Hybridity vs. Anti-Colonialism: The Quest for a Postcolonial Utopia in Al-Ḥakīm's "In Year One Million" and A Journey to Tomorrow

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Abstract

This essay discusses a common trend in the Arabic post-colonial literary scene. It argues that – much to the neglect of postscolonial critics - Arab postcolonial writers utilize hybridity to speak back to anti-colonialism the same way they utilize it to speak back to imperialism. As Arab writers mimic anti-colonial rhetoric and appropriate its ideals, they subtly deconstruct it and allow for a more refined postcolonial rhetoric to emerge. This trend is exemplified in two of Tawfiq al-Hakim's works ("In Year One Million" and "Journey to Tomorrow), which underscore the consequences of the absence of al-Hakim's hybrid concept of at-ta'aduliya. In explaining this concept, al-Hakim argues that a good society incorporates opposing ideas and allows them to clash within its premise. Any society that nullifies this conflict is doomed to failure. This concept speaks back to anti-colonialism because anti-colonial rhetoric in the Middle East, particularly that of al-Hakim's time, is notoriously intolerant. Understanding this trend allows us to understand the complexity of postcolonial texts and the diverse ways postcolonial writers respond to imperialism.

Arabic Science Fiction – Utopia – At-taaduliya – postcolonial - Twfiq Al-Hakim- hybridity

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مستخلص

يناقش هذا المقال ظاهرة سائدة في المشهد الأدبي العربي الما بعد إستعماري. ويدعي الماحث أنه في هذه الظاهرة، يستخدم كتاب ما بعد الاستعمار العرب الهجنة للرد على الخطاب المضاد للإستعمار بنفس الطريقة التي يستخدمو فما للرد على الإستعمار: فبينما يقلد هؤلاء الكتاب الخطاب المناهض للاستعمار ويتناسبون مع مُثله، فإنهم أيضا يفككونه بمهارة حتى يسمحو لخطاب مابعد إستعماري ناضج أن يخرج للساحه. يناقش هذا المقال هذه الظاهرة من خلال مناقشة عملين من أعمال الحكيم: «في سنة المليون» و«رحلة إلى الغد». تناقش معظم كتابات الحكيم مفهوما هجينا أسماه "التعادلية." في شرحه لهذا المفهوم، يرى الحكيم أن المجتمع المثالي يحتوي بالضرورة على أفكارًا متعارضة ويسمح لها بالتصادم من دون محاولة إسكات رأي ضد رأي. ويرى الحكيم أن أي مجتمع يبطل هذا الصراع وينحاز إلى جانب واحد منه، إنما هو مجتمع محكوم عليه بالفشل. يستخدم الحكيم هذا المفهوم للرد على الخطاب المضاد للإستعمار مثلما يستخدمه للرد على الخطاب الإستعماري. خاصة وأن الإقصائية قد غلبت على الخطاب المضاد إستعماري في زمن الحكيم. إن فهم هذا الاتجاه في المشهد الأدبي الموي المنابعد إستعماري يسمح لنا بفهم مدى تعقيد نصوص ما بعد الاستعمار بصفة عامة العربي المابعد إستعماري يسمح لنا بفهم مدى تعقيد نصوص ما بعد الاستعمار بصفة عامة والطرق المتنوعة التي يستجيب بما كتاب ما بعد الاستعمار للإمبريالية.

كلمات مفتاحية

خيال علمي عربي - الطوباوية - التعادلية - مابعد الإستعمار - توفيق الحكيم - الهجنة

In 1956, Second Lieutenant Gamal Abdel Nasser became the president of Egypt after the political upheaval that replaced the Kingdom of Egypt with a Republic. In promoting his rule, Abdul Nasser propagated that the Egyptian monarchy was the cause of Egyptian desolation and promised Egyptians a prosperous, free, and socialist pan-Arab utopia that eliminates hunger, poverty, and feudalism. He also pledged to restore the dignity and glory of Egyptians and Arabs that the monarchy supposedly lost to the colonizers.¹

Despite his suppression of dissent, poor economic performance, and military defeats, Abdul Nasser's charisma and anti-colonial utopian rhetoric were massively popular across the postcolonial Arab World. Intellectuals and writers who disagreed with him trod a fine line in portraying the consequences of his policies in their works without risking either state persecution or public rejection. Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm is among the writers caught in the strings of navigating the role of an intellectual expressing his disagreement with Abdel Nasser's propaganda. He initially seemed to promote Abdul-Nasser's anti-colonial stances, and the latter bestowed him with medals and described his works as revolutionary and inspirational. After Abdul-Nasser's death, however, al-Ḥakīm seemed to shift position and argued that he was blind to the draconian policies of Abdul-Nasser's authoritarianism. This shift, which was significant in its implications, prompted Nasserists to accuse him of hypocrisy and cowardice. Al-Ḥakīm denied these accusations and maintained that he had always been consistent.

This paper argues that Al-Ḥakīm's experience highlights a familiar characteristic of the Arab postcolonial scene. Postcolonial rulers often consolidate power through anti-colonial utopian rhetoric that, ironically, is infused with the colonizers' tactics of controlling colonies (e.g., oppression, propaganda, etc.). In response, and to protect themselves from possible backlash, postcolonial intellectuals introduce hybrid concepts that subtly deconstruct this anti-colonial rhetoric under the premise of deconstructing colonialism itself. For example, in the case of Abdul-Nasser and al-Ḥakīm, Abdul-Nasser consolidated his power through an anti-colonial rhetoric mixed with utopian socialism and nationalism, both imported from the colonizer. In return, al-Ḥakīm cautiously introduces the hybrid concept of *at-ta'aduliya* - (i.e. equilibrium), which I will discuss in this paper - to deconstruct Abdul-Nasser's utopian rhetoric under the premise of speaking back to colonial utopian ideals.⁵ This intellectual maneuver allowed al-Ḥakīm to avoid backlash from Abdul Nasser and his idea to echo across the Arab World.

Al-Hakim's experience is significant for two reasons. First, it highlights that hybridity speaks back to anti-colonial authoritarianism the way it speaks back to that of colonialism. Critics have addressed the role of hybridity in undermining imperial claim to superiority and frequently brought up Homi Bhabha's assertion that any imperial claim to a hierarchical 'purity' is untenable. This role aligns with Edward Said's broader postcolonial claim that the colonizer's identity is defined by its differentiation from that of the colonized. However, many critics tend to overlook the function of hybridity in countering anti-colonial rhetoric that asserts hegemony over postcolonial

societies on the premise of indigenous purity and precolonial romanticized status. They also dismiss that anti-colonialism is an offshoot of colonialism because it consolidates the colonizer vs. colonized dichotomy and thrives by positioning itself on one of its sides. Second, Alhakim's aspect is also significant because it further elucidates Edward Said's articulation of "Travel Theory." In his book, The World, the Text, and the Critic, Said argues that imperial theories are insentiently radicalized as they travel to postcolonial peripheries. Arab Nationalism is an example of this. Though Arabism was present before colonization, the adaptation of European-style Arab nationalism took place through imperial expansion. It was initially utilized to rally Arabs under banners of anti-colonial resistance but then exploited to consolidate the hegemony of postcolonial dictatorships. Subsequently, postcolonial critics and writers adopted hybrid concepts and rhetoric to speak back to these dictatorships. This interaction illustrates how theories do not travel seamlessly from one culture to another; instead, they evolve and are challenged in their postcolonial context that seeks to disengage from imperial residue.8

Hence, this essay discusses this characteristic, examining al-Ḥakīm's reaction to Abdel Nasser's anti-colonial utopian rhetoric and illustrating how the hybrid concept of *at-ta'aduliya* subtly deconstructs it under the disguise of deconstructing imperial rhetoric. This paper first introduces al-Ḥakīm's hybrid concept of *at-ta'aduliya*. Subsequently, it summarizes and analyzes two of al-Ḥakīm's postcolonial works, articulate this hybrid concept while critically engaging with Abdel Nasser's anti-colonial rhetoric. The works examined are *In Year One Million* (1953) and *A Journey to Tomorrow* (1958).

Al-Ḥakīm introduced the concept of *at-ta 'aduliya* in a book bearing the same title in 1955, during the height of political upheaval and conflict within the revolutionary junta that overthrew Farooq I, the King of Egypt at the time. In the book's opening, al-Ḥakīm explains that one of his enthusiastic readers asked him about his beliefs in life and art and that the question propelled him to write a book about his philosophy of being (al-Ḥakīm, 3). In the book, al-Ḥakīm states that the world is a balance between conflicting forces. The push and shove of these forces create *at-ta'aduliya*, which translates into an equilibrium of balance and harmony. To illustrate his idea, al-Hakim explains that the cosmos exists due to balanced conflict: The sun, for example, pulls the Earth, but the Earth pulls away from it. Life ends if this conflict is lost (i.e. Earth breaks loose, or the sun draws it in). Inhaling

and exhaling is another example of balanced conflict. Life can only be sustained if the two constantly battle without eliminating one another. Similarly, al-Ḥakīm argues that conflict exists within individual and social relationships: a healthy individual has internal opposing forces in constant conflict: mind vs. emotion, work vs. rest, anxiety vs. peace, and destiny vs. freedom. Similarly, a stable society has the conflicts of good vs. evil, religion vs. no religion, law vs. chaos, etc. These conflicts are constructive and healthy if they are balanced. Problems arise if we enforce one side over the other under the premise of promoting rightfulness (i.e. reason over emotion, freedom over control, justice over injustice). Thus, al-Ḥakīm argues that the role of intellectuals is to highlight the importance of *at-ta'duliya* rather than promoting one side of a conflict over the other.

The significance of al-Hakīm's concept is not in its philosophical complexity but in its exemplification of a hybrid concept countering both anti-colonial and imperial narratives. Though described as groundbreaking in Middle Eastern philosophy, one can see that this concept is not unique. It is rather a hybrid articulation of previous Islamic and Eastern ideas about dualism. At-ta'aduliya contains elements of the Islamic concept of tadafu' (i.e.counteraction) that is mentioned in the Quran in the context of the battle between the oppressed Israelites and their oppressors. Absolute power corrupts Earth if the oppressed do not push back against the oppressors (2:251). In addition, ta'aduliya resonates with the idea of the yin and yang in Taoism. In Tao Te Ching, opposites alternate in a single duality. These opposites have no ethical significance because morality is a matter of relativity (chapter 24). Al-Hakīm's concept is hybrid because it contains elements from the two concepts: like tadafu', it sees opposites as separate good vs. evil entities clashing rather than alternating in a harmonious flow. Unlike tadafu and similar to the yin and yang, this conflict has no ethical significance. Allowing it to flow eternally brings an equilibrium of harmony, peace, positivity, and meaning to life. Problems arise once one side eliminates the other.

Furthermore, al-Ḥakīm's hybrid concept is noteworthy for its projection of a postcolonial utopia in many of his works. Throughout his writings, al-Hakim tackles the importance of *at-ta'aduliya* within individual and social relationships and warns against its absence. To al-Hakim, the presence of *ta'aduliya* ensures healthy personal and social progress. It also ensures a prosperous postcolonial utopia that is at peace with previous conflicts between the colonizer and the colonized and then builds upon accepting that conflict as a component of a good life. Conversely, the concept's absence

leads to imbalance, violence, and destruction. "In Year One Million," a short story published in the Arini Allah [Show me Allah] collection in 1953, and A Journey to Tomorrow, a play published in 1958, highlight the importance of at-ta'duliya and demonstrate the role of intellectuals in addressing its absence. As the title suggests, "In Year One Million" is set one million years into the future. Science and technology enabled humanity to achieve utopia. Mortality, disease, hunger, poverty, and social stratification were long gone. As a result, reproduction, gender differences, attraction, love, and emotions disappear (al-Hakim, 80). The narrative begins with a geologist discovering a skull, leading him to reject the conclusions of the scientific establishment and assert that it belongs to a deceased individual. This realization prompts a philosophical exploration of the dichotomy between life and death. The geologist advocates for his hypothesis, garnering a following, particularly after a meteor kills a man and the utopian authorities hide the corpse to suppress the truth and reprogram the mind of the geologist (96). These events incite a revolt among his followers, who abandon the utopian metropolis and establish a primitive colony. In doing so, they forfeit the utopian infrastructure, including the air supply that sustained their health and nutrition, and revert to hunting and self-sufficiency. With the return of mortality, emotions such as fear and love resurface (99). Despite the challenges of their new existence, the group finds happiness in their renewed connection to God and nature. The story ends by praising the Creator and nature:

Oh, Eternal Creator ... to you belongs immortality and might Us, we only want to be humans
With bodies quenched from thirst, hearts alive, and brains full of thought.
Ultimately celebrating both through song and praise.
Oh, Merciful nature ... you alone possess infinite age
We humans only wish for an age of dew
That depends on heaven at dawn
And ascends at morn. (101)

A Journey to Tomorrow is similarly set in the future. In the play, a wife convinces a doctor to kill her ailing and supposedly abusive husband. The doctor realizes her ploy only after he is convicted and sentenced to death (al-Hakim, 19). Instead of carrying out the sentence, the authorities gave him the option to participate in a fatal scientific space travel experiment with another convict (83). The two travelers lose communication with Earth in space and

crash into a barren magnetic planet. There, their bodies perish, but their minds become immortal and acquire superhuman capabilities of telepathy, telekinesis, materialization, and other psychic abilities (93). Yet, despite their immortality and infinite power, they were discontent. They return 300 years later to an Earth that has achieved utopia after WWIII: science and technological progress eliminated hunger, illness, poverty, and social stratification (172). However, the authoritarian "future party" controls utopia, and it harshly proscribes beliefs in traditional values, strife, and social connection. When a dark-skinned female utopian guide expresses her discontent with the achieved utopia, contradicts her blonde female coworker, and floats the idea of a revolution, the utopian authority immediately sentences her to either reprogramming or isolation (194). The doctor saves her by taking the blame for attempting to persuade her to revolt, and she is sentenced to isolation. (157).

After elucidating al-Ḥakīm's concept and summarizing his two works, the subsequent section of this essay will examine the postcolonial dimensions of both texts and their application of at-ta'aduliya as a critique of Abdel Nasser's anti-colonial utopian rhetoric. Although neither work explicitly portrays a conflict between a colonizer and a colonized, both are postcolonial works: they reflect utopian imperial fantasies of scientific progress, infinite wealth, efficient control of populations, and effective capabilities of eliminating opposing sentiments. In "In Year One Million," the futuristic oppressive government represents an imperial utopia that champions the end of strife and hunger through science and forces an oppressed cult to abandon civilization and revert to pre-civilized means of survival. Similarly, in A Journey to Tomorrow, the "future party" enforces its ideals of reason, progress, and civilization - all of which are imperial- upon the oppressed population that believes in traditional heritage, social harmony, and strife all of which are anti-colonial fantasies about pre-colonial settings. Furthermore, the tragic ending in both works can be interpreted as rejecting imperial fantasies: The geologist in "In Year One Million" abandons his comfortable life to promote his ideas, and his followers abandon utopia and bear the consequences. The doctor in A Journey to Tomorrow also takes the blame and punishment rather than enjoying his celebrity status in future Earth.

However, although both works seemingly reject imperial fantasies, they should not be mistaken as supporting anti-colonial sentiments that yearn for pre-colonial utopias. Many of al-Ḥakīm's other works advocate social evolution based on the imperial ideals of scientific progress and the spread of

civilization. Both of these works highlight the nuanced consequences of the absence of at-ta'aduliya, which turns any utopia into a dystopia. In both works, there is utopia and its opposite. Utopia is scientific progress, medical advancement, and the end of hunger and strife. Its opposite is the rejection of all these ideals and the yearning for whatever utopia has eliminated from the past (i.e. strife, struggle, hunger, etc.). In both works, utopian governments not only settle for their accomplishments but actively crush the mere articulation of the opposites of utopia. In other words, at-ta'aduliya (i.e. the balanced conflict between utopia and its opposite) is non-existent, which puts an end to the utopias in both works and transforms them into dystopias. Both works demonstrate that for any utopia to avoid this doom, its governments must continuously tolerate ideals conflicting with utopian ideals. This conflict is crucial for the survival of utopia, just as it is crucial for all vital aspects of humanity. Therefore, in both works, the absence of at-ta'aduliya causes the disappearance not only of utopia but also all other aspects of civility in society (e.g. love, social connection and empathy) even though utopian governments do not target them. The conclusion of both works articulates the failure of imposed utopias. "In Year One Million" illustrates that the triumph of utopia and the absence of its opposite results in a gradual decline of humanity's physical and emotional well-being (e.g. lack of intellectual capabilities, gender differentiation, attraction, sex, love, etc.), which leads to unrest and rebellion even though all other humanity's needs are met. This discontent begins with the geologist's discovery of the skull and his efforts to raise awareness about death. His efforts lead to social upheaval and disturb the utopian status quo. In response, the utopian government reprograms his thoughts. However, his influence did not diminish, and his followers build a human colony away from the metropolis. Even though the end of the scientist's endeavors leads to his end and the suffering of his followers, the overall result is positive. Humanity is redeemed in the colony beyond the metropolis. In A Journey to Tomorrow, the consequences of lacking at-ta'aduliya are present in the protagonists' discontent with the magnetic planet and future Earth. In the magnetic planet, the protagonists achieve a mental utopia. Their minds triumph over their bodies, and they achieve complete freedom from all worldly and physical needs. They become immune to injury, sickness, hunger, and death. However, both are discontent despite their absolute power and the absence of strife, which propel them to return to planet Earth only to face a similar situation. Though science and progress allowed people to achieve utopia,

people were discontent. Even though the utopian features of future Earth are functional and desired, the oppression of the utopian opposite causes unrest and failed attempts of rebellion. Hence, when the dark-skinned oppressed female guide is convicted, the protagonist takes the blame and decides to live in isolation instead of enjoying celebrity status in an imbalanced utopia.

Having established the importance of at-ta'aduliya in challenging imperial utopias, it is essential to recognize that although imperial contexts shape the pursuit of utopian aspirations in al-Ḥakīm's works, these aspirations are universal in all utopias, whether imperial or anti-imperial. This implies that while al-Hakīm seems to criticize colonial fantasies in both works, he also indirectly speaks back to every utopia that oppresses its opposite. This subtly includes Abdel Nasser's notoriously intolerant anticolonial socialist and nationalist utopian rhetoric that also rallies on the premise of ending hunger and poverty caused by colonialism. 10 And in this premise lies the crux of this essay: al-Ḥakīm did speak back to colonization, and he received praise for his stance, but in doing so, he also subtly spoke back to anti-colonialism. He openly illustrated that utopian aspirations cannot keep human aspirations alive if they suppress dissent. Neither colonial nor anti-colonial utopias should prevail over one another. To al-Hakīm, a healthy postcolonial utopia maintains at-ta'aduliya: utopian visions and their opposites, whether colonial or anti-colonial, should always be in constant conflict. Postcolonial utopias should be contact zones of conflicting ideas that accept and tolerate differences, allowing humanity to nurture empathy, harmony, and redemption.

In conclusion, this essay has discussed a common trend in the Arabic post-colonial literary scene. Arab postcolonial writers utilize hybridity to speak back to anti-colonialism just as they do to speak back to colonialism. After all, the dichotomy of colonizer vs. colonized is an imperial construct, and hybridity speaks back to imperial constructs in their totality rather than choosing one side over the other. What is peculiar in this trend is that hybridity responds to anti-colonialism in the same manner it responds to colonialism. It mimics its rhetoric and appropriates its ideals. Yet, it subtly deconstructs it, creating a complex and dynamic challenge to anti-colonialists who assume that hybrid postcolonial texts support their position. One of the best examples of this Arab postcolonial characteristic is al-Hakim's writings, which establish the hybrid concept of *at-ta'aduliya*. This concept argues that a good society incorporates opposing ideas and allows them to clash. Any society that nullifies this balanced conflict by taking sides is doomed to failure. This concept speaks back to anti-colonialism because

anti-colonial rhetoric in the Middle East (particularly that of Abdul Nasser) is one-sided and intolerant of opposing ideas, and intolerance produces an unhealthy society. Al-Hakim's concept argues for a holistic postcolonial contact zone where ideas clash and are discussed, allowing for unique, harmonious conditions. "In Year One Million" and *Journey to Tomorrow* showcase the ending of societies devoid of *ta'aduliya*. Even though these societies seem utopian and fulfill human aspirations, they are nevertheless dystopian and repulsive to individuals seeking a society that caters to human needs.

Notes:

- For more on Gamal Abdel Nasser's politics and ideology, see Elie Podeh
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 Winckler and Sara Salem.
- 2- Among the medals he received are the Republic's Medal in 1957 and the Nation's Award in 1960. In addition to other honorary awards.
- 3- For example, Anwar Alsadat, the president of Egypt, called him "An old man with dementia, writing with a pen dripping with black hatred; it is a tragedy that a man whom Egypt elevated to literary prominence to the top of the pyramid descends into the gutter at the end of his life." [My Translation] (online). Muhammad Hasaneen Haikal, a staunch advocate of Nasserist ideology, said, "It is courageous to stand in front of life and say one's opinion, not to wait to whisper one's opinion after death. There is no courage in his attitude" [My translation] (online).
- 4-In the introduction to the second edition of *The Return of Consciousness*, al-Hakim states that Nasserists ranted and raved after the publication of his book, "as if Nasserism was a sacred religion that should not be touched, as if Nasser was above human beings and no one could hold him accountable for a mistake, and that the files of the July Revolution must be opened and the facts seen if Egypt is to progress [summary of my translation]. (al-Hakim)
- 5—This term has been translated into Equilibrium. However, the translation does not provide its deeper essence. Hence, this research explains the term further and continues to use it throughout the text.
- 6- See Hybridity in Ashcroft
- 7- See Said
- 8- For more on traveling theories, see Said and Salem.
- 9 In *Al-Ta'am Likul Fam [Food for Every Mouth]* (1963), al-Hakim indirectly expresses a yearning for a utopia where hunger, poverty, and corruption are eliminated. In his novel 'Awdat al-Ruh [Return of the Spirit] (1933), he criticizes poverty and class stratification and praises the revolution against the British Empire.
- 10 Postcolonial critics established the relationship between anti-colonialism, nationalism, and socialism. For more, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin.

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