forms— which were regarded as an othered discourse – and the Western aesthetics.

He suggested a theatrical "mold" that relied primarily on the Egyptian traditional folk enactment of the storytelling, recitation, impersonation, and improvisation, derived from the rich oral tradition of *al-ḥakawātī*ⁱⁱ, *al-muqallid*ⁱⁱⁱ, and *al-maddah*^{iv} and originated *al-muqallida*, female impersonator (15). The rationale behind resurrecting these traditional figures, as he contends, is,

[T]hese three traditional figures in their plain attires, the attires of blue collars in factories, of peasants in fields, can move smoothly and go anywhere, with no décor, props, costumes, or accessories ... Just with the help of the great texts in their heads and hearts, they can reach all classes of society bearing the finest fruits that arts and intellect can yield. (17)

Al-Ḥakīm did not shy away from the fact that his theatrical mold could be perceived as "primitive", but as he confirms, despite its primitiveness, "back then [the three performers] gave people the wildest fun" with their storytelling that had hypnotizing effect on the audience (13). Additionally, it is characterized by simplicity, intimacy between the performer and audience, familiarity, and closeness. As al-Ḥakīm explicates, "our theatre would be very similar in its simplicity to *ḥakawātī*, *al-muqallid* and *al-maddah*'s performances"; it is the simplicity that facilitates "the live communication between art and people" (15), and between audience and performers.

Contrary to the practices of realist drama which pretends that the performance is a real-life event and that the actors are being their characters; in rewriting the excerpts from the seven canonical plays, he made the performers not hide behind these pretenses but show awareness of the artificiality of the event throughout the show. Al-Ḥakīm emphasizes that in his mold, the audience remain fully aware of the performers' walking in and out of characters; and that the performers do not lose their identity. He takes *al-muqallid* as an example:

Al-muqallid slips smoothly from one character to another, emphasizing the distinctive features of each character, that are different from other characters in tones, gestures, inherent feelings, and way of thinking. He is both attached to and detached from the character he is impersonating simply because he lives with us, in his normal clothes and his real name... He holds a hidden magic feather informing us, "I'm So-and-so, but I'll show you now who is Hamlet? ... Look carefully." And when we look at him as he shapes the character and creates it, we feel that we too, in the depths of ourselves, have participated with him in the process of creation, and have risen above the level of sleepy audience. (18)

In involving the audience in "the process of creation," al-Ḥakīm aspires to raise them above what he describes as "the level of sleepy audience" (13) and turn them into "Spect-Actors," a term created by Augusto Boal, the Brazilian theatre director. In *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal used the term to activate audience and turn them into protagonists capable of taking action and finding their own ways out of their powerlessness (xxi).

It is worth to note that al-Ḥakīm did not write original plays to put his theatrical initiative into practice, but he forms a meaningful theatrical blend between the European canonical plays and his new mold. In other words, he "poured" excerpts from *Agamemnon*, *Hamlet*, *Don Juan*, *Peer Gynt*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and *An Angel Comes to Babylon* in "his mold" to showcase how his "mold" can accommodate European canonical plays, and how the traditional performers would be able to "carry the banners of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, Chekov, Pirandello, and Dürrenmatt" (16). Hence, as he states, his theatrical mold could "break the wall between the masses and the grand world arts" and "simplify the mediums that carry the most refined of arts and the finest human intellect to the masses in their neighborhoods and villages" (16-17, 21).

Al-Ḥakīm concludes his Introduction by asserting that advocating for an indigenous theatrical tradition does not necessitate a complete disregard for Western theatrical practices. On the contrary, he states, "to be part of the march of civilization with all its developments and advances" (21), all theatrical traditions must go hand in hand. So, he explicitly advises readers and writers to maintain the dialogue between the East and West to contribute to "general human intellectual activity" (*Thawrat al-shabāb [The Revolt of the Young]* 24). Thus, the cultural encounter in his theatrical initiative has manifestations of mutual understanding and empathy to bridge cultural gaps.

4. *Hamlet* Revisited: A Local Perspective

Scholarship on postcolonial Shakespeare brings to the fore the significance of appropriating Shakespeare's plays and synchronizing them with local ones to serve the local needs. Having been regarded as a "a privileged site of authority", "a mask for the dominant ideology", "a tool used to promote 'authentic' version of British

culture”, and “embodiment of the conservative politics, imperialism, and patriarchalism of a previous age” (Cartelli 1; Godiwala 42, 46), al-Ḥakīm – like many postcolonial writers – has visited and re-visioned *Hamlet* to illustrate the dynamics of exchange and mobility in the circulation of ideas and genres.

Loomba and Orkin observe that intellectuals and artists from the colonized world responded to Shakespeare in a variety of ways,

sometimes they mimicked their colonial masters and echoed their praise of Shakespeare; at other times they challenged the cultural authority of both Shakespeare and colonial regimes by turning to their own bards as sources of alternative wisdom and beauty. In yet other instances, they appropriated Shakespeare as their comrade in anti-colonial arms by offering new interpretations and adaptations of his works. (2)

In the re-visioning process of excerpts from *Hamlet* along with the other excerpts, al-Ḥakīm “turned to his own bard ... and appropriated Shakespeare” to challenge the cultural hegemony Shakespeare’s play represents. To encourage his readers’ / audiences’ critical reflection on cultural encounters taking place in *Hamlet*, al-Ḥakīm poured it into the mold of dramatic storytelling, which foregrounds the role of the traditional performances. Thus, *Hamlet* becomes a contact zone and a borderlands narrative with its navigation between theatrical traditions, pushing the boundaries of theatrical expression and suggesting that these traditions are fluid and constantly evolving. It is worth to note that al-Ḥakīm preserves some of the identifying signifiers of the canonical text but gave himself the liberty to drastically modify other major signifiers. Unlike Nigerian writer Femi Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song* (1977) or the Kuwaiti writer Sulayman Al-Bassem's *Al-Hamlet Summit* (2002), al-Ḥakīm did not alter the play's title. He also left the original geographic locale unchanged. However, he modified the narrative construction along with the visual representation. Since the dismantling process in *Hamlet* is broad; so, my field of inquiry falls into the size and genre of the play, the manipulation of narrative, and performative conventions of *Hamlet*.

One major counter-discursive intervention is the size of the appropriate play. Instead of concentrating on one rewriting project, *al-Ḥakīm* uses selected portions of the master narrative. The appropriated play *is* most radically reduced into two scenes only out of 20 scenes in five acts in the original play. By minimizing the selected portions into Scene 1 and 2 from Act I, al-Ḥakīm marginalizes the canonical text, subverts the overwhelming centrality of Hamlet in Western drama, and deconstructs the play’s codes as an Elizabethan tragedy; thus, giving it less eminence and status.

Another counter-discursive strategy is reworking the play to fit the Egyptian culture. Reading the excerpt below from introductory lines of the appropriated *Hamlet* takes us to a performance aesthetically specific to the Egyptian culture as it starts with *al-ḥakawātī* who is aware not only of his role and position as a performer but also of the audience:

AL-ḤAKAWĀTĪ: I am ḥakawātī... (*He mentions his real name*). I will show you a play by the author Shakespeare called Hamlet... Once upon a time dear esteemed audience, in the country called Denmark, there was a king who had a beautiful wife and a righteous son named "Hamlet." He also had an evil brother who wanted to usurp both his throne and his wife... This brother stalked him one day while he was sound asleep in the garden of the palace and poured poison in his ear

and murdered him ... Then he married his widow and ascended his throne... Prince Hamlet was, of course, deeply saddened by his father's death and his mother's quick marriage to his uncle ... One night Hamlet learned that his father's ghost had appeared wandering around the palace, and when he met it, he learned the secret of the crime ... And since that night, he has been living a turbulent life, drenched between doubt and certainty, seeking truth to begin his revenge^v ... (58)

Al-ḥakawātī's commencement of the story of *Hamlet* in this very Egyptian ritualistic fashion has more than one dramatic function. It reflects his role as a storyteller who creates a literary complexity that prepares the readers/audience to conceive of such vast doings taking place in the short period of time of the appropriated play. It also serves to decenter both the canonical play and the figure of the prince. Moreover, it recreates and refashions the literary genre of the original text as a tragedy in general and as a revenge tragedy in particular; and creates a new generic mode.

Despite the references *al-ḥakawātī* made to Hamlet's revenge, his uncle as a villain, the crime committed, and the appearance of his father's ghost, *al-Ḥakīm*'s reworking of *Hamlet* presents a light, new dialectical version of the tragic play. Beginning the narration with the stock phrase, "once upon a time," *al-ḥakawātī* transports the readers/audience to the mythical, fascinating atmosphere of folktales. This phrase opens the gate to the world of magic where their mood is completely immersed in the fantasy and the supernatural that disconnect them from their mundane world. This fantastical atmosphere fills readers/audience with curiosity and eagerness but marks a drastic shift from the conventionally solemn and sombre atmosphere of an Elizabethan tragedy to one full of enthusiasm and zeal. This shift from tragedy to fantasy facilitates for the audience acknowledging that the playwright is *al-Ḥakīm* and not Shakespeare.

In addition, *al-Ḥakīm* reconfigures the tragedy of *Hamlet* into the fabulous world of fantasy. Thus, the action is neither serious nor complete and lacks magnitude. Moreover, the play fails to arouse pity or fear in the audience; and consequently, does not create the effect of purgation or catharsis of these strong emotions. The protagonist lacks the necessary attributes to be viewed as a tragic figure and is reduced to a risible figure as a result. Furthermore, the appropriated play lacks all conventions of Elizabethan revenge tragedy like play-within-a play, blood-filled conclusions, corpses, etc.

Al-ḥakawātī is fully aware that storytelling constitutes a continuous interaction with the audience. So, after the introductory note in which he – like a spoiler – divulges all plot elements, modulates his voice, and speculates, "how did Shakespeare manage to draft his immortal masterpiece from this simple tale?" To which he responds, "this is what we are going to watch right now from *al-muqallid* and *al-muqallida*'s impersonation." Then he directs his gaze to *al-muqallid*, saying, "You can start first ... come closer then, and tell the honorable audience who you would impersonate ... and start by introducing yourself" (58).

It is clear that *al-ḥakawātī* – along with the other performers – dominates the audience's visual focus as they exist both visually and aurally; thus, forcing the audience to remain active and engaged. Drawing the audience's attention to their corporal presence is highly significant in the reconstruction of their subjectivity. In front of the audience's eyes, *al-muqallid* and *al-muqallida*'s bodies metamorphose into multiple personae as they impersonate all male and female characters.

Throughout the two scenes, they vacillate between their authentic personae and the characters they inhabit; thus emphasizing the performativity of the body and defying the audience's expectation for unified subjects.

AL-MUQALLID: I am *al-muqallid* ... (*He mentions his real name*). I will impersonate Hamlet, his father, his uncle, the King of Denmark, Polonius, the elderly Lord Chamberlain, Horatio, Hamlet's friend, Laertes, the son of Polonius, Francesco and Marcellus, then all the courtiers ... and many more.

AL-ḤAKAWĀTĪ: And you, madam ... Introduce yourself.

AL-MUQALLIDA: I'm *al-muqallida* (*She mentions her real name*), I will impersonate Hamlet's mother, Gertrude the Queen, and Hamlet's beloved, Ophelia, daughter of Polonius, and other ladies. (58-59)

The above excerpt highlights al-Ḥakīm's use of the three performers which is central and intrinsic to the action rather than operating as uninvolved, neutral of the nameless chorus. Their interaction with each other concentrates the audience's attention on their own presence, in a self-referential technique that calls attention to itself as a play; and consequently, brings them in and involves them actively in the play. This self-referential technique is used by al-Ḥakīm to create a more immersive and thought-provoking experience for the Spect-Actors, who become fully aware that they are watching a play, and this awareness allows them to reflect on the broader cultural and social implications of the play.

Unlike the traditional role of chorus in dramatic works of art, al-Ḥakīm's three performers are fully integrated in the actions of the plot. They mediate between the audience and the action. While *al-muqallid* and *al-muqallida* impersonate all male and female roles, it is *al-ḥakawātī* who plays various dramatic functions. In addition to being the storyteller, he is "the show manager who monitors and gives it the proper direction," "the director who assists *al-muqallid* in understanding the characters." Furthermore, *al-ḥakawātī* enunciates the stage directions to fill in gaps in the appropriated narrative. For instance, in the original play, we have the stage direction stating [*Enter Horatio and Marcellus*] (Shakespeare I.i.16). In the appropriated text, *al-ḥakawātī* comments, "Here enter Horatio and Marcellus who proclaim ..." (61). Sometimes *al-ḥakawātī* adds lines that are not in Shakespeare's text like, "here is Hamlet standing alone speaking to himself" and "here's the queen, Hamlet's mother, trying to appease him" (75). Therefore, *al-ḥakawātī* is the most immediate point of reference for the indigenous audience. His position and the different dramatic roles he plays encourages an intimate relationship with them that enables him to guide the audience into the fluid time and space of the appropriated play. *Al-ḥakawātī* creates the play's frame, but since he sometimes plays the role of the storyteller, this dual role then – along with the different roles impersonated by *al-muqallid* and *al-muqallida* – complicates the spectators' points of views; thus, creating multiple levels of meanings.

Placing great emphasis on the indigenous performers leads to the muting of Shakespeare's dramatis persona. This muting can be interpreted as a form of resistance against the dominant narrative that has historically marginalized the native voices. It also allows al-Ḥakīm to focus on authentic representations of his community and to center the experiences of the traditional performers. The excerpt below elucidates how *al-ḥakawātī*, in describing the temporal and spatial setting of the play, takes over and silences Francisco and Bernardo:

AL-ḤAKAWĀTĪ: Great ... let's start the play! ... which begins in a paved place in front of the palace ... which is both a house and a castle at the same time ... Now it's night ... midnight ... Francisco is the watchman ... at this moment, Bernardo, his comrade approaches ... whom of course he cannot recognize because of the darkness. Now it's al-muqallid's turn; you can start now ... impersonate Bernardo when Francisco is getting nearer to him, and tell us about their dialogue ... (59-60)

Al-muqallid and al-muqallida too, in slipping from one character to another, strip the characters they impersonate of their tangible support indicated in the original text:

AL-ḤAKAWĀTĪ: [impersonating Bernardo as he approaches his comrade]

Who is there?

- Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself
- Long live the king!
- Bernardo?
- He.
- You came most carefully upon your hour.
- 'ts now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.
- For this relief much thanks. 'tis bitter cold,
- And I am sick at heart.
- Have you had a quiet guard?
- Not a mouse stirring.
- Well, good night.
- If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,
- The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.
- I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who is there?

AL-ḤAKAWĀTĪ, here enter Horatio and Marcellus ... saying ... (60-

61)

In this short scene, Bernardo, Francisco, Horatio, and Marcellus are prevented from having a voice; and consequently eclipsed, and muted. Their presence is diminished while giving the traditional performers resonant voices to narrate from their own perspectives. From their first appearance, the indigenous performers defy Shakespeare's authority by disrupting the normality of the master text; hence, destabilizing the power structure of the original text. This is a powerful intervention in the colonial relation in which the centre is silenced, and the periphery is empowered. So, the subaltern is speaking. After being suppressed and muted, after being deprived of agency and voice, *al-ḥakawātī*, *al-muqallid*, and *al-muqallida* are identified; and once they speak, they cease to be subaltern; thus, subverting the authority of the characters that used to have hegemonic power.

Using indigenous performers as a performative strategy challenges the stasis and fixity of performing the canonical play as their tone, inflection, gesture, voice, and stance dislocate the canonical text and transpose it into Egyptian theatrical space signified by folk conventions. Therefore, al-Ḥakīm's revisionist improvisational approach and lack of regard for naturalistic conventions such as the fourth wall allows his mold to "interrogate received Western models and valorize oral cultures that were negated by colonial cultures" (Godiwala 38).

Conclusion

In conclusion, al-Ḥakīm's appropriation of Hamlet offers a compelling example of how postcolonial literature can challenge Western cultural hegemony. By appropriating European theatrical conventions and incorporating local performative elements, al-Ḥakīm creates a hybrid performance that resists the dominant narrative and celebrates cultural diversity. Using the concepts of contact zones, borderlands narrative, and counter-canonical texts provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex interplay between global and local cultures in al-Ḥakīm's play's *Hamlet*. Al-Ḥakīm's role as a postcolonial playwright emerges here by creating a theatrical mold that hybridises two performative approaches in a way that interrogates the cultural supremacy of the text and offers new insights for performative Egyptian intervention. It is this reposition that serves the needs of al-Ḥakīm's decolonization of the Egyptian stage.

Al-Ḥakīm's recovery of the indigenous theatrical mold and applying it to *Hamlet* brings an Egyptian perspective of theater as a genre which challenges Western theory, since it acknowledges how the literary genre moves beyond the limits of the literary to include the folk tradition as performance. The choice of indigenous performers gives cultural weight to the way in which *Hamlet* is (re)constructed; and helps al-Ḥakīm in his indigenization and Egyptization processes. The performers break this canonical play open to "decolonizing performatives" which "disrupt[s] the operations of coloniality" (Sandoval et al 1) through representing modes of performance that present cultural encounters.

Al-Ḥakīm exercises agency by shifting the focus of *Hamlet*. The staging of the first two scenes only, and having the *al-ḥakawātī*, *al-muqallid*, *al-muqallida* in their regular attires subvert and appropriate the master text, allowing for a considerable power shift towards the indigenized play. In addition, dispensing *Hamlet* with the conventions of oral dramatic heritage undermines the genre of tragedy. Thus, the appropriated play displaces the centralized, dominant voice of Shakespeare's masterpiece.

The potent underlying indigenous features and techniques that call for de-centred dramatics which places *Hamlet* outside the dominant Western tradition definitely pave the way for Egyptian literary and cultural independence. By blending of oratory with *Hamlet*, al-Ḥakīm shows how an indigenous theoretical paradigm can become the vessel for the understanding of a Western canonical text. The use of the three performers is significant in the play as they make the Egyptian readers/audience appreciate their position as insiders, and not outsiders. In so doing, al-Ḥakīm returns the power of the past to his people.

I would like to conclude by confirming that the stature and role of al-Ḥakīm as a de-colonizer of Egyptian stage must be acknowledged and appreciated. Not only did he indigenize and Egyptize *Hamlet* as a canonical text, but also he creates a powerful subaltern voice that strikes back against the empire. With this final note, I recommend that Egyptian playwrights continue what al-Ḥakīm started. Playwrights should invest time and efforts to understand and appreciate indigenous Egyptian drama.

Endnotes

- ⁱ All excerpts from *Qālibunā al-masraḥī* are translated by the researcher.
- ⁱⁱ *Al-ḥakawātī* is a public teller of tales. The etymological root of the word *al-ḥakawātī* lies in the term *hekaye*, which is a form of oral storytelling that has a long tradition in the Arabic culture.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Among the *al-ḥakawātī* (storytellers/impersonators) who performed in medieval marketplaces, many exhibited exceptional skills in mimicry. As a result, the terms *al-ḥakawātī* and *muqallid* (imitator) are often used interchangeably.
- ^{iv} *Al-maddah* is another popular entertainer who sings praises of the Prophet Mohamed and his family.
- ^v The excerpts from *Hamlet* are rendered back into English by the researcher with reference to the original play written in English.

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