



HUMAN EXISTENCE IN MODERN ARAB DRAMA: AL-HAKIM, IDRIS, AND ABD AL-GHAFORE, EXISTENCE AND ABSURDITY

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the concept of human existence in Modern Arab Theater by checking some dramatic functions that deal with the subjects of existence and non-existing in different social and cultural contexts. The research examined *Food for Every Mouth* by Tawfiq Al-Hakim, *The Princess is Waiting*, and *Al-farafe* by Yusuf Idris. This indicates how these authors address human issues ahead of life's non-equality and contradictions. Research examines the most prominent philosophical topics related to human existence, such as contradictions between individual and society, a sense of isolation, and the damage of modern people in a world dominated by stress and uncertainty. The dramatic methods used to express these ideas by authors are also analyzed through dialogue, dramatic structure, and character design. Research depends on analyzing dramatic texts using philosophical equipment to read the dimensions of the existence of these functions, which reveal the effect of existentialism and non-equality in presenting psychological and intellectual challenges that individuals face. Through this analysis, the research wants to provide a deep understanding of how the theater can be a platform for detecting existential problems, while modern Arabs reveal the social and cultural references that shape human experience in the Arab Theater.

Keywords

Human existence, Arab theater, Absurdity, Existentialism, Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Salah Abd al-Ghafour, Yusuf Idris, Existential crisis, Contemporary Arab literature, Theatrical characters, Theatrical philosophy, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

To have a deep understanding of human existence in modern Arab plays, we must reflect on how Arab writers and playwrights address the question of continuous discovery for existence, loss, and meaning. The theater of Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Salah Abd Al-Ghafour, and Yusuf Idris, in different social and political contexts, forms different models of such conversations between people and society that have emerged in Arab countries since independence. Through their dramatic functions, such as *Food for Every Mouth* (al-Hakim), *The Princess is Waiting* (Abd al-Ghafour), and *Al-farafe* (Idris), these authors offer lively concepts between life, death, and personal self and society (Al-Hakim, 45; Abd Al-Ghafour, 63; Idris, 12).

Modern Arab Theater represents a fruitful environment to express questions about human survival, on the one hand, associates the philosophy of existence with social and political struggle, on another. In *Food for Every Mouth*, al-Hakim portrays a foggy social reality and asks philosophical questions about equality and existence (Al-Hakim, 89). For its share, in *Princess is Waiting*, Abdel Gafor reflects the heroine, which reflects the disinterest (Abdel Gafor, 120) in life, which falls into the trap of eternal waiting. In *Al-farafe*, Yusuf Idris focuses on the psychological



challenges the Idris Society faces (Idris, 58). All of these plays reveal an intensive interaction between the concepts of existentialism, non-equation, and social division, making them a meeting point between Western philosophy and Arab society.

In this research, an attempt is made to examine these four plays with an existential and absurd perspective to analyze how the Arab person is represented in these plays. We'll take up the concepts of existence.

Literature Review:

The last studies on the question of survival in the Arab theater are not enough, but many studies have been done at the theater of al-Hakim and Idris, who have helped create a solid base to understand the subject. For example, we find that many studies behave a lot by the theater of Al-Hakim, who researches Hala Abdullah's study existing philosophy in the theater of Tawfiq Al-Hakim, which shows how Al-Hakim does not limit himself to presenting social reality, such as existence, which is an existence.

Another important study is the study of Muhammad Salem *Arab's Theater*, which analyzed Al-Hakim, Abd Al-Ghafore, and plays Idris from the perspective of the influence of existential philosophy on the understanding of the Arabian person. This study indicates that during this period, the Arab theater reflected the influence of existential philosophy, and it was an effective means of expressing human pain in front of a society that was unable to provide real answers to the questions (Salem, 134). When it comes to the study of Abd Al-Ghafore theater, he has been referred to as having conflicts in his plays, especially in *The Princess is Waiting*, where the Arab man is trapped in waiting, the position of the character of intensive existence. Many studies have largely addressed this point, such as Mustafa Abdullah's study *Expressions of Absurd in the Arab Theater*, which argues that Abd Al-Ghafore reflects the absence of life in his characters, waiting in a metaphor waiting in a metaphor that expresses existence in the case of the event.

Man and Society: A Theatrical Reading of the Dimensions of Human Existence in Arab Theater:

***Food for Every Mouth* by Tawfiq Al-Hakim:**

In *Food for Every Mouth*, Tawfiq Al-Hakim uses as a tool to criticize social and political reality in Egypt and the Arab world during that period. This drama reflects an internal conflict between individuals and society, with existentialist clarity in the claim that people are in a terrible confrontation with invisible forces that limit the alternatives, while strength and loss are fitted emotions. In this drama, al-Hakim reflects the existence of character in a world full of social and economic oppression, where the concept of 'food' symbolizes the need for existence becomes a survival problem, but not in a natural way. The characters in the play are forced to eat 'tasteless food', which is a symbol of life without meaning. The characters also remain in a state of constant existence because there is no clear solution in a world full of conflict. The most important destruction that humans face in *Food for Every Mouth* is the loss of the ability to define a clear purpose in life, leading to the loss of identity and internal division. Through this drama, Al-Hakim addresses the issue of existence philosophically and presents the idea that people under political and social systems have no significance in their existence, but remains in a state of indifference that they cannot escape. Thus, the characters are depicted as finding something to make sense to their lives, just to implicate themselves in the cycle with repetition and chaos (Al-Hakim, 45).

***The Princess is Waiting* by Salah Abd Al-Ghafore:**

Salah Abd Al-Ghafore's *The Princess is Waiting* is considered one of the most prominent works to address the issue of absurdity in the Arab theater. In this drama, human existence is built into



eternal waiting. The protagonist, Princess, is constantly characterized by a constant expectation of a world that never comes. The wait here is depicted as part of the existing non-equation, as the princess can only take an action, and her life is trapped in an infinitely vicious cycle. This eternal wait reflects the absence of human life, where everything is exposed to the future, but there is no guarantee that it will eventually happen. It is a hallmark of uncertainty and continuity, which is a feature of existentialism addressed in the play (Abd Al-Ghaffore, 63).

Within the structure of non-equation, this work can be regarded as an expression of psychological crisis that Arab individuals experience under oppressive political and social systems. The princess becomes a symbol of the people waiting for a change in life, but is unable to bring about this change. She represents the general state of the Arab person, trapped in the lost hope. The play shows that waiting is not only a psychological process, but also an expression of indifference and constant concern for the future (AbdAl-Ghaffore, 120).

Al-farafeby Yusuf Idris:

In the *Al-farafe*, Yusuf Idris addresses the dilemma of human existence by presenting a composite picture of people suffering from social and psychological isolation. The characters in the play are in a strange position in their daily lives, as each one tries to save their reality in another world, but without any real results. The play is characterized by the absurd dialogue between the characters, which reflects the increasing inner stress between individuals and society. *Al-farafe* characters show a clear contradiction between their lives, which are full of sorrow and emptiness, and their high expectations, which are difficult to achieve in difficult social conditions.

Through this drama, Idris shows an existential crisis in Arab society, where individuals are unable to find meaning in life. Life becomes a chaotic mess, devoid of any real value, and individuals live in a state of internal inconsistency. This drama reflects a constant sense of failure and regrets the left occasions, revealing the idea that people in the Arab world live in constant struggle with themselves (Idris, 58).

Human Existence in Arab Theatre: A Comparison with Western Theatre:

Human existence is one of the basic concepts addressed by both Western and Eastern philosophy. It acts as a tool to understand human nature and existence in a world full of challenges, conflicts, and uncertainty. This concept refers to the constant discovery of man for meaning in life and reflects the struggle between the person's will and society's ability to impose its obstacles on it. Human existence is seen similarly in modern Arab and Western theater, but with variation in the expression of this existence based on different cultural and social contexts.

Human Existence in Arab Theatre:

In the Arab theater, the playwright presents human existence as a complex and misleading state, where the person is caught between social traditions, conflicting cultural identity, and a sense of existence. These philosophical dimensions are reflected deep in the works of Arab dramatists such as Tawfiq, Salah Abd Al-Ghaffore, and Yusuf Idris. Their plays express various forms of human existence, exposing psychological crises, spiritual emptiness, and existing isolations that Arab individuals experience in a stressful social context.

Tawfiq Al-Hakim: The play *Food for Every Mouth* reveals the Arab man in a confrontation with his society and fate, where the person lives between his desires and demands on society. In his acting, Al-Hakim presented a model of a person who tried for self-interviews while being forced to follow the social values that prohibit his freedom. Through this character, al-Hakim emphasized the existence of the dilemma that the Arabic man faces, and could not achieve self-interviews in a world filled with social pressure and deeply ingrained traditions. As Al-Hakim



explains in his plays, “a person cannot free himself from the group's burden, no matter how much he tries” (Al-Hakim, *FEM*, 34).

The Princess is Waiting by Salah Abd Al-Ghafore: This drama reflects the pain of human existence through the existence of the hero waiting for an unknown wealth. This wait represents the state of uselessness as a person in the world who lacks a clear vision for the future. It shows separation of separation from the pending reality and the contingent's location, as the person suffers from an inner peace that expresses the absence of real existence. As the character says, “I waited so long ... But what did I wait for in the end?” (Abd Al-Ghafore, *The Princess is Waiting*, 45).

Yusuf Idris: The play *Al-farafere* is a Psychological Crisis that examines human existence through individuals when met with the tough reality imposed on them in life. The characters in this drama must face the injury situation, which is in contact with unexplained conditions, which reflects the disrespect of human existence during social and political obstacles, from which a person cannot escape. Here, Idris is a symbol of human existence in a social context, where the person lives in the margins of life, is unable to find a true meaning for his existence. Idris says in his drama: “Everything in this life lives in its place and does not run like us” (Idris, *Al-farafere*, 28).

Human Existence in Western Theater:

In the Western theater, man's existence is known for its intense philosophical dimensions, as presented by thinkers such as Sartre and Camus. Theater is used as a platform to highlight human crises in modern times. The Western Theater focuses on personal existence and internal conflict with the Arab theater, but varies in some methods and symbolism that reflect it. In movements such as Western philosophy, especially in movements such as existence and absurdity, these problems are more widespread and directly addressed.

Jean-Paul Sartre Theater: Sartre is considered one of the most prominent existential philosophers who formed a philosophical basis for understanding human existence. In his plays as *The Deluge* and *The Devil and the Good Lord*, he indicates how humans are not born with a specific meaning, but make their way through their choices. In their plays, man's existence is depicted with stress between personal freedom and the heavy burden of personal functions. The existence in Sartre's theater is a continuous function of self -self-self-construction, but with a continuous recognition of the burden of personal freedom, such as feelings of crime or loss. As Sartre said in his acting: “Existence is the only one; man is just what he does (Sartre, *The Deluge*, 102).

Samuel Beckett's Theater: The most famous play, *Waiting for Godot*, is one of the most prominent absurd tasks that addresses the question of human survival within a structure of non-equality and meaninglessness. This drama is always focused on the idea of waiting and indifference that can surround life, because there is nothing specific throughout the piece, and there is no remarkably dramatic development. Through this story, the back expresses an existence that seems devoid of purpose and makes no promise of real meaning. As the back says in the reading of the drama: “We just wait, but nothing comes” (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 16).

Albert Camus Theater: In his play *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus presents the concept of existence through the non-life of life, from which it is impossible to get off. Camus believes that man in modern time remains in a state of false existence, which reflects the basic idea of absurdity: the idea that life is meaningless, but that man will have to face this reality with full acceptance. The existence of Camus faces the biggest challenge of finding meaning in a world full of meaninglessness. As Camus states in his work: “The existence is absurd; we all search for meaning in an empty world” (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 99).



Comparison between Arab and Western Theatre:

Although the human existence of the Arab theater reflects many similar questions discussed in the Western Theater, such as rude, isolation, and conflict with himself, the way Arab dramatists present these subjects is influenced by local social and political contexts. In the Arab theater, the author often portrays characters in conflicts with external forces such as society and tradition, while in the Western theater, the struggle itself is more concentrated in the characters, especially in existence and absurd movements.

Stylistically, the Western theater uses more modern techniques in dramatic construction, which focuses on short communication and indirect conditions. In the Arab theater, we can find a clearer representation of social and cultural pressure that affects character development. However, both types of theater share a common theme: exposing human suffering and the continuous discovery of meaning in a world filled with uncertainty and pressure.

Conclusion:

The dramas that were analyzed in this research, *Food for Every Mouth*, *The Princess is Waiting*, and *Al-Farafere*, are modern Arab dramas that reveal many philosophies of human existence, the understanding of the Arabs, and the effect of the absurd philosophy. These plays not only reflect the characters' internal conflicts but also reveal social and political tensions that define this struggle. Through the character that discovers meaning in a chaotic world, *The Princess is Waiting*, in the end, without hope, and the characters facing social powers that threaten their existence, we see how Arabs cope with existence and non-liking in the context of their changing environment. What is the difference between these tasks, how they add existence and absurd philosophy on the one hand, one hand, with the challenges of social and political life, on the other, making them a detailed reflection of Arabic reality after independence? On the other hand, the Western Theater, especially the baked work, coincides with some ideas presented by these Arab plays, but with a fundamental difference related to social and political contexts. The interaction between the Arab and Western existence philosophy creates a fruitful field for studies and analysis of these literary and dramatic works. These tasks also help to enrich the dialogue between Arab culture and Western philosophy, which strengthens the importance of human existence as a basic subject in literature and theater. Through this research, we hope to explore how existence and absurd philosophy have shaped the Arab character, as well as open the door to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the theater's role in spreading these philosophers and social issues to the wider audience.

Ethics Statement

Ethical Approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed Consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Data Availability

Data sharing does not apply to this research as no data were generated or analysed.

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