
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Shakespeare and Intellectual Castration in the Arab World: Hamlet as a Detached Arab Intellectual in Jawad Al-Assadi's *Forget Hamlet*

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| ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating the crises of the Arab intellectuals under the policies of some Arab regimes. It analyses Jawad Al-Assadi's *Forget Hamlet* as an example of this political oppression that targeted Arab intellectuals in the Ba'athy Iraq, headed by Saddam Hussien. The study discusses the theme of the neutral Arab intellectual who kept a silent position in a time of political crisis. It traces how Hamlet in this adaptation was dramatized as a hapless and inactive intellectual to mock those Iraqi intellectuals, in particular, and Arab intellectuals, in general, who succumbed to power and avoided speaking truth to the oppressive regimes. After analyzing the scope of intellectualism in the play, the study discusses how Hamlet became a signifier to reflect the Arab intellectual crises in a time of political oppression.

| KEYWORDS

Adaptation, Arab Political theatre, crisis, intellectual Castration, Iraq.

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1. Introduction

One of the political aspects that the Arabic *Hamlets* commented on is the massive oppression and the silencing policies enforced by Arab regimes on many Arab intellectuals. Jawad Al-Assadi¹, the author of *Forget Hamlet*, was one of those Iraqi academics, journalists, clergymen, and artists impacted by the undemocratic Ba'athy regime. Al-Assadi had fled Iraq to Bulgaria immediately after the Ba'athists got a grip over Iraq in 1966. He earned a PhD in Theatrical Studies in Bulgaria and kept his 25-year exile working in Eastern Europe, Syria and UAE before settling in Iraq after the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 (Carlson, Litvin and Arab, 2016, 227). The play was written by Al-Assadi in his exile in Europe in 1976. It has bilateral political allegories: Claudius targets "the scholars and wise people" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 271). represents Hussein's oppression of the Iraqi intellectuals, and Hamlet's searching for serenity and spirituality instead of stopping Claudius' "guillotine" that "has crushed people near and far" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 271), is a mockery of the Arab intellectuals who remained neutral and silent against Hussein's brutality.

Al-Assadi wrote the play after he had fled Iraq due to the policies of the Ba'athists in targeting their opponents from the Iraqi intellectuals, religious men, and artists. Many intellectuals were arrested, others were exiled, and many fled the torture to Europe and nearby countries. They were charged with their dissenting ideas that opposed the Ba'athists' socialist beliefs. Some academics were denied access to national universities controlled by the regime, many were prohibited from the political assembly, and some were also prevented from establishing political parties. The Ba'athists also enlisted intellectuals from utopian nationalists, scholars, and university academics to speak for them.

It is not only in Iraq, but targeting intellectuals was a distressful fact in most Arab countries. In Syria, for example, the Ba'ath regime has controlled universities, publication houses, and religious institutions and widely excluded unwanted scholars. Al-Ba'ath University in Syria is an example of how the states funded and subsidized their projects, universities, ministerial agencies, hospitals,

¹ Jawad al-Assadi (in Arabic : جواد الاسدي) is an Iraqi playwright and stage director. He was born in Baghdad in 1947. He received the prestigious Prince Claus Award for Theatre Achievement in 2004 for his theatrical heritage in directing many plays like "The Rape" (1992), "Variations on the Ward" (1993), "The Maids" (1994), and "Women of War" (2000).

and courts where such pro-state intellectuals were usually institutionalized. They succumbed to the power to attain safety and to avoid punishment. In other countries like Saudi Arabia, the state created its supporters from the Wahabists, a type of Islamic religious clerks who produced Fatwas² to prevent any revolution against the Saudi leaders. Wahabists later named the 'Mashaiek Alssultan,' which means the court clerks, were famous for their blind loyalty to the regime. They managed to plant their followers in most Arab countries, and the authorities always favoured them for their supportive stands.

Other Arab scholars adopted a nonaligned position and preferred to stay neutral, but such scholars have constantly been attacked for their non-interference in politics. These intellectuals have always found excuses to defend their isolation. Zeina G Halabi indicates in *The Unmaking of Arab Intellectual* how part of these intellectuals, she calls them the prophetic intellectuals, became neutral after their national dream had failed to be materialized after Nasser's death. For example, the Palestinian poets Mahmoud Darweish and Ibrahim Toukan were among the prophetic intellectuals who recalled the prophecy of nationalism and emancipation in their works before the Oslo Accord between PLO and Israel (1992). However, they detached themselves after the Oslo accord due to their disappointment in the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat. Halabi comments:

No longer [is] the lone voice speaking truth to power. The prophetic intellectual that Toukan portrays carries the burden of his aborted prophecy tragically, stranded in a dystopic present, unable to move to the future. Intertwined and enmeshed, the prophetic past, the dystopic present, and the stalled future are temporalities that operate as a reminder of the intellectual's interrupted journey toward emancipation (Halabi, 2018, Xviii).

While such prophetic intellectuals detached themselves when their national dreams failed to be materialized, other Arab intellectuals chose neutrality as 'epistemic pride,'³ believing that neutrality will grant them the ability to see the truth objectively without the need to be corrupted by politics. Some university academics and journalists adopted professionalism and were regulated by institutionalization. Other religious men and women, like the Sufis, separated themselves behind mysticism and spirituality that can be gained in solitude away from the common issues.⁴ The attempt of those intellectuals to isolate themselves aroused mockery and cynicism by many political activists. Edward Said, who came from an Arabic background, spoke of those disengaged Arab intellectuals and how they forsook their principles and preferred silence:

A more ominous phenomenon is the power and wealth of the oil-rich states. A lot of the sensational Western media attention paid to the Ba'athy regimes of Syria and Iraq has tended to overlook the quieter and insidious pressure to conform exerted by governments who have a lot of money to spend and offer academics, writers, and artists munificent patronage. This pressure was particularly in evidence during the Gulf crisis and war. Before the crisis, Arabism had been supported and defended uncritically by progressive intellectuals who believed themselves to be furthering the cause of Nasserism and the anti-imperialist pro-independence impulse of the Bandung Conference and the nonaligned movement. In the immediate aftermath of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, a dramatic realignment of intellectuals took place. It has been suggested that whole departments of the Egyptian publishing industry, along with many journalists, did an about-face. Former Arab nationalists suddenly began to sing the praises of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, hated enemies of the past, new friends and patrons now (Said, 1996, 115-116).

The fact of targeting Arab intellectuals in the Arab World by different state apparatuses, as Said explains, restricted the intellectual life and limited political reform. The intellectual castration is emulated in cultural means like poetry, music, and theatre that shaped resistive intellectual methods. Dramas like Jawad Al-Assadi's *Forget Hamlet* are utilized to speak up against that castration that occurred in Iraq under Saddam Hussien's regime. It simulates a constant conflict between a domineering power assumed by Claudius, who targets the wisest people in the country, and an intellectual's inclination to succumb to this power represented by the apathetic Hamlet. The play is a one-act fifteen-scene Arabic rewriting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It was first staged in Cairo, 1994, under the title *Ophelia's Window* that signifies the window from which Ophelia has seen the murder committed by Claudius and Gertrude against the king. It was retitled for publication in 2000 as *Forget Hamlet* by Al-Assadi to create dramatic irony, asking the audience to forget the hero Hamlet and remember the hapless one at the same time. The play was translated into English by

² Fatwas are religious laws, produced by high religious institutions, and decide for Muslims what is allowed or prohibited in their lives.

³ The term epistemic pride is coined by Dick Pels in his book *The Intellectual as Stranger*. The term signifies a state of intellectualism when the intellectual "have identified themselves, as 'displaced persons', distanced and dissident *vis-à-vis* the broader society and its centres of political and economic decision making. Such outsidership, while breeding resentment and anxiety, has also been a source of considerable epistemic pride, in so far as intellectuals have often presumed the existence of a structural relationship between their generic distanciation and their chances of attaining a broader, less distorted, more objective or just view of the social world." In (Pels, 2013, x).

⁴ Sufis, from the word 'soof' means 'wool' in Arabic, refer to those Islamic clergy men used to wear cheap wool out of asceticism. It is an Islamic mystical movement appeared almost in the seventh century and spread in all the Arab World. Sufis are known of their different *Tariqas*, means religious baths, to attain more closeness to God. They are also known of their non-interference in social and political issues. The estimated number for Sufis is fifteen million in Egypt alone.

Margret Litvin in 2006 for a stage reading at the world Shakespeare Congress held in Brisbane, Australia. It was then workshopped by the New York Theatre Workshop at Vassar College (Carlson, Litvin and Arab, 2016, 227). It was also excerpted in the Norton Critical Edition of *Hamlet*, 2010.

The play begins as Claudius and Gertrude execute the old Hamlet while he is sleeping at night. Claudius, then, enters the stage dragging one of the servants and accusing him of killing the king. Ophelia rejects Claudius' false story and informs Hamlet that the servant is innocent. She has seen Gertrude and Claudius execute the king from her window that night. Hamlet indifferently discarded Ophelia's story, unconvinced that his mother and uncle could be the murderers. He gradually becomes autistic, searching for serenity by locking himself in his chamber reading 'theologies.' Horatio informs him that he has seen a ghost that resembles his father, but he carelessly accuses Horatio of forging that to ruin his spiritual peace. In the meantime, Claudius becomes excruciatingly a butcher, executing in broad daylight his opponents and targeting in a heartbeat the wisest men in Denmark. His "guillotine" tirelessly is "going around the clock, day and night" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 246), as one of the gravediggers describes. Hamlet's disengagement compels other characters to stand firm against Claudius's bloody actions. For example, on the coronation day, Laertes confronts Claudius, telling him: "We are ready for blood, O master of Denmark" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 244).

Claudius is annoyed by Laertes' fortitude, and he gives the order to send Laertes to a 'sanatorium.' Ophelia asks Hamlet to save Laertes, but Hamlet pretends that he is ignorant of Laertes's imprisonment. She angrily leaves him after scolding him, saying: "Get yourself to a monastery" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 255). She goes and asks Claudius to release her brother, but Claudius tries to seduce her, demanding her to spend "a nice time together" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 261) if she likes him to free her brother. Ophelia rejects, warning Claudius that she will inform Gertrude about that. When Gertrude learns about Claudius's inclination to seduce Ophelia, she confronts him, telling him how she can no longer endure his crimes. She also announces to him her intention to confess her crime and leave the court with her son. Claudius quickly issues an order for two soldiers to kill Hamlet before the latter knows about his crime. They sneak to Hamlet's room, finding him alone, relaxing in his bathtub. They stab him to death without any resistance from him. Ophelia and Gertrude enter to see Hamlet's body. They run to inform the palace about the crime. In the end, Laertes, who managed to escape the sanatorium, appears to discover Hamlet's death. He has a fencing match with Claudius and finally kills him. Laertes sits on the throne, declaring himself the new king of Denmark.

The play draws many verbal echoes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but most of Hamlet's speeches are ascribed to other characters who refilled the spaces vacated by the inactive Hamlet. For instance, Ophelia turns the nunnery scene on Hamlet, saying: "Get yourself to a monastery; that would be more merciful. There you can focus your body and your mind on the pressing theological questions" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 255). Laertes replaces Hamlet in the play. He is the one who is charged with madness, and he is the one who kills Claudius at the end. Al-Assadi also changed much of Shakespeare's plot by omitting the ghost scene, all the scenes about Fortinbras, the play within the play, and the fencing match that occurred between Laertes and Claudius instead of Hamlet and Laertes. Hamlet is presented as a bookish intellectual who quits his responsibility out of fear in the play. He pretends that his solitude is a result of his wish to avoid the corruption of power. Power, as he describes, is "an eternal curse, a wild animal that opens its mouth greedily to positions of rank and blinding lights," and "a spiritual person has no business with it" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 264). By doing these alterations, Al-Assadi wanted to shift the focus from Hamletism, where the prince's intellectual abilities cause his delay in acting his revenge, to the prince's intellectual dilemma caused by his desires to have a peaceful life. In his preface to the play, Al-Assadi declares his purpose behind this alteration:

I wanted in my dramatic text, *Forget Hamlet*, to pull the curtain from some characters suffering the edge of madness and to open the door of the text to their desires and their rancour, postponed in the face of Claudius, the state barbarian who swallowed up both his brother and sister-in-law at once to send the former to the gravediggers and the latter to his own bed and his boorish unmanly haste...To take issue with texts, whether through writing or direction, pulls them from their places and times and puts them into a time and place that respond to the intellectual and political changes that have occurred, which brings texts into contact with contemporary life (Carlson, Litvin and Arab, 2016, 223).

Al-Assadi also announces that Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine* influenced him while he was living in Europe. He says in his preface: "Heiner Müller transformed *Hamlet* into *Die Hamletmaschine*, and all the characters played out with unparalleled violence [sic] Müller's vicious anger and hatred toward those who, lost in the kingdom of the political priesthood, invented justifications for collusion and appeasement with the enemy (i.e., Power)" (Carlson, Litvin and Arab, 2016, 223). Müller announces his hatred for the German priests and intellectuals who chose a neutral position in the Nazi occupation of Europe. He dramatizes Hamlet as a self-lamenting intellectual: "I stood at the shore and talked with the surf BLA BLA, the ruins of Europe in back of me" (Mueller, 2001, 1). Also, people became no more interested in theatres that do not discuss their political issues as Hamlet indicates: "I play no role anymore...behind me, the scenery is being taken down [by] people who are not interested in my drama" (Mueller, 2001, 5).

Al-Assadi's Hamlet is also a fruitless intellectual in the play. He locked himself in his room studying theologies. He announces to Ophelia that "he'll enrol in the seminary to be a monk" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 266). In scene two, the news came about the death of King Hamlet. Claudius accused one of the servants of killing him, saying: "Lowlife! Lowlife! Lowlife! Who bribed you to kill the king?" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 237) Ophelia informs Hamlet that she has seen Gertrude and Claudius killing the king from her window the night of his father's death: "I saw the slaughter with my own eyes, Hamlet" (Al-Assadi, 2016), but Hamlet responds indifferently to that news. Ophelia is shocked that Hamlet does not believe her story and that he becomes apathetic to the murder of his father.

In the meantime, everyone celebrates Claudius's coronation and his marriage to Gertrude. Claudius makes a horrifying speech in which he threatens that he will not tolerate "the rot and permissiveness that crept in with my good, tender brother" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 243). He will make Denmark "protected by the guillotine from any [sic] who would tell lies or go fishing in dirty waters" (Al-Assadi, 2016). Laertes, who is annoyed by Hamlet's silence, decides to confront Claudius, saying: "We attend your celebration and your coronation only to bear witness to your guillotine, which you show us very early! We have become your food! The meals for your table!" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 244) Polonius begs Claudius to forgive Laertes as the latter "has been in the middle of a terrible nervous breakdown for some time now" (Al-Assadi, 2016). Claudius orders that Laertes might be mad, and he should be sent to a 'sanatorium' to receive medication. Ophelia tells Hamlet, who is hiding and reading in his room, about Laertes's punishment. Hamlet pretends that he did not hear about Laertes's punishment:

OPHELIA: Hamlet—Laertes is in danger!

HAMLET (*calmly and coldly*): Why is Laertes in danger?

OPHELIA: Don't you know why?

HAMLET: Where is he now?

OPHELIA: In heaven, building a kingdom of pain.

HAMLET: Are you ill? Exhausted? You should see a doctor! (Al-Assadi, 2016, 254)

Ophelia is enraged by Hamlet's cold reaction, and she scolded him, saying: "You've disappointed me...You're just sick, just a dumb kid. That's how I see you now" (Al-Assadi, 2016). She also asks him: Get yourself to a monastery; that would be more merciful. There you can focus your body and your mind on the pressing theological questions. There you can have more peace and quiet to ask and re-ask your question, "to be or not to be" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 255).

Ophelia tells Polonius that she will not continue in their plan to marry Hamlet as she is no more interested in him: "He's the one giving himself up. My soul doesn't want him anymore" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 253). His indifference to the murder of his father and the imprisonment of his friend Laertes is what compels her to abandon him: "He turns his back on the murderer and keeps contemplating and philosophizing" (Al-Assadi, 2016). Polonius defends Hamlet, telling Ophelia that he becomes a wise man, unlike the reckless Laertes who will put Polonius and Ophelia in danger.

When Horatio informs Hamlet that he saw a ghost that resembles his father's figure, "I swear I saw him!" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 243) Hamlet charges Horatio of running his spiritual solitude with nonsense: "Don't ruin my peace with your nonsense" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 247). Horatio then asks Hamlet to do something against Claudius, who became like a "wild buffalo" killing everyone in Denmark, but Hamlet reached a state of indifference to all that is happening in the country: "I do not care about anything anymore. That's how I've trained my body and mind to be" (Al-Assadi, 2016). Horatio tries to awaken him, but Hamlet refuses to act:

HORATIO: I've never seen anything so horrible in my life. Claudius turned into a wild buffalo, parting the sea and coming toward us with a sword in his hand.

HAMLET: I'm going back to the palace. It's my bedtime.

HORATIO: You act as though Claudius hadn't killed your father.

HAMLET: He killed my father, or he didn't kill him—it's all the same to me.

HORATIO: You're making me angry.

HAMLET: I don't care about anything anymore. That's how I've trained my body and mind to be.

HORATIO: You don't care about anything—and here, your uncle has grabbed the crown away from your father just like a child grabs a doll away from his brother.

HAMLET: This is the play of brothers. An eternal play that will never cease.

HORATIO: A bloody king has mounted the throne of the just king.

HAMLET: Who said my father was just? And who can tell if Claudius is really bloody? This killing doesn't prove that the new king is bloody (Al-Assadi, 2016, 247).

Every time Horatio or Ophelia tries to push Hamlet to leave his books and do something against Claudius, Hamlet keeps inventing excuses to justify his voluntary state of disengagement. One of his excuses is that he does not want to be corrupted by politics as

he tells Horatio: Power is an eternal curse, a wild animal that opens its mouth greedily to positions of rank and blinding lights, and overwhelms and masters people and then turns them into obedient sheep of the king! This is the ABC of the world, and a spiritual person has no business with it, I say, Horatio, my bosom friend, because I no longer have any desires, or any appetites, or demands (Al-Assadi, 2016, 264).

Hamlet pretends that power will not corrupt him, "I haven't been swayed by its pull. Nor by its treasures" (Al-Assadi, 2016). Hamlet does not believe in the significance of revenge, for revenge breeds nothing but hearted: "If I killed Claudius and spilt his blood and sat on the throne myself, what would happen? Would the world rise to a life without violence, in certain justice?" (Al-Assadi, 2016). When his mother asks him to explain if his silence might hide any dangerous plan, he confesses that he knows about her guilt, but his silence comes because he does not want to be dragged into filthiness:

Mother, since you have taken over this kingdom. Since my father was slaughtered, I have not wanted to provoke you because I don't want to be dragged into your filthiness. I am silence itself! I have become the very soul of silence. I do not wish to avenge anyone or grieve for anyone. Please, do not play these banal and faded performances upon my pain (Al-Assadi, 2016, 276).

Hamlet also tells Horatio that he has found the peace and serenity he was looking for, and he will not forsake that peace in seeking revenge. Horatio tries to remind him of his old days, "Where are your wild cries, where is your madness?" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 264) He responds that he drains his anger in prayer, "I emptied my guts in prayer" (Al-Assadi, 2016). He also tells Horatio that he became a pessimistic person who does not see any significance in this life since "all of us will die" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 265). Even his love for Ophelia was demolished because he started seeing her as a "body made of plaster. A mummy-woman [sic] just looking for some male to drag her to bed and play with her breasts, like two moons" (Al-Assadi, 2016) He is also aware of the changes that occurred to him when he tells Horatio that he is no more willing to live like before:

There were two Hamlets living in one body: one vicious, pledged to the dagger, dreaming of salvation and killing Claudius and revenge; the other, a Hamlet disillusioned and full of anxiety. There was a clash and a struggle between the two Hamlets, and the winner was the disillusioned Hamlet! The resigned Hamlet! (Al-Assadi, 2016, 264)

However, Hamlet's excuses in defending his voluntary disengagement do not deceive his friends who discovered his fear of Claudius earlier. Laertes, for instance, describes him as 'a rat,' saying: "Hamlet responds to his father's murder with "to be or not to be." Be, just for once be, you rat!" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 242) Ophelia calls him "presumptuous! What a catastrophe for Denmark" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 255). It is not only his friends who recognized his weakness but even his enemies. When Gertrude tells Claudius that Hamlet's silence does not mean acquiescence to what is happening, and he might be planning something dangerous for both of them, Claudius reassures her that Hamlet has changed and become wiser. He does not shape any danger:

GERTRUDE: I know my son well. Silence doesn't always mean acquiescence. Maybe he's planning something.

CLAUDIUS: Yesterday I invited him to eat at my table. He sat beside me like an obedient boy. His silence made me nervous. He's started to look as diffident as a wax statue.

GERTRUDE: What was he doing?

CLAUDIUS: Reading as though chewing the page mouthful by mouthful.

GERTRUDE: He didn't drop any hints?

CLAUDIUS: He didn't even eat or drink! He was immersed in his reading! And so absent-minded! Sometimes he would talk to himself and move his hands in the air. He'd make gestures I didn't understand.

GERTRUDE: I know Hamlet well. He's preparing himself for some explosion.

CLAUDIUS: I don't think so. He's wiser than Laertes, that hothead who destroyed himself (Al-Assadi, 2016, 250).

Claudius understands how power will make him "the eternal man" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 272), as he tells Gertrude. He is a man of action and ready to hang and kill to preserve his throne. He explains to Gertrude that the throne is everything for him: "When the throne dies, then dies Claudius! And since the chair is still here, so its Claudius" (Al-Assadi, 2016). He threatens the Danish on the coronation day, and he has "already chopped off 20 heads since he took the crown!" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 246) as one of the gravediggers who is tired by digging graves comments. Claudius carelessly decides to send Laertes to the sanatorium, seduces Ophelia, and kills Hamlet in the end, all that for the sake of power. Not only that, but he targets the intellectuals and artists in Denmark, intentionally killing "the scholars and wise people, women and men" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 271). Gertrude decides to confront Claudius' bloodbath in the country, telling him: "You've turned life into a big puddle of blood" (Al-Assadi, 2016). Claudius explains that his policy is "to wipe out anyone who are [sic] plotting against [him]" (Al-Assadi, 2016), and the intellectuals are the most dangerous ones.

Hamlet keeps a blind eye on all of that. Even the time an actor, who used to work with Hamlet, suggested doing a play about the jailing and the poisoning of 'Socrates' as an indirect criticism of Claudius's aggression against the Danish scholars, Hamlet did not prove that play after he heard the idea:

HAMLET: Can you recite to me a piece of what you're working on?

PLAYER: Of course, my lord. I'll perform for you the last thing I've written.

HORATIO begins to play the flute.

PLAYER: I was Socrates' jailer and the guardian of the community. Before that, I was a groom for the horses and a blacksmith making swords for the wars. Every day the carriage with its shabby horses used to take me to the town square where the guillotine stood, solid and high. We would wash the guillotine at dawn to remove the scent of blood. Especially the blade, which took off the heads of many of the best young people of the land. More than once, I knelt at the feet of the saints and begged forgiveness for my sins. One day something unexpected happened. The head of the prison asked me to serve as a jailer for Socrates! I was happy, for I admired Socrates. Why? Because Socrates was Athens, and Athens was Socrates. And indeed I became Socrates' jailer: I watched him, and heard him, and loved him. I gave him food and drink, and I carried his letters to his friends in Athens and brought many letters to him. One night, suddenly, out of nowhere, the head of the prison ordered me to pour poison into Socrates' cup and make him drink it. I said: Me, kill Socrates with my own hands! Kill the most precious thing in Athens with my own hands? They tore my body with whips; they humiliated me until I agreed. I said Alright! Give me the cup! And indeed, I took the cup filled with poison. Socrates was asleep at that moment, sleeping like a huge angel on the burnt-out earth. At that decisive moment, I decided to drink the poison. And indeed, I poured everything in the cup down my throat, and I was victorious. I died, and that death was the most beautiful and radiant moment of my whole life (Al-Assadi, 2016, 236).

Hamlet's fear of speaking the truth to power reached his theatrical interest. He is not interested in doing political theatre anymore, and he rejects the actor's idea without mentioning the reason. All that is for the sake of safety and the lure of peace he is moralizing about. His words about how disengagement allows him to see truth objectively as a spiritual person the time he informs Horatio that "power hasn't swept me away" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 264) is only an excuse to justify his inaction. Nevertheless, Hamlet's betting on peaceful life does not rescue him from death in the end. Claudius thought that murdering the bookish Hamlet would be more safeguard for his throne, especially when Gertrude announces that she will take her son and leave the palace after confessing her crime. She could not tolerate Claudius's homicides anymore: "I'll go to church and confess to the priest. I'll tell him that I've committed terrible sins and wrongs" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 263). Claudius immediately issues an order for two soldiers to stab Hamlet to death in his room:

CLAUDIUS: Tonight, you must slaughter Hamlet. Your thanks are ready. He will be in his room after midnight—that's 30 minutes from now. Change into other clothes, not the ones you are wearing. Put masks over your faces.

SOLDIER 1: I'll stab him in the neck.

SOLDIER 2: No, in the side.

CLAUDIUS: Quickly! (Al-Assadi, 2016, 274)

Gertrud runs to tell Hamlet about Claudius's plan to kill him, and if he does not plan to kill Claudius, he should leave the palace to rescue himself. Horatio also warns Hamlet that it is better for him to "go away quickly! All this excitement doesn't bode well. Claudius is sowing fear and horror among the people" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 275). Hamlet insisted that he would not run and leave the palace even if he is going to die:

HORATIO: Have you noticed how empty the streets seem and how muddy—as though the people had swallowed themselves and gone to sleep. You'll only see soldiers out there. It's a country of soldiers. We have to get away!

HAMLET: If you want to escape with your head, this is your last chance. Go, my friend!

HORATIO: And leave you?

HAMLET: I will stay here, but I will be with you as well. I give you this book. It will be your friend. You'll smell my scent on every page. Go, quickly! (Al-Assadi, 2016)

The two soldiers find Hamlet relaxing and reading in his bathtub. They stab him to death without any resistance. Gertrude and Ophelia find Hamlet's body covered with blood. They knew that Claudius had killed him. Laertes appears suddenly carrying a sword after he manages to escape the sanatorium. He has a fencing match with Claudius and kills him. The play ends with Laertes sitting silently on the throne.

Al-Assadi's Hamlet is best described as a paralyzed intellectual. He absorbs knowledge theoretically and detaches himself from politics and power since, as he believes, "a spiritual person has no business with it" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 264). He is an intellectual but

without an intellectual role. He is "a rat, good for nothing but sophistry" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 242), "chewing the page mouthful by mouthful" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 250), and always philosophizes and moralizes. What makes it even worse is his self-awareness of his paralysis when he describes himself: "the spiritually pious Hamlet, the rat with his books and poems and dedication to stillness" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 264), or when the gravediggers find one of his notebooks after his death in which Hamlet seems to despise his silence by writing:

What a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in fiction, in a dream of passion,
...
Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing.
Am I a coward? Who,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
A scullion! (Al-Assadi, 2016, 281)

Hamlet's intellectual stillness became significant for the paralyzed Arab intellectuals who had chosen a non-interference position in politics at that time. Al-Assadi creates a mocking image of the apathetic Hamlet to ridicule those neutral intellectuals who lock themselves in their ivory tower and start moralizing about life. They forsake their political and social responsibility for the sake of safety and professionalism. Hamlet's previous lines might also be read as a self-criticism by Al-Assadi, who preferred to flee Iraq instead of facing Hussein's atrocity. He is aware that the significance of the intellectual always comes out in political turmoil when people become in need of one to speak for them. The intellectual should speak truth to power even at the risk of being ostracised or imprisoned. His/her role, as Edward Said declares, is "to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations" (Said, 1996, 11), Foucault once said: "The intellectuals speak the truth to those who had yet to see it, in the name of those who were forbidden to speak the truth" (Foucault and Deleuze, 2021, 207). Still, not all intellectuals have in society the role of the intellectual. Antonio Gramsci states that "all men are intellectuals... but not all men have in society the function of the intellectual" (The Routledge Guidebook to Gramsci's Prison Notebooks, 2015, 73). This function materializes when the intellectual speaks truth to power, but this function is what Hamlet ignores.

Similarly, some Arab scholars succumbed to the lure of money and position. Others compromised to escape the state's surveillance. Hamlet's silence is part of the compromise and obedience he shows. He pretends that he is a spiritual person, but his fear of Claudius forces him to isolate himself. His fear is uncovered and felt by everyone in the court as one of the palace Guards comments:

GUARD 2: Here's Hamlet! My God, he's changed.
GUARD 1: He looks all skinny and pale.
GUARD 2: Maybe from fear. He's got to be afraid for his head right now.
GUARD 1: He doesn't act like a prince anymore. He's fading away. He must be suffering (Al-Assadi, 2016, 246).

The image of Claudius targeting "the scholars and wise people" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 271) in the play paralleled the Ba'athists Saddam Hussein regime, which employed many strategies to silence his opponents. Sennar Hassan observed how the Iraqi government targeted those intellectuals to market their ideology for the public:

In most totalitarian countries in the Middle East, especially Iraq, culture and literary activities cannot be understood separately from politics. In practice, the state uses culture and intellectuals to market its ideology and legitimize its authority, and many intellectuals are associated with the state, either outside the ideology of persuasion or fear of power. (Hassan, 2019)

The ability of Arab regimes to gather around them many utopian nationalists and institutionalize academics was accurate. The task of such intellectuals was to legitimize the brutality and defend the state's vast cruelty and savageness against civilians under national ideas. They always created enemies for people and always charged opponents with holding destructive agendas against their national ideals. Many of them got financial and non-financial rewards for their blind support. Many clergypersons were instrumentalized to silence people, especially the Wahabists who flourished in Saudi Arabia for their pro-state Fatwas. One of their

frequently quoted sayings is, "You listen and obey the leader even if he strikes your back and takes your money."⁵ Such Fatwa aimed to restrict people and mark any revolution against the leader as a satanic and eccentric practice that deserves God's punishment. It is also essential that the regimes have used Wahabists to restrict other religious factions like the Muslim Brotherhood Party, who does not see any problem overthrowing the corrupted leader. The Wahabists issued Fatwa that considers Muslim Brotherhood Party as a terrorist organization later. As a result of that, many clergymen from Muslim Brotherhood Party have been arrested. The Egyptian Al-Qaradawi, one of the party's leaders, was exiled from Egypt for his revolutionary thoughts against Hussny Mubarak in Egypt in 2001.

Still, few intellectuals raised their voices against the regimes' atrocity, but they were jailed or exiled like Al-Qaradawi. For example, the Saudi religious man, Suleiman Aloudeh, has always shaped a threat for the Saudi leadership under King Abdullah and his successive king Suleiman. His anti-government stands led him to be jailed several times, and in the last few years, he was accused of youth misleading and deception. The Jordanian civil engineer and political activist Layth Shbeelat has been dragged and hit many times by the state mercenaries for his speeches about the palace corruption in the time of King Hussien. The Egyptian Abdel Mounem About Alfouttoh was jailed many times for confronting Sadat's agreement with Israel. The Egyptian University professor, Mohammad Algazaly, denied access to Cario university after his frequent annoying speeches against Hussny Mubark policies in 1980. These are just a few examples of many intellectuals who suffered for speaking the truth.

All the characters suffer because of Hamlet's aloofness and Claudius's despotism in the play. When they discover Hamlet's indifference, they decide to act instead of him. Laertes gets angry by Hamlet's inaction, and he scolds his silence by calling him 'a rat', saying, "Be, just for once be, you rat!" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 242). Ophelia also decides to rescue her brother after both Hamlet and Polonius reject to help Laertes. She goes to Claudius, telling him that she would inform all characters about the crime she has seen from her window if Claudius does not release her brother. Even Gertrude, in the end, decides to confess her crime. She scolds her son inaction: "Have you lost the power of speech? Or is it weakness?" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 268).

The decision made by Laertes, Ophelia, Horatio, and even Gertrude to stop Claudius' destruction of their country came out of Hamlet's apathy. This is an example of how the public is ready to discard any intellectual who quits his role. Foucault once said that the public does not need one to deliver knowledge to them in the time of political crises:

In the most recent upheaval, the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he, and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves...Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of the power-the idea of their responsibility for "consciousness" and discourse forms part of the system. The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself "somewhat ahead and to the side" in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge," "truth," "consciousness," and "discourse" (Foucault and Deleuze, 2021, 207).

Claudius's power objectifies Hamlet. His silence makes him an agent of the system imposed by Claudius, and his friends abandon him like most Arabs who left their paralyzed intellectuals. Hamlet lost Ophelia's love, Horatio's respect, and his mother's sympathy. Even Hamlet loses his self-respect when he describes himself in the notebook found by the gravedigger as "What a rogue and peasant slave am I!" (Al-Assadi, 2016, 281).

Al-Assadi's Hamlet is different from Shakespeare's intellectual prince. The attempt to interpret *Hamlet* as an intellectual tragedy can be dated back to the eighteenth century when critics like Coleridge tried to fathom Hamlet's inner struggle with his consciousness. In 'Lectures on Hamlet' (1818), Coleridge comments on the intellectual Hamlet as: "... we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it" (Kinney, 2001, 30). Hamlet is undeniably intellectual, a student from the University of Wittenberg where he was educated to carry a skull and mediate, and learned that "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (Shakespeare, II.II. 259). He raises philosophical, political, moral, and spiritual questions that have always intrigued humanity. However, Hamlet's intellect and overthinking are mistakenly seen as a hindrance to his action by many critics like William Hazlitt, who believed that the prince's "passion for thinking [more than] to act" is the cause of his delay in taking revenge (Alexander, 2001, 81).

If Hamlet procrastinates, he does that because he learned to take action upon a solid background, for he declares to his mother, "I know not seems." (Shakespeare, II.II. 74). Unlikely, in Al-Assadi's play, Hamlet intellectualism becomes a burden that stops him from taking revenge and rescuing the wise men and women that Claudius is targeting with his scaffold. It is not only Al-Assadi

⁵ This saying is attributed to Prophet Mohammad before 1440 years. It always incites hot arguments between people in the Arab world. My translation from The Arabic text: *تسمع وتطيع للأمر وإن ضرب ظهرك وأخذ مالك فاسمع وأطع.*

who uses Hamlet to reflect on the silence of the intellectuals amid political crises, but Muller also did that when he ridiculed the silence of the intellectuals against the Nazis' war crimes. Muller's Hamlet regrets his silence when he says, "I stood at the shore and talked with the surf BLA BLA, the ruins of Europe in back of me" (Mueller, 2001, 1). This is almost similar to Hamlet's regression here. In other adaptations like Charles Marowitz's version of *Hamlet*, staged first in Berlin in 1965 and filmed for television in 1969 in a condensed version by the BBC, Hamlet is a 'paralyzed intellectual' whose stream of consciousness became a nightmare for him. Marowitz comments on his work by saying, "I despise Hamlet. / He is a slob. / A talker, an analyzer, a rationalizer. / Like the parlor liberal of paralyzed intellectual, he can describe every face to a problem, yet never pull his finger out" (White, 2017, 122). Similarly, Hamlet is absorbed with theories and moralization, but he is entirely a 'talker' in Marowitz's descriptive words. This compels other characters to despise him and forget him.

2. Conclusion

Al-Assad's play has a twofold political significance. It reflects on the crises of the intellectuals made by the oppressive regimes. It also comments on the passive role of some Arab academics, artists, religious men, journalists who preferred silence and compromise. Hamlet's cynical end, searching for safety, does not arise pity and fear, but his death arises mockery instead. He becomes a symbol for all the academics, Sufis and nationalists who avoided their responsibility for the sake of safety. Al-Assadi's message is to forget those indifferent intellectuals. This is why he has chosen the title *Forget Hamlet* for his play.

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