

DOROTA RUDNICKA-KASSEM

AL-MUKHAṬṬĀṬĪN: A QUEST FOR A NEW TYPE OF HERO-LEADER

In 1969, Idrīs published the play *al-Mukhaṭṭāṭīn*¹ (The Striped Ones). With this new work, the author, as usual, surprised both readers and critics. This play, considered by Badawī as one of the most outspoken satires, written during 'Abd al-Nāṣir's era, caused a lot of controversy and discussion, and due to its political content, it was never produced on stage.² In reading and analysing the play and by examining the scanty critical assessment of it, that is, the studies in Arabic by Muḥammad Barakāt,³ Ṣabīrī Ḥāfiẓ⁴ and Amīr Iskandar,⁵ and the brief study in English by Badawī,⁶ we notice that the play was neglected by the critics. As Ṣabīrī Ḥāfiẓ actually pointed out, it was simply "rejected" without an attentive look at its content.⁷ Why did the censors and some critics consider *al-Mukhaṭṭāṭīn* to be the author's anti-socialist propaganda? Was it really necessary to ban the play from being staged?

We differ with those who rejected the play because they considered it to be an attack on the socialist system⁸ and on 'Abd al-Nāṣir himself and we are inclined to share Muḥammad

- ¹ Y. Idrīs, *al-Mukhaṭṭāṭīn*, Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1984.
- ² Idrīs's version is that 'Abd al-Nāṣir sent Anwar al-Sadāt to inspect two new productions, the play *al-Mukhaṭṭāṭīn* and a film based on *Mirāmār*, a novel by Maḥfūz. The presidential emissary judged the play politically offensive, whereas he cleared the cinema production. Interview with Y. Idrīs, May 1978, cited by P.M. Kurpershoek, *The Short Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981, p. 32.
- ³ Muḥammad Barakāt, "Ḥaṣād al-Mawṣim al-Masraḥī, *al-Ādāb*, September 1969, pp. 75-76.
- ⁴ Ṣabīrī Ḥāfiẓ, "Ra'y Ākhar fī Masraḥiyyat *al-Mukhaṭṭāṭīn* dīdd al-Nuẓum al-Shumūliyya lā dīdd al-Ishṭirākīyya", *al-Masraḥ*, August 1969, pp. 92-96.
- ⁵ Amīr Iskandar, "Qirā'a li-Masraḥiyyat *al-Mukhaṭṭāṭīn*, Ḥalām Ākhar fī-l-Ḥāḥira", *al-Masraḥ*, June 1969, pp. 55-58.
- ⁶ M.M. Badawī, *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, pp. 161-163.
- ⁷ Ṣabīrī Ḥāfiẓ, "Ra'y Ākhar...", p. 93.
- ⁸ Muḥammad Barakāt, "Qabl Raf' al-Sitār...", *al-Masraḥ*, January 1966, p. 32.

Barakāt's point of view⁹ that, in *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn*, Idrīs attempts to present an answer to his plea in *al-Fārāfir*. At the beginning, it seems that the solution is found, and Idrīs's apparently uncomplicated plan of the "striped world" (i.e., the ideal political and social system categorized by the black and white divisions) might bring happiness to the people. However, surprisingly, by the end of the play, the author revolts against his plan stating that he was mistaken and misled. Should we really see Idrīs's rejection of the "striped world" as a rejection of socialism? Was he really presenting this particular system or had he perhaps a much broader issue in mind?

The play *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn* was published after the "defeat of 1967" (1969), that is, during the time when Arab intellectuals attempted to assess the event, find its causes and try to pull society out of its predicament. Therefore, when judging the play and the author's ideas we must definitely remember this fact. As we might notice in Idrīs's previous works, namely, fictional, journalistic and dramatic, the author is consistently preoccupied with the unresolved conflict between man and society, i.e., between an individual and the social, political and cultural establishment. In *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn*, the author did not abandon this issue. On the contrary, he undertook an effort to discuss it further, shed more light on the matter hoping that will help to "wake up" the people and alert their consciousness to clearly see the problems and mistakes and eventually be born again.

By looking closely at the play's content and studying "all its corners and private laws", we would not hesitate to share Ṣabīrī Ḥāfiẓ's opinion¹⁰ and consider *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn* a rather general discussion and an attack on any regime, that is, on any kind of regime which did not truly implement its noble aims. As presented in the play, the beautiful ideals of the "striped people" were never realized and they lived on unworthy slogans only. In reality *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn*, after having taken over, "forgot" about the true implementation of their

⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰ Ṣabīrī Ḥāfiẓ, "Ra'y Ākhar...", p. 94.

ideology, and eventually the previous "rotten" and corrupted system began to re-enact itself from behind the mask of new slogans. As Ṣabīrī Ḥāfiẓ emphasized in his study, socialism was not alone to claim its theory could bring happiness to the people and solve all their social problems. There were also other regimes and leaders claiming the same. In *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn*, Idrīs points out clearly that even the greatest idea has to be implemented. Otherwise it will fail as did the plan of black and white, and eventually people's situation will not improve.

According to the playwright, the only correct political system would be one which would let the people enjoy "all the colours of life", that is, a system which would never hamper their dynamism and creativity and ensure the possibility of fulfilling man's individual aims and goals. This is the essence of Idrīs's message and herein lies its importance in the development of post-1967 Egyptian drama. The government's decision to ban the play from the stage was a mistaken one. The author was judged prematurely and, without any obvious reason, deprived of the chance of presenting his stand in the nation-wide debate of the post-1967 period.

When we look closely at the play's content, we may notice that the notion of the ideal political and social regime is not the only issue which captivated the author's mind. There is also another important problem Idrīs focuses on. This is his concept of a hero-leader. A critical assessment of the play indicates that this issue remained rather unnoticed by the critics. Idrīs's portrayal of the hero-leader as it is drawn in a few lines in his previous plays, that is, *Jumhūriyyat Farahāt*, *al-Laḥẓa al-Ḥarija* and *al-Mahzala al-Arḍiyya* and sketched clearly and more completely in *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn*, certainly deserves more attention and critical analysis.

Many works of Egyptian playwrights of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and 1950s present images of "great" heroes, i.e., brave, strong and devoted leaders who sacrifice for the well-being of their society and fight with determination to free their people from all kinds of oppression, attempting to establish a just political and social order. This concept of a leader, which grew out of the influence of various elements such as Arab popular and literary

traditions, glorious Islamic history and Western models, was to a great extent inspired by famous patriotic figures such as 'Arābi Pasha, Muṣṭafā Kāmil, Sa'd Zaghlūl, and later 'Abd al-Nāṣir.¹¹ These images of the leaders, as presented by the Egyptian playwrights of the pre-revolutionary and early post-revolutionary drama, definitely bear the influence of Egyptian neo-classical drama with its model of the magnificent hero, the embodiment of the concept of one-person spiritual leader and effective ruler of Egypt such as in the plays of Shawqī, Abāza and Bākathīr.

In his search for a contemporary hero-leader, Idrīs attempts to leave behind the inherited concept of the great *ẓa'īm* and asks: Who is this leader? What are the qualities he should possess? What are his values and what ideals does he aspire to? Is he a magnificent hero or a simple man with noble ideas?

Idrīs began to sketch a model of his hero-leader in *Jumhūriyyat Farahāt* (1957), when he introduced a poor, simple Egyptian man who, by pure luck, got a chance to devote his efforts and money to the improvement and well-being of his society. The man was honest, enthusiastic, and had a lot of charisma; however he did not succeed. His plan failed because, as the author pointed out in the play, the man neither consulted others on his project, nor realized that the material achievements should be followed by spiritual development and that the new rebuilt society had to maintain close links with its past experiences. In *al-Laḥza al-Ḥarija*, Idrīs presented another hero or rather anti-hero, Sa'd, the leader of the *Fida'iyyīn*, who uncovered his internal fears and weaknesses and thus conveyed the leader's need for self-criticism and self-education. Subsequently, in *al-Mahzala al-Arḍiyya*, the author introduced the issue of the difficult choice and emphasized once again the need for a wise, just and honest leader, who in his actions would always seek the truth and, like a medical doctor,

¹¹ For a discussion of the concept of a leader in Egyptian drama, see: E. Machut-Mendecka, *Współczesny dramat egipski* (Egyptian Contemporary Drama), Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1984.

would be able to make a correct diagnosis, cure the contemporary world from all existing ills and free it from evil.

In these three above-mentioned plays, Idrīs only touches upon the problem of the leader and analyzes some of his characteristics. In *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn*, he carries his discussion of the issue further and attempts to present a more complete, "evolutionary" portrait of the contemporary hero-leader.

The three-act play *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn* is a political allegory, it is a "fantastic story" about the secret society of the "Striped People" who, under the leadership of al-Akh (The Brother), establish happiness in the world.

The first act of the play begins in a bleak Beckett-like wasteland where a group of suspicious-looking individuals with strange, comical names, members of a secret organization, are waiting for the arrival of their leader. The Brother, who is already one and a half hours late, finally arrives and descends from the sky in a helicopter. From the beginning, he presents himself as an authoritarian leader who expects blind obedience from his group. Without any explanation for his late arrival, he informs them that that day is the most crucial day in their lives, as they are planning to take over power and go public. Meanwhile, the group is joined by the last of its members, that is, Almāz, a well-known actress who turns up dressed in a tight-fitting garment with black and white stripes. Then, on the command of the Brother, all the members of the society change into similarly striped clothes and head for the nearby theatre.

The second act takes place in the theatre when the Striped People occupy the front stalls and watch the play entitled "The Foundation of the Great Happiness". During the performance of this play within the play, in which many absurd incidents take place, the Striped People begin to execute their plan. The actress Almāz goes on stage and attacks the show accusing the Foundation of the Great Happiness of fraud and corruption. It is mostly due to her intellectual and physical charms that she and her colleagues manage, in a relatively short period of time, to take over the management of the Foundation, with the Brother

ousting the Chairman of the Board of Directors. The Striped People change the name of the foundation into the "Foundation of Real Happiness".

In the third act Idrīs presents us with a picture from one hundred months later. This is the anniversary of the establishment of the Foundation of Real Happiness, that is, the anniversary of the rise to power of the Striped People. From the movie presented to us on the big screen, we learn that the entire globe became governed by the Striped People. Everything and everyone is painted in black and white: people, buses, houses, birds, even children's balloons, are all striped black and white. The whole world seems happy and pretends to be satisfied with the simple black and white order. The movie ends with a huge picture of the hero-leader. Then, Idrīs takes us to the meeting room where we can witness a very strange conversation between the Brother and Almāz. This conversation reveals to us that the architect of the only supposedly happy world is not happy himself. On the contrary, during the last year, he has been plagued by doubts about the truth of his white and black revolution and by the fact that people's conversion has not made them any happier and has not solved their problems. For the first time he doubts his judgment and admits that he was mistaken and misled. Now he sees clearly that the world is really full of colours and is convinced that people should be allowed to choose any colours they want. The Brother shares his views and doubts with his colleagues. However, now that they enjoy power and privileges the Striped People are not ready to obey their leader and follow his new ideas. They even accuse him of reaction, betrayal and reneging on his past revolutionary principles. Having been turned down by his closest people, the Brother decides to go to the street to preach there about his new-found philosophy, that is, the revolution against black and white. When the Brother, dressed in red, goes to a café trying to find new believers, he is suspected of being a government secret agent and is finally beaten up and taken back by police to the Foundation Headquarters, where he is forced by the Striped People to broadcast an official anniversary message prepared for him on tape. He is physically prevented from telling them what he now truly believes. At this time the previous dictator has to obey the orders and becomes a victim

of his own past principles, a mere figurehead kept for the benefit of the corrupt, powerful and privilege-hungry few whom he has himself appointed to positions of power.

Why has the idea of the black and white and its founder failed? Why has the Brother discovered the need to revolt against the system he himself created? Can the play *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn* be regarded as the answer to Farfūr's call for a solution to the problem of the relation between man and the system? Finally, can we sketch Idrīs's portrait of the hero-leader? A close look at the personality of the Brother and the content of the play may bring some answers.

From the first act of the play the Brother (al-Akh) appears to us as a glorious *za'im*, a magnificent hero coming from above as though from the sky. His personality is dictatorial, and he wants people to know him as such in each and every moment:

al-Akh: Who brought the idea that everyone does as he wants... You did not know that our first idea was to discontinue that everyone does as he wants.

Doctor 'Arīq: This is only for security... Only a mistake. This will never be repeated.

al-Akh: This mistake should be corrected immediately!¹²

The members of the secret society are completely under his control. He expects absolute obedience from them, he successfully controls their actions, sayings, and thinking:

Farkat Ka'b: How many is one third?

al-Akh: One third is equal to one.

All of them: One third is equal to one.

Farkat Ka'b: How do you expect me to know it by myself?

¹² Y. Idrīs, *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn*, p. 14, v. 13, v. 19-23.

al-Akh: Shut up.¹³

Furthermore, he is even capable of directing their physical movements:

al-Akh: (to all of them): Come close!

(They have approached him. Then al-Akh pushes Akhū Kalām saying:)
Come close, do not jump on me?... "Come close"
means come from far, so you will stand at the
nearest distance. Understood?!¹⁴

The members of the secret society work precisely as al-Akh had planned, they have to trust him completely and obey him blindly. They are afraid of him and flatter him in ridiculously exaggerated terms. The Striped People are not allowed to question anything. When one of them demands an explanation for why the leader was late, he ignores him and even imposes undignified punishment.

al-Akh: Now you stand here... Take off your clothes and do not put them on again, until the second part.¹⁵

The Brother is the sole architect of the plan of the secret society, and he is the only one who decides that their action begins:

al-Akh: Our meeting tonight is not the first... This is a decisive one. It will bring us from underground to the outside world... from the belief we hide in our hearts to the strategy to expose it to all the people who want to believe in it.¹⁶

Al-Akh has been very lucky to have with him persons such as Almāz, Doctor 'Arrīq, Farkat Ka'b, Akhū Kalām and others who are completely faithful and who accept, without hesitation, his ideology and repeat his words as their own:

¹³ Ibid, p. 14, v. 4, v. 17-20, p. 18, v-7.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 21, v. 18-21, 23-25.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 21, v. 8-10.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 22, v. 21, 23-24, p. 23, v. 1-2.

Doctor 'Arrīq: Everyone acts as he wants and as the result of this (we have) chaos, destruction, wars, quarrels, stupidity and ignorance...

Akhū Kalām: The world must be planned. Human beings must plan everything, even themselves. Everything should be clear, understood and sane. White is white and black is black.¹⁷

These people are ready to go with his idea to the end:

Farkat Ka'b: I will not relax till I achieve everything in my brain. All the world must be black and white.¹⁸

According to the Brother's vision, in a relatively short period of time, the Striped People carry out their plan. Due to the action presented by Idrīs's revolution, the whole world became similarly striped, i.e., black and white. Everything in the ideological and material aspects of life was planned, organized, and categorized simply according to black and white lines. However, the revolution has remained in slogans only. In reality, as discussed by Šabrī Ḥāfiẓ,¹⁹ the changes in the system were slight, mostly in name (the Foundation of Happiness had changed its name from Great into Real), the previous structure and employees, even high officials were kept. Therefore, the old system began to act under the mask of a new one and the people continued to take advantage of the system running after power, money and privileges. The same thing happened with the members of the secret society. While enjoying new careers and posts they forgot completely the ideas they had preached, they forgot about happiness for other people:

Doctor 'Arrīq (bringing to the meeting a bottle of whisky):
Who wants whisky?

The Director: It is good with a Cuban cigar.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 23, v. 7-8, 10-13.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 23, v. 18-20.

¹⁹ Šabrī Ḥāfiẓ, "Ra'y Ākhar...", p. 94.

Farkat Ka'b: And Finnish cheese.²⁰

They became so attached to their new privileges that they were unable to notice that the new system did not make people any happier than before and thus did not solve any of their existing problems. For their own convenience, the Striped People forgot about everything and they only repeated their slogans. What happened, then, to their leader?

As we can see from the third act during the year preceding the anniversary, the Brother had changed considerably. The long dialogue with Almāz, his best employee and friend, clearly exposes these changes. He was not happy with the system he himself had created; he wanted to revolt against it:

al-Akh: I am fed up... with all these nights... I have spent by myself talking... Sometimes I get up from my sleep frightened, and I feel that I am a liar. I see one thing, and I say something else. I am not like this. I preached black and white because I believed in it.

Almāz: And now?

al-Akh: I see that we have to revolt against black and white. I believe that always we have to be advanced. We need a new revolution.²¹

These new ideas of al-Akh were not approved by his colleagues, they absolutely refused to revolt against black and white:

Doctor 'Arriq: ... We all have one idea. We have become friends on one path. Now you are the one who has betrayed us and who wants to leave this path.²²

Having been rejected by his own people, al-Akh went to preach his new revolution in the street. He was also rejected there, even beaten up and later brought by the police to the Foundation Headquarters. Now, the previous leader and dictator had to listen to his lesson:

²⁰ Y. Idrīs, *al-Mukhaṭṭāfīn*, p. 85, v. 14-17.

²¹ Ibid., p. 74, v. 20-21, p. 75, v. 4-7, 10-12.

²² Ibid., p. 87, v. 2-4.

The President: Didn't what happened to you make you think?... You went to the people to tell the truth and they refused you. The whole world has rejected you because the whole world is striped. There is not even one hole in the middle for any colour.²³

The Brother has become a victim of his own strategy. Now his black and white system, which left no place for human creativity, originality, free thinking, fantasy, sensitivity and pure, honest feelings, has turned against him. The people whom the Brother himself created became indifferent, even hostile to his new ideas. Our leader realized that the truly happy life of the society he sought could not be categorized simply according to the black and white lines. The Brother left alone was unable to fight or to change anything and he became a puppet in the hands of the people whom he himself had given power and privileges. They forced him to read the anniversary message prepared on tape and while he was protesting they prevented him physically from telling the people the truth.

What is the main message of the play *al-Mukhaṭṭāfīn*? What final touches can we give to our "evolutionary" sketch of Idrīs's portrayal of the contemporary hero-leader? The play presents the leader as a sensitive, honest man who would understand that all members of contemporary society are different and all of them should be equally allowed to express their ideas, to show their potential, originality and creativity and that it is necessary for a leader to listen to, and respect, the voices of the people. Being a leader in today's society requires a great deal of responsibility. Therefore, as Idrīs points out in *al-Mukhaṭṭāfīn*, the contemporary leader should never forget that he is also a simple man who can doubt, and make mistakes, who sometimes does not know how to act, decide or answer, and who should always consult with the people and constantly seek more knowledge about human nature, the world and its problems. The Brother explains this as follows:

al-Akh: That was my view but now... I have another one. I need the truth... I do not know...

²³ Ibid., p. 94, v. 10, 12-15.

Almāz: This is the first time I have heard that from you.
We used always to have answers from you.

al-Akh: Except for this one. I cannot know if people are
happy or not.²⁴

Contemporary societies are in a deep ideological crisis. There is a strong need to listen attentively to the voice of Idrīs's Farfūr to find a real solution. We are "going round and round", and we have to get out of this situation. Each society needs a good guide, that is, a wise, honest, sensitive and experienced leader for whom the truth would remain the most important issue.

While presenting his model of a contemporary hero-leader in *al-Mukhaṭṭaṭīn* the author dealt us a big dose of optimism and showed deep faith in the good will of man. Although his leader did not succeed in truly carrying out his plan, he did succeed in another way. Idrīs's leader discovered the nature of his mistake and, through his self-education and re-thinking of the plan, possibly found a more correct new direction. Being a great *zaʿīm*, he had enough courage to declare a new revolution, a revolution against his own principles. The power of black and white slogans did not allow him to succeed this time. However, his insistence on the new ideology and commitment to it indicates that the future belongs to his new idea, the idea of "flying colours". His road might be laden with various obstacles; he might temporarily jeopardize his efforts but strength and confidence are with him.

Idrīs's sketch of the hero-leader remains incomplete. The sudden death of the author in August 1991 ended his creative search. In his recent journalistic writing, he often mentioned the Arab world's expectation of a new leader and his deep belief in his appearance. Idrīs had faith that the Egyptian (Arab) world would again produce a great leader.

At present, all we can say is that the coming days may reveal some hidden and unpublished book or notes and that we may yet be able to add the finishing touches to the author's unfinished sketch.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 73, v. 20,22, p. 70, v. 14, 24.

EWA SIEMIENIEC-GOŁAŚ

WILLIAM SEAMAN AND HIS *GRAMMATICA LINGUAE TURCICAE* (1670)

Among the 17th century Turkish grammars one can find William Seaman's *Grammatica Linguae Turcicae, In Quinque partes distributa*, published in Oxford 1670, pp. 183. This is the first Turkish grammar printed in England.

Although it is mentioned in some bibliographical sources, very little has been known in the turcological literature about the author of *Grammatica Linguae Turcicae* (the *Grammar*) and the *Grammar* itself¹. The only source we have found, giving some data about William Seaman is Harold Bowen's work². Everything we can find out from Bowen's book about Seaman is that he wrote *Grammatica Linguae Turcicae* and also translated *Anglican Catechism* and *New Testament* into Turkish. There is also another information referring to Seaman in Bowen's book. Seaman's name is mentioned in the letter from 1649 written by English mathematician and astronomer John Greaves to the great arabist Pococke. Greaves writes: "Mister Seaman and myself are both in hand with a Turkish Dictionary". This piece of information can suggest that Seaman also worked on Turkish dictionary. This is confirmed by his own words in *Praefatio ad Lectorem* in his *Grammar*: "Quin et ad idem institutum promeendum Lexicon-Turcico-Latinum paratum habeo". Unfortunately, no trace of this dictionary can be found in turcological literature. We still know nothing about Seaman's occupation and private life. We cannot exclude that he might have been a missionary and this can explain his interests in translating *New Testament* and *Catechism*. However, we do not have enough data confirming this supposition.