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Youths and Political Allegory: Nader Omran's *A Theatre Company Found a Theatre and Theatred Hamlet*

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***Abstract*—This paper investigates Jordanian playwright Nader Omran's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* It examines Omran's dramatization of the struggle of Arab youths in a region ruled by corrupt leaders. In particular, the paper focuses on how Omran transforms Shakespeare's Ophelia into an assertive and dynamic character to reflect the contemporaneous circumstances and conditions of the Arab World in *A Theatre Company Found a Theatre and Theatred Hamlet* (1984). In Omran's adaptation, Ophelia's suicide is an act of self-immolation which anticipates Tunisian fruit and vegetable vendor Mohammed Bouazizi's act of burning himself in December 2010 since both acts awaken dormant hopes for change and trigger a process of transformation as an inevitable result of years of political oppression and marginalization. In this respect, Omran's play anticipates and predicts recent Arab uprisings that were initiated and led by Arab youths in protest against years of social injustice and exclusion from the political life.**

***Index Terms*—Omran, Ophelia, MENA region, justice, Arab youths**

"The Hamlets one meets in Arab countries are different […] they are marked by distinctive experiences and concerns" (Litvin, 2011, p. 12)

I. Introduction

The literary world of artistic production is always looking for alternatives through which concerns of the contemporary world are displayed. Theatrical pieces, as such, are a recreation of the lived reality through which playwrights try to deliver their political, cultural and even socioeconomic thrust whether directly on stage or indirectly through embedded meanings. The indirect approach that these productions follow takes the form of what Kristeva (1986), terms "intertextuality" which she describes as a "mosaic of quotations" as any text is "an absorption and transformation of another" (p.37). The notion that Kristeva develops in order to describe the "dialogic" relationship between texts echoes Eliot's theory in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1982) in which he illustrates that most texts are a reproduction of an already existing text in the literary tradition. He writes: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (Eliot, 1982, p. 37). Due to the development in the field of comparative studies, and the different ways in which literary texts are revisited, different techniques have been developed to describe forms of intertexts and these include adaptation and appropriation. Sanders (2016) makes a clear difference between adaptation and appropriation. Unlike the simple process of "bricolage" developed in an adaptation, appropriation is much more complex since it adopts a sort of a "posture of critique, even [an] assault" (Sanders, 2016, p.4).

Since this article uses the terms adaptation and appropriation interchangeably, a glimpse of Hutcheon's theory of adaptation is required. In her book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Hutcheon defines adaptation as a "palimpsestuous" creation that is related to other works or texts. She maintains that adaptations are somehow independent from the original text, and thus, have their own "aura". For Sanders (2016), an adaptation entails "an act of re-vision" as it "comments" on the primary text.

Shakespeare is perhaps one of the most appropriated writers whose texts trigger the complexity of the human soul. Writers from different parts of the world tend to take him as a first reference in their texts then mark a point of departure by recontextualizing the text to fit the contemporary situation they try to reflect in their reproductions. As Hartley (2018) puts it:

> Shakespeare, it seems, is always with us through the forms in which his works are studied, disseminated, and taught vary constantly, and the ways in which artists respond to his work, in their adaptations, reformulations and other forms of creative engagements are perhaps more dependent on trends and forces in the larger zeitgeist (p. 4).

The above quotation illustrates how relevant Shakespeare is to the contemporary society through the adaptations of his texts by various artists and for multiple ends. However, their revisions are significantly related to the concerns that the historical context imposes on the artists in terms of social, political and cultural beliefs.

This globalized way in which Shakespeare is appropriated has reached different parts of the world. In texts or cinematographic adaptations, Shakespearean tragedies are highly appropriated and this suggests the closeness in the human and social conditions most countries live in. Huang and Rivlin (2014) try to solve the ambivalence surrounding the very idea of ethical appropriation. They state that appropriation cannot be considered unethical for it "carries strong overtones of agency" (Huang & Rivlin, 2014, p.2) to convey political, cultural and ethical "advocacy". They insist, moreover, on the "transformational force" of the appropriation.

The Arab world contributes to these revisions of Shakespearean tragedies in which *Hamlet* becomes a favorite of all Shakespeare's text. As the epigraph at the top of this paper indicates, the Arab Hamlet has different concerns from that of Shakespeare's. Indeed, it appears that the choice of *Hamlet* instead of other tragedies is very significant in the sense that it paves the way for playwrights to comment intelligently about what has been happening in the Arab world, especially after the decolonization process. As Awad and Dubbati (2018) succinctly put it, Arab authors have been frequently "drawing on the psychological depth that is the hallmark of Hamlet" (p.17) to imbue their characters with sophistication as intense as that of Hamlet. In this, Bessami and Abu Amrieh (2022) state that "William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* offers a proper intellectual space for Arab writers to reflect on the generational clash between two different worldviews of the next step to creating a new aura for the Arab world" (p.175). This study attempts to add to the already existing scholarship on the Arabic adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by providing critical and analytical reading of Omran's *A Theatre Company Found a Theatre and Theatred Hamlet* (1984).

Omran (ʿUmran) is a Palestinian Jordanian playwright who was born in 1955 in Halhul and died in 2017. He got his diploma in the Arts of Theatre from Egypt's Art Academy in 1979. He is among the founders of the Jordanian Theatre Festival, London Theatre Festival LIFT, Zurich Festival and Kiev Festival.[1] He was the director of the Al Fawanees Theatre, founded in 1982, that regularly commented on the Palestinian issue even if most critics view it as "politically independent" (Hemke, 2013).

Omran's *A Theatre Company Found A Theatre and Theatered Hamlet* [*Firqa Masrahiya Wajadat Masrahan Fa Masrahat Hamlit*] was performed in 1984. It is a three act play that recreates Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in an artistic frame. Textually, the text differs from that of the Bard in the way the lines are attributed to numbered actors who sometimes portray more than one character of Shakespeare's play. Moreover, Omran adds a new character, Abu Fawanees, who appears occasionally in the play. Omran's play is about a group of actors who have gathered to perform Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The play comments on socio-political concerns as well as the importance of art in creating awareness. By the end of the play, the actors decide to rebel on Shakespeare's script by performing their own version of the reality they live outside the theatre.

Al-Shetawi is among the first few scholars who have explored how Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been critically received by Arab audiences and critics. In "*Hamlet* in Arabic" (1999), Al-Shetawi states that Arab audience came into awareness of Shakespeare's existence through the stage in the nineteenth century via adaptations and translations. Drawing on the interpretation of Mohammed Baqir Twaij, Al-Shetawi argues that *Hamlet* appeals to Arab theatergoers more than other plays due to supernatural elements that relate to Arabic folklore, revenge and lastly madness. He insists that Hamlet represents the struggle of the "divided individual who is torn between his desire to take revenge and the fear that the ghost could be an evil spirit which is tempting his soul to fall into an abyss" (p. 47). Moreover, Al-Shetawi argues that the portrayal of Hamlet changes according to the concerns of the playwrights.

Arab playwrights such as Nabyl Lahlou (1968), Mamduh Adwan (1976), Nader Omran (1984) and Jawad Al-Assadi (1994) are among the first Arab playwrights to have re-written Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to comment on contemporaneous issues in the Arab world. Al-Shetawi, for instance, relates Mamdouh Adwan's adaptation of *Hamlet* to critiquing the role of "Arab intellectuals after the loss of the Six-Day war" (p.50). Similarly, Bedjaoui and Abu Amrieh (2022) argue that "in re-writing Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Adwan offers clearly his Marxist point of view to criticize the Syrian policy of the post-1970s" and "the hypocrisy […] of the Arab world in general" (p.90). Al-Assadi's *Hamlet*, for Litvin (2011), "criticizes Hamlet for passivity; it calls for awareness of what is wrong in our world and proper action 'to set it right'" (p. 212). Unlike other adaptations such as that of Adwan, Lahlou and Al-Assadi, which are still being investigated by critics, Omran's adaptation of *Hamlet* has not received enough critical attention, and therefore, this paper intends to address this critical oversight.

In *Hamlet's Arab Journey*, Litvin (2011) writes that Omran's play has two "twin tyrants: the king and the director" (p.193) while commenting that "political theatre is impotent to accomplish political change" (p.196). She argues, moreover, that Omran's text "is too morally ambiguous to qualify as a *mousetrap*" as Abu Fawanees never provides "political" or "moral guidance" (p.179, emphasis added). In addition, Litvin's reading of the play diverges from the mainstream critical views that regard Omran's play as a "'comedy'" or "'a call for revolution against subjection, submission, oppression and tyranny'" (p. 198) as she sees the play impertinent to politics. Thus, for Litvin, the play is purely artistic aiming at offering change to the entire vision of theatre rather than be concerned with socio-political

[1] "Jordan: The Artist Nader Omran died [Jordanie: L'artiste Nader Omran est décidé]" (2017), *Nessma TV*, https://www.nessma.tv/fr/culture/actu/jordanie-l-artiste-nader-omran-est-decede-5369/13876, January 7th, 2022.

criticism. In her editor's note on the play, Litvin (2015) quotes Omran's opposition to the Rabat Theatre Festival slogan that aims at reviving the "roots" of the Arabic Theatre when he illustrates "The [Fawanees] company wanted to respond to this slogan by taking up a non-Arab play, but from an Arab viewpoint, considering this slogan to be racist and phony" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p. 157). Indeed, Omran's use of a British source to perform at the Rabat Theatre Festival proves that the individual's artistic creation is not bound to using a purely Arabic inspiration as long as the writer is committed to representing his country's reality.

Nasser (2014) argues in her article that Omran's play was written as an answer to Rabat Festival's "slogan 'bring the Arab Theatre to its roots'" (p.295). She writes that similar to Adwan's "mock[ery] of the tradition of Hamlet as an Arab Hero," Omran's purpose behind writing his text was to "present theatre making as an 'autonomous force that evades both the 1960s style allegorizer and censor'" (Nasser ,p. 295). Rubin (1999) writes that Al Fawanees (Lanterns) Group was founded to depict the Jordanian reality back in 1980s as it attempted to produce a theatre that would be "committed to social action and social change"(p.126). In this sense, Omran's adaptation is quite different from other productions as it aims at "search[ing] a new scenographic style utilizing color, light and silence […] while mocking and commenting on the action throughout recognizable local times" (Rubin, 1999, p.126). Omran's renovation of theatre was done to reflect the changes that he wants to see in society.

Nasi (2017) argues that Omran's recreation of the Bard's tragedy was to condemn the "ideological theat[re]" as a representative of "absolute values". Indeed, Omran's aim was to recreate a new category of theatre that would rely on a different form of expression from that of the traditional theatre to speak against the current mainstream issues facing Jordan or the Arab world. Through the character of Hamlet, he was able to create a "postmodern protagonist who looks with irony […] not only at theatrical fiction, but at power itself" (Nasi, 2017, p.13) as a feature that preserves the country and its people's "status quo of privileges". To Alami (2016), the mousetrap is used to show the importance of theatre in creating "change" and the performers' role in remaining "truthful" in the domain of art making without any consideration to "human consequences;" their allegiance is first and for most to art then to individuals.

Unlike Litvin's reading of the play as purely artistic, we believe that Omran's play goes beyond commenting on local affairs and offers a sharp statement about the entire Arab region. The present paper contributes to offering an alternative political reading of Omran's play. As such, Omran's adaptation anticipates the youth-led revolutions of the Arab Spring that started initially by Bouazizi's act of self burning as an act of protest against social marginalization and political exclusion of youths in the MENA region. Therefore, the following section explores the main socio-political issues that have shaped Arab countries in the 1980s with a particular emphasis on Jordan's internal politics.

II. Jordan and the Arab World in the 1980s

Moore (2004) writes in his book that the post independent Arab states noticed an economic boom from 1960s to 1970s. However, the period between 1980s and 1990s was a period of recession as "decline in exogenous revenue and persistent low economic growth rates have strained fiscal systems of induced chronic debt" (p.2). To begin with, due to the crisis of 1973-1974, the Jordanian government chose to restrict the price of wheat that led "farmers" to think only of fulfilling "home consumption" (Moore, 2004). The country also noticed stability due to the lack of parliamentary elections (Moore, 2004). It is noteworthy to state that the first dismissal of parliament was in 1967, followed by two other successive dismissals in 1974 and 1976 (Moore, 2004). King Hussein, however, ordered the creation of the National Consultative Council in 1978 (Moore, 2004). Parliamentary elections, in this sense, were controlled alongside "freedom of choice" (Moore, 2004).

Moreover, the 1980s witnessed a decline in oil prices in the world market which led to the economic crisis of Jordan in the early 1980s (Brynen ,1992). The decline in oil prices eventually affected the country's social stability as the issue of "unemployment" started to pressurize the government (Brynen, 1992). This economic "recession," furthermore, augmented the need for "rentierism" as "domestic taxation raised from 17 percent of state expenditures to a peak of only 24 percent in 1984" (Brynen, 1992, p. 86). Due to the many loans the country made to fulfill its population's needs, it announced international "debt" between 1980-1987 including unannounced "military debt" (Brynen, 1992). Indeed, the country's failing economy affected all aspects of life and this in turn frustrated Jordanians.

To strengthen the importance of democracy and parliament, the return of parliamentary life was announced in 1984 followed by a dismissal of the National Consultative Council. Brynen (1992) illustrates in his article that the reactivation of the parliament was done not only due to "public dissatisfaction and the economic condition," which he regards as secondary causes, but rather the decision to make the parliament function was due to "assert[ing]" Jordan's political stance in regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict" (p. 87). It is noteworthy to point out, however, that the decision to re-launch parliamentary life in Jordan was restricted as it did not fully "entail expansion of civil democratic rights" (Brynen, 1992, p.84). Indeed, political parties were limited and most likely "banned" and the press's "freedom" was "restricted" (Brynen, 1992). The 1980s in Jordan also witnessed protests against Rifai government in which the population "denounced economic recession, inequality and corruption" and "call[ed] for political freedom and participation" (Brynen, 1992, p. 89). The people's call for liberty and freedom of expression was itself a decisive moment in which the theatre has contributed to increasing people's awareness of the socio-political situation. In other words, theatrical writings tried to project the people's reality and raise their consciousness by centering plays on the importance of democracy and liberty in the Arab region.

While emphasizing the importance of the parliament, King Hussein "called for restoration of 'security and public order, the rectification and reprofessionalization of the role of Jordan's professional organizations and a halt to the politization of religion" (Brynen, 1992, p. 91). It appears, therefore, that the protests opened a new channel between the population and its government for the restoration of social, political, economic and cultural life. It is also noteworthy to state that despite the fact that Jordan is situated in a war prone area, the country, thanks to its relative democratic atmosphere, was able to preserve its socio-political stability.

The Arab region experienced many years of turbulence in the 1970s and 1980s. The quest to repel democracy and maintain autocracy in several Arab countries resulted in many massacres that historians have minutely recorded. These include Hama's massacre in Syria in 1982, Lebanon's Civil War from 1975 to 1990 and the Iraq-Iran war between 1980 and 1988. In addition, Egypt witnessed in the late 1970s protests due to the huge increase in prices owing to Sadat's open market policy and the subsequent lifting of government subsidies on basic commodities. The assassination of Sadat in 1981 led to reinforcing the martial law which was slyly exploited by his successor's regime to persecute dissidents and silence opposition political parties. In addition, Al-Qaddafi's iron rule in Libya for more than forty years was marked by continual brutal and violent clampdowns on dissidents and suppressions of uprisings and insurrections.

The socio-political context outlined above is important to understand Omran's re-writing of the Bard's text. As highlighted above, this paper attempts to offer an alternative perspective to Litvin's depoliticized reading of Omran's play and argues that the play does not only speak of the 1980s in Jordan but also offers a statement on the entire Arab region. This article focuses on the representation of youths in Omran's play represented by Ophelia. As the following sections will show, Omran's adaptation is not merely an attempt to comment on the theatre as an art, but it is a real attempt to comment on the socio-political circumstances and conditions that the Arab world witnessed in the 1980s.

III. Youths and Political Allegory in Omran's Play

In his representation of youths in *A Theatre Company Found a Theatre and Theatred Hamlet*, Omran keeps a lot of the features that can be associated with Shakespeare's Ophelia; yet, Omran's Ophelia is different from the Bard's. As a young woman, Ophelia's character appeals to Arab youths in their difficult journey of self-assertion. On the one hand, she is a "child-like" character, gullible and she still feels the need to be protected by her brother Laertes. Even when Hamlet confesses his love to her, she tells him that she is "too young to understand" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p.167). This is reminiscent of Laertes's warning to Ophelia in Shakespeare's play:

Then weigh what loss your honor may sustain / If with too credent ear you list his songs […] / Fear it, Ophelia; fear it, my dear sister, / And keep you in the rear of your affection / Out of the shot and danger of desire (Mowat & Werstine, 2012, 1. 3. ll. 33-39).

Laertes warns his sister from entering Hamlet's game. He assures Ophelia how important it is to keep her honor intact and tells her to be prudent of the dangers of desire. Omran's representation of Ophelia as an innocent soul that seeks salvation in the other world echoes the Bard's representation of Ophelia. After drowning herself, Laertes tells the doctor and the gravedigger: "Lay her i' th' earth, / And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest, / Aminist'ring angel shall my sister be" (Mowat & Werstine, 2012, 5.1. ll. 248-252). In other words, in his adaptation of *Hamlet*, Omran imbues Ophelia with traits of innocence and purity that Shakespeare has bestowed on her. Yet, Ronk (1994) argues that Shakespeare's Ophelia is one of the characters who are certainly hard to read. Indeed, "her iconography is contradictory as she appears both as the goddess of nature and a debased version of the same" (p. 24). Showalter (1985) argues that "the representation of Ophelia changes independently of theories of the meaning of the play or the Prince, for it depends on attitudes towards women and madness" (p. 92). In this sense, Omran's reading of the Bard's text, therefore, entails restoring the political power of Arab youths as active participants of instigating change. Seen from this perspective, Omran's play of 1984 prophesized and predicted Arab Spring uprisings of the 2010s that were led by Arab youths and came as a result of years of socio-political repression and marginalization.

A Theatre Company is a play that comments on, on the one hand, the socio-political life in Arab world in the 1980s and offers, on the other hand, an attack on undemocratic Arab regimes that oppress and manipulate millions of people. Thus, the play can be viewed as a political text that calls on youths not to remain static and be involved in inducing democracy in their countries through activism. Omran describes the atmosphere of theatre as dark having only the "acting area […] white" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p.161). This interplay in the use of colors, white and dark, perhaps indicates the difference between reality and art. For Omran, his rewriting of *Hamlet* brightens the audiences' perspective and enlightens their awareness of their surroundings while foreshadowing their dissatisfaction with their country's current situation. This indeed accentuates the importance of the theatre in raising people's awareness of the socio-political situation.

The color white is also significant as the actors who perform the roles wear white clothes and hold lanterns as an indication that the performance is not only artistic but is rather political. Conroy (1996) writes that white color symbolizes "purity," "innocence," and the transcendence to "spiritual life". She carries on that the white dress reflects "the souls of the Redeemed in Revelation" (p.40). It appears, therefore, that Omran's choice of the white color to be worn by the performers is to reflect the "revelation" of the suffering souls in the society who are suffocated and in need

of art to express their inner thoughts on the stage. Performers, as such, are the epitome of the desired society that the audience attempt to perceive one day.

The chorus vouches individuals to be lost in the mysteriousness of art which is indeed far better than having a lost mind of reality. The allegory Omran presents about Arab leaders and their subjects is exemplified in the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. The chorus sings: "how happy are the sheep/ by [the shepherd] singing mesmerized/ happy to eat, drink, and sleep/ through the howling wolf's nearby" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p. 163). The sheep's embrace of the shepherd's singing might allegorically reflect the subjects' gullible attitude towards their leaders and their unconsciousness of the plans that the shepherd or the leader is planning under the table to deceive them. The sheep are at ease being provided with the necessary means to survive: they eat, drink and sleep without realizing the danger represented by the wolf which is an indication of how their gullibility is being played with by both the shepherd and the wolf.

The chorus carries on singing: "if we search and reflect/ on what happened to the sheep,/ the mind would tell the body/ oh, oh, oh my Lord/ cursed be the sheep" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p. 163). Here, Omran blames the sheep rather than the shepherd for meekly accepting the status quo and not changing the situation. When the sheep protest against "their situation by locking horns," the shepherd holds a dagger and starts smiling as the sheep fail to see "the gleaming knife/ worship even his ugliness/ Dancing as his big stick strikes" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p.164). By using this allegory, Omran refers to the people who are unable to realize that they are being controlled by an iron fist by their leaders. The population is being manipulated to the point where they cannot activate their awareness about the reality of the way they are controlled and being used. This resonates with the mainstream of Arab leaders who turned into dictators and stopped all forms of protests to keep on the top of their countries' political regimes as discussed earlier. Omran's reference to the sheep/ people's admiration of the shepherd's "ugliness" refers to the ugly reality that the sheep fail to perceive about their leaders' corruption. The ugliness of the shepherd, in this sense, may also indicate any leader's political corruption that the sheep either fail to see or simply ignore. The knife held by the shepherd may also refer to the military apparatus some Arab leaders use to maintain their power that "kills," "hits," and "steals".

While Omran, prefers not to refer to politics explicitly, he uses more or less the same analogy of the sheep and the shepherd by hinting at people's "cheer[ing] for Claudius" while the shepherd takes his sheep and disappears from the stage (Carlson & Litvin, 2015). At this level it is perhaps arguable to state that Omran uses the example of the sheep to maintain the play's comedy to preserve the overall tone of the play as happy, colorful and cheerful. Notwithstanding comedy, Omran comments playfully on the overall situation of Arab citizens in their countries who are submissive and controlled by autocratic political regimes.

Omran's play, in addition, comments on Arab governments' manipulation of the judicial system. When Claudius hears of the vice committed in the holy place, he starts investigating the actors and those who try to hide the truth from being exposed. Actor 6 says "Abu Fawaness says that when darkness wears the dress of justice, and when a murderer carries the balm of life, love can only be seen through the lens of vice" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p. 185). Darkness, in this quote, refers to the dark souls of government officials who corrupt the innocent soul of lovers who are being accused of sin. When justice is put in the hands of the dark souls, the innocence of love fades away and is referred to as a simple act of sin committed by the lovers. Omran, thus, comments on how justice is being manipulated by powerful leaders. He illustrates how their dark judgments affect every aspect of an individual's life. In other words, the playwright comments on the danger that results from putting the fate of individuals, thus the nation, in the wrong hands.

IV. Ophelia's Suicide as a Cry for Change

Omran's text emphasizes the importance of finding the real truth not any truth covered by the darkest souls. Here, one may draw on Sanders's (2016) argument on adaptations and appropriations:

Extrapolating a particular storyline or character's trajectory from the original and relocating that to a new context, historical, geographical and/ or cultural. The relationship to the original remains present and relevant but it is as if a grafting has taken place of a segment, or rootstock, of the original text (p.73).

To better illustrate the quote, Sanders insists that one of the important aspects of adaptations and appropriations is recreating / rewriting the first source in a different cultural setting. Despite the fact that Omran's Ophelia commits suicide, she is re-contextualized to represent another reality from that of Shakespeare's. When Gertrude asks Actor 6 to testify and tell the truth of who committed "the act of lust" in the holly place, he refers to Ophelia, the innocent, who was convicted of treason, and thus, condemned to death. Shocked of this accusation, Ophelia commits suicide as she does in Shakespeare's play. According to Bloom (1996), Shakespeare's "Ophelia is too virtuous for this corrupt world which will prostitute her to its ways if she does not retreat into a cloistered religious life" (p.70). In Omran's play, one may view Ophelia's behavior within the sociopolitical, historical and cultural conditions of the 1980s in most Arab countries. In this sense, Ophelia, like millions of Arabs youths, is deprived from defending herself and is victimized by society. Ophelia's voice is simply suppressed as rulers in Arab countries brutally silenced dissident voices and tightened their grip on their thrones.

Omran depicts Ophelia as too innocent to be involved in the political life and unaware of her surroundings. When accused of treason in the holly place, she is not even able to defend herself against the accusation. In this sense, Omran is commenting on the way justice was carried in some Arab countries which were under martial laws. Youths back then

were unable to have a fair position in society through which their voices and concerns were to be heard. Ophelia's suicide indicates that she does not even believe in justice, and therefore, she seeks another form of justice in another world in which her innocence would be proclaimed. Indeed, it appears that Arab youths, just like Ophelia, do not have a medium through which they speak due to the lack of democratic channels and institutions.

In his reading of suicide as a social, cultural and political phenomenon, Durkheim (1952) argues that social "uprisings" minimize the risks of suicide while oppression increases them. Durkheim (1952) thus concludes that "suicide varies inversely with the degree on integration of political society" (p.167). Following Durkheim's argument, one may view Ophelia's suicide as a sign of Arab youths' inability to access their country's "political society" due to continual exclusion and marginalization. Her suicide implies that her voice is suppressed. Ophelia, just like Arab youths, has felt suffocated and she does not have a medium through which she can defend herself and prove her innocence. Due to the fact that nobody wants to hear her story, she commits suicide. For Durkheim (1952), "No living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned by his means In other words, if his needs require more than can be granted […] they will be under continual friction and can only function painfully" (p. 207).

Ophelia's innocence in Shakespeare's tragedy and in Omran's adaptation may indeed indicate her inability to live in the corrupted world that both Shakespeare and Omran dramatize. Ophelia, or youths in this sense, decide to find an alternative reality in order not to "pollute" their innocent souls like those inside the castle. Omran borrows the same lines in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* but attributes them to Polonius rather than Laertes when he says: "an angel returned to Heaven. There is no need for your superstitions on Earth. Let her rest […] and from her fair and unpolluted flesh May violets spring! Farewell, o my beloved daughter" (Carlson & Livin, 2015, p. 195). Siding with his daughter, Polonius starts questioning the way justice is executed by society. Hamlet, meanwhile, accuses him of being the cause of his daughter's death which clearly indicates that Ophelia, as a representative of youths, is not only dismissed socially, politically and culturally, but she is also brutally oppressed by her own family as her father does not adequately defend her in front of Claudius.

Polonius's belated defense of his daughter's honor after her death can be interpreted as Omran's calling for understanding young people's need for freedom and democracy to enable them contribute to their countries' socioeconomic development and progress. For Sanders (2016), most writers appropriate Shakespeare out of "political commitment" (p.67). Omran, in this sense, calls for creating an economic, political and social dialogue between the youths and people in authority to integrate youths in politics, on the one hand, and, on the other, to enlighten the government into other solutions provided by youths; this for Omran is the truth that Arab governments need in order to reach the desired economic boom.

Polonius's anguish for losing his daughter can be seen when he attempts to choke Gertrude who thinks that he is just "tickling" her. At this point, Polonius expresses his grief by telling Gertrude: "everything in you explodes with feeling, except your conscience […] *in the heart of man who has lost his daughter*" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p.199, emphasis added). Thus, one may argue that by committing suicide, Ophelia has awakened her father's conscience and consciousness. This reflects the important role that youths play as whistleblowers in society. In this sense, Ophelia's suicide can be compared to the act of self-immolation by 26-year-old Tunisian fruit and vegetable vendor Mohammed Bouazizi who, in December 2010, set himself on fire and was thence dubbed as the father of the Arab revolution (Herrera & Mayo, 2012). Youths' participation, for Omran, is indeed crucial in understanding truth. For him, there is no truth without an active participation of youths in politics.

In his article "Youth, the 'Arab Spring,' and Social Movements," Anderson (2013) argues that Arab youths have been subjected to a reductive statistical and economically-deterministic lens and have been apprehended primarily "as part of a demographic 'bulge' whose hefty scale, combined with dim employment prospects […] have made it a harbinger of potential instability" (p. 150). Anderson maintains that "scrutiny of prior revolutions and world historical revolutionary upsurges" makes us cautious before rushing to hasty conclusions as major transformations "have seldom unfolded in a unilinear, uncomplicated, or easily predictable fashion" (p. 153). Commenting on the role Arab youths played in the Arab Spring, Anderson argues that "contemporary youth activism in such a fashion illustrates their place in conceiving new modes of collective action and redrawing the bounds of the political imagination in the Arab world" (p. 154). In other words, Bouazizi's self-immolation has surprisingly and unexpectedly instigated a collective action the ramifications of which are still resonating in the Middle East.

In the light of Anderson's analysis of Arab youths' involvement in social and political change in the Middle East, one may regard Omran's depiction of the effect that Ophelia's suicide leaves on other characters such as Polonius and Hamlet as his prescience of future youth-led uprisings and insurrections in the Arab world. For instance, when Polonius tells Gertrude "there is no longer anything beautifying my life" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p.199), he means that the innocence of youth, represented by Ophelia, could have saved everybody's fate including himself. The loss of the innocence of youth; therefore, entails the loss of hope and beauty in life. In this respect, unlike Litvin's reading of Abu Fawanees's character, we argue that Abu Fawanees is indeed Omran's voice in the play. While providing statements here in there, it appears that the affirmative sentences told by Abu Fawanees are the direct messages Omran wants to give under a new character that does not exist in Shakespeare's text.

Abu Fawaness comments on Ophelia's suicide by saying that "if there are great storms, the weak and vulnerable can do nothing but run […] if they can even do that" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p.200). This indicates that when chaos

dominates society, for Omran and Abu Fawanees alike, it is better to withdraw. According to Sanders (2016), "seeing things from marginal or even offstage characters' point of view is a common drive in many adaptations and appropriations" (p.74) which again reminds us of one of postcolonial theory's main tenets of writing back to the centre. Omran's focus on secondary characters stems from his belief that Hamlet is less relevant to the representation of current issues in the Arab world. In this sense, Ophelia's experiences are more telling and of interest than those of Hamlet since he is already a part of the nation's governing elite and enjoys, as one of the actors clearly indicates, the privileges and benefits the ruling class affords itself.

Ophelia, who lives in another world now, is able to converse with Hamlet and reclaim her right. The truth she was not able to reveal while alive, is revealed after her death. She says:

> There are things I would like to say. Why did you all convict me of a sin I did not commit even though you knew of the extreme injustice that occurred? Why don't you make the connections? Isn't it wiser to punish the man who knew of the crime that his wife committed? He did not bother to blame anyone else for it, so as not to accuse the innocent (Carlson & Livin, 2015, p.204)

Indeed, Ophelia's access to the world of the dead not only leads her to find self-esteem and reveal the truth about the sin in the holly place, but she also reveals to Hamlet how his mother, Gertrude, is in fact the murderer of her own husband. Omran implies that maintaining dictators and corrupt rulers leads to criminalize innocent people like Ophelia who took her own life after being deprived of voice to defend herself in a country run by murderers and killers. Ophelia, just like Arab youths, finds herself torn between submitting to the rulers and muting her concerns or revolting and starting the process of change. Ophelia's suicide opens Hamlet's eyes and awakens his conscience and consciousness just as Bouazizi's suicide incites Arab youths, resurrects their dormant hopes of change and freedom, and encourages them to shrug off feelings of fear and intimidations.

In this sense, Ophelia represents the voice of truth, wisdom and youth, in short the voice of revolution. By revealing the truth, she is able to enlighten Hamlet about his mother's betrayal and murdering his beloved father. While her voice fades away and disappears from the stage, Hamlet's father's voice reverberates to declare that Gertrude is a "snake" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015). Ophelia offers Hamlet's father a space to reveal the truth that is not revealed to the people of the kingdom earlier. Hamlet vouches himself to Ophelia who refers to herself simply as a "mirage" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015). She tells Hamlet that he "can't get truth with falsehood. Vanity seeks in vain […] your tragedy has become a comedy" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p. 209). Ophelia is the voice of the future, change and truth. She tells Hamlet that he is not the tragic hero who was immortalized, but his tragedy changed according to the concerns of time. For Sanders (2016), "literary archetypes enact and re-enact the activity of storytelling, and Shakespeare has provided a repository of some of the most familiar stories of Western culture" (p.82).

Ophelia's quest to unveil truth influences Hamlet. Considering that both Ophelia and Hamlet are representatives of youths' values, concerns and ideals, they reveal the truth, and thus, they instigate a revolution led by the youths. The actors' rebellious attitude of not following Shakespeare's text can be interpreted as a revolution made inside the theatre, and thus, it represents Omran's prophecy of the Arab Spring. The actors say "we have faith in what we do. And there's no shame if our faith brings us to a stage of confidence. As for pride, it is better than modesty" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p. 214). That Omran imbues his actors with confidence and pride reflects his belief in the necessity for change to preserve the pride of the youths and the nation at large. Seeking a better life for Omran is fueled by a rebellion the same way the actors rebel against Shakespeare's text.

The relationship between the director and the actors can be read as another allegory of the leader and his subjects. While the director insists that the actors should stick to their lines, they rebel against him and refer to him as somebody who is both "unjust" and "ignorant" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015). The actors want to represent their reality on stage. They do not want the audience to sympathize with Hamlet; rather, they want to reflect the reality of the audience and Arab citizens who endlessly experience financial problems. In other words, the actors draw the audience's attention to the fact that Hamlet is less relevant as a character to the contemporaneous Arab context because he belongs to the ruling class and his sufferings are nothing when compared to those of ordinary people's quotidian struggles and drudgeries. In this manner, Omran's actors draw people's attention to the hard conditions they endure. Actor 5 says that no sympathy can be shown towards Hamlet as he is neither "unemployed" nor is unable "to pay for his home" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p. 214). This statement reflects the hard situation that millions of people endure in Arab countries.

Omran ends his play by a call for a revolution in the Arab world for dark times need to end. Actor 3 insists that ignorance of the socio-political situation kills the entire country. The population must not be as a "herd that [does] not know when it would be sent for slaughter" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p.217). They should, however, be aware of the "darkness" that roams in every "direction." For Omran, humans do not have a "tongue" to eat with only; rather, it is a tool for change and restoring justice. Omran writes: "and we know, as they know, that the tongue is not only good for tasting food. One can also speak with it. The lanterns spoke even as oppression darkened the streets" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p.217). The importance of having a voice for the playwright is the same as the light distributed by the lanterns even in the darkest nights; light always finds its way through darkness.

Omran, moreover, comments on the situation in modern Arab societies whereby most people work so hard to win their bread of the day. *A Theatre Company* highlights the reality of Arab societies in which the "distance between the workers and the eaters widened" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p.218), which is a fact perceived in most Arab countries. The

playwright's implicit call for revolution is mainly to reduce this gap and perhaps restore what can be restored before it is too late. Omran's prophecy of a revolution that topples Arab dictatorship and restores democracy is indeed hinted at in the final line of the play in which Actor 5 says: "Solomon the Wise died leaning on his staff […] while he was supervising the workers and builders […] urging them to work" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p. 218). Actor 5 likens the director to King Solomon and refers to him as a "statue […] See him [director] standing, leaning on his staff –or is it a cane? He will not move until or unless someone grabs his staff" (Carlson & Litvin, 2015, p. 218). In this way, Omran points out how both the director and Solomon rely on the staff as a tool that represents authority. By establishing this analogy, Omran reminds people and rulers alike that power is not eternal. Similar to Solomon's useless powers against the reality of death, Omran warns the rulers that power is doomed to fade away one day. For Actor 5, it is indeed mandatory to take the staff from the ruler to urge him to "move" and this is actually Omran's call for revolution against rulers. The playwright's use of Solomon's story is an allegory that indicates how a ruler when he reaches power never gives it up until his death. In this sense, revolution is crucial to force the ruler to step aside. Omran ends his play by pointing out how vulnerable a ruler is if people defy and challenge him. However, if they decide to remain submissive and weak, they will continue to be ruled by the same tyrant and his offspring.

V. Conclusion

In short, this paper has discussed Omran's re-writing of Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* Omran adapts/appropriates Shakespeare's *Hamlet* because it is a universal text through which he can project his social, political and cultural concerns. Moreover, this paper has examined how Omran adopted some features of Shakespeare's Ophelia while changing others. This difference between the source text and the adaptation /appropriation might be due to the different concerns that are "relocated," as Sanders explains, in Omran's time that did not originally exist in Shakespeare's. Changing the Bard's script, therefore, is to reflect the rougher reality of the MENA region. By taking the theme of youths' struggles against authority as a primary focus, this paper has highlighted how Ophelia's struggle in the play allegorically stands for the Arab youths' battles in the entire MENA region. Omran's text shows the hardships that youths suffer from to restore justice in their countries.

In the light of recent youth-led uprisings in the Arab World, one may argue that Omran's adaptation has prophetically predicted the Arab Spring. Just as Mohammed Bouazizi's act of self-immolation in 2010 ignited protests in Tunisia and elsewhere in the Arab World, in Omran's play, Ophelia's suicide is a catalyst for change and transformation as her death reveals hidden facts and unveils the suppressed truth. Eventually, the actors in Omran's *A Theatre Company Found a Theatre and Theatred Hamlet* revolt against the director, transforming the play into a performance that addresses Arab people's daily concerns and affairs. Thus, in Omran's adaptation of Shakespeare, Ophelia's suicide ironically makes her speak on behalf of millions of Arab youths who have been oppressed and marginalized for decades.

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