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Decentering the Bard: The Localization of *King Lear* in Egyptian TV Drama *Dahsha*

Abstract: *Dahsha* [Bewilderment] is an Egyptian TV series written by scriptwriter Abdelrahim Kamal and adapted from Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The TV drama locates Al Basel Hamad Al Basha, Lear's counterpart, in Upper Egypt and follows a localized version of the king's tragedy starting from the division of his lands between his two wicked daughters and the disinheritance of his sincere daughter till his downfall. This study examines the relationship between *Dahsha* and *King Lear* and investigates the position of the Bard when contextualized in other cultures, revisited in other locales, and retold in other languages. It raises many questions about Shakespeare's proximity to the transcultural/ transnational adaptations of his plays. Does Shakespeare's discourse limit the interpretation of the adapted works or does it promote intercultural conversations between the varying worldviews? Where is the Bard positioned when contextualized in other cultures, revisited in other locales, and retold in other languages? Does he stand in the center or at the margin? The study attempts to answer these questions and to read the Egyptian localization of *King Lear* as an independent work that transposes Shakespeare from a central dominant element into a periphery that remains visible in the background of the Upper Egyptian drama.

Keywords: *King Lear*, The Arab Shakespeare, Adaptation, Localization, *Dahsha*, Local Shakespeare, Global Shakespeare.

Introduction

In today's globalized world, Shakespeare could travel to global destinations that he had never imagined he would one day reach. Shakespeare's plays have been produced in every continent and been translated to most of the world languages. The plays have been adapted to different media, transplanted into different cultures and recreated in many revisionary works. New versions of Shakespeare have emerged: the American Shakespeare, the Russian Shakespeare, the Japanese Shakespeare, the Arab Shakespeare, etc. This global dissemination of the Bard raises many questions about his proximity to these transcultural/

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transnational recreations. Does Shakespeare's discourse limit the interpretation of the adapted works or does it promote intercultural conversations and encounters between the varying worldviews? Where is the Bard positioned when contextualized in other cultures, revisited in other locales, and retold in other languages? Does he stand in the center or at the margin? This study attempts to answer these questions through the analysis of the localization of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in the Egyptian TV drama *Dahsha* by scriptwriter Abdelrahim Kamal. *Dahsha* locates King Lear's counterpart, Al Basel Hamad Al Basha, in an Upper Egyptian environment and translates the King's tragedy to an Upper Egyptian locale to tackle themes of revenge, authority, chaos and political transition in Egypt. The study endeavors to examine the Egyptian localization of *King Lear* as an independent work that transposes Shakespeare from a dominant element into a periphery that remains visible in the background of the Upper Egyptian drama. It is an attempt to fill a gap in the Arab Shakespeare studies through locating Arabic adaptations of the Bard into a global phenomenon of cross-cultural and cross-media reproduction of his plays.

The Arab Shakespeare: Intercultural Encounters

The adaptation of Shakespeare, the travel of his plays to other countries and the transmission of his theatre to other literary genres and media started as early as the seventeenth century. The re-opening of theatres in England after the end of the Commonwealth period witnessed a new-born interest in Shakespeare that resulted in an array of reproductions and adaptations of his plays. Shakespeare was increasingly adapted in the eighteenth century reaching a climax in the middle of the century. "At the height of this revival, in 1740-1741", Jean I. Marsden expounds, "Shakespeare constituted almost one fourth of London's theatrical bill" (76). Marsden adds that "the form of these adaptations was markedly different from their predecessors in the Restoration and early eighteenth century" (77). An assortment of Shakespeare's adaptations followed these early revisions. John Keats, for example, transformed *King Lear* to an historical drama in seven tableaux titled *King Stephen* in 1819, and Bertolt Brecht adapted Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* in his unfinished work which had the same title and was written between 1951-1953. The Bard was reproduced in hundreds of screen adaptations all over the world starting from the second half of the twentieth century. In February 2017, The IMDb listed 1.245 screen productions adapted from William Shakespeare's works, and in September 2017, the list increased to 1.302 productions ("William Shakespeare"). In October 2017, the MIT Global Shakespeares video and performance archive showed 450 global performances of the Bard performed in forty-three different languages. Twenty three out of the 450 videos belong to the Arab world.

The MIT Global Shakespeares archive is one of the few sources that shed light on the Arabic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. The Arab Shakespeare is often neglected in books and studies on the adaptation of the Bard. Graham Holderness complains that "the Arab world went unnoticed in the numerous edited volumes on international Shakespeare reception and appropriations" ("Arab Shakespeare"). For example, *Postcolonial Shakespeare* (1998), a collection of articles edited by Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin has no mention of Arabic adaptations. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) discusses different appropriations of Shakespeare, yet there is no single reference to any Arabic example. Even when the second edition of the book was published in 2013, the negligence of Arabic adaptations continues to exist. In *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from Seventeenth Century to the Present* (2000), editors Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier examine various examples of adaptations that represent a range of cultural politics in six countries: Britain, Spain, Germany, the United States, Canada, and South Africa. The Arabic adaptations are again absent from the anthology. This scanty of references to the Arab Shakespeare may in turn be due to the non-sufficient efforts done by Arab scholars to contribute to an international discourse on the global/local Shakespeare. It may also go back to the western scholars' neglect of the few Arabic contributions to the field. This study is an attempt to fill in this gap and contribute to the local/global Shakespeare dialogue.

The transmission of Shakespeare's works into Arabic culture and literature started as early as the nineteenth century through translations and adaptations. In the mid-nineteenth century, several Arab writers and theatre artists drew on their cultural encounters in the western world and introduced the Arab audiences to western playwrights that included the Bard. Graham Holderness notices that the Arab world knew Shakespeare in the last decades of the nineteenth century through theatre as his plays formed the repertoire of theatrical companies in Egypt and the rest of the Arab countries ("Arab Shakespeare"). The expansion of the British Empire and the acquisition of colonies in the Arab region constituted also one major factor that contributed to the introduction of Shakespeare to Arabs. Shakespeare was studied in schools, written on in journals, and viewed as a model of western intellectuality. In order to appeal to Arab audiences, most of Shakespeare's plays, whether translated or performed, were transposed into Arabic culture and contributed to what is currently known as "local 'Shakespeare,'" a field of Shakespearean studies which is defined by Alexander Huang as:

Interpretations that are inflected or marked by specificities of a given cultural location or knowledge derived from a specific geo-cultural region. Locality, in the full sense of the word, denotes the physical and allegorical coordinates of Shakespearean performance, appropriation, and criticism. ("Shakespearean Localities" 187)

Najib Al Haddad is recorded to be one of the first Arab dramatists to appropriate Shakespeare to Arabic culture. In 1892, Al Haddad adapted *Romeo and Juliet* from a French translation of the play and created a new Arabicized version titled *Shuhadaa Al Gharam* [*The Martyrs of Love*]. Al Haddad placed the lovers' story in an Egyptian environment and wrote it in prose and verse to appeal to Arab audiences. This early adaptation of Shakespeare was followed by many others. For example, Tanyus Abduh presented a French-based adaptation of *Hamlet* to the Arabic stage in 1902, and Khalil Muttran adapted *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *The Merchant of Venice* in the early twentieth century. *Julius Caesar* was adapted by Muhammad Hamdi in 1912 and by Sami Al-Juraidini in the same year. Contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare include The Arab Shakespeare Trilogy (*The Al-Hamlet Summit*; *Richard III*, *An Arab Tragedy*; *The Speaker's Progress*) by Kuwaiti playwright and theatre director Sulaiman Al Bassam, in which the playwright merges Shakespearean drama with Arab politics. The Arabian Shakespeare Festival—founded in 2013—is devoted to building bridges between the West and the Arab region through braiding Shakespeare and Arab stories and poetry to illustrate common human values, as their mission statement says (“About”).

It is true that Shakespeare found his way to the Arab audiences through theatre and translation, but this early literary travel of the Bard was restricted mainly to elite intellectuals and was limited to the doors of theatres and the pages of translated texts. It is through TV and films that Shakespeare found his way among wider audiences of lay public. Shakespeare lent his plots to a number of Arabic movies in the second half of the twentieth century that achieved considerable success on cinema and TV screens. For example, *Hamlet* was rewritten in 1979 to be rendered into a movie titled *Yomhel wala Yohmel* [God Forgives but Never Forgets] starring famous Egyptian actors Farid Shawky and Nour El Sherif. A localization of *King Lear* appeared in 1979 in a film titled *Al Malayeen* [The Cursed] and *Taming of the Shrew* was revisited in the popular 1962 film *Ah Min Hawa* [Beware of Eve]. Many contemporary productions also borrowed their plots from Shakespeare including *Ruud Al Muzun* (2014) [Thunder of Clouds], a Jordanian TV series based on *Romeo and Juliet*; and *Hobbak Nar* (2013) [Your Love is Like Fire], an Egyptian revision of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

What is remarkable about the Arabic localizations of Shakespeare is the relocation of the plays into a foreign land and culture that are often seen to be distinct from the western. Add to this the new media used to reproduce the Shakespearean works. Although Shakespeare remains present in the background of these localizations, his presence does not dominate the new production. The Bard switches his position from the dominant to the periphery and the localized work metamorphoses into a dominant. In most cases, the Arab audiences are not even aware of the Shakespearean source of the story as the original

Shakespearean text gives way to a new story in a process named by Alexander C.Y. Huang “palimpsest” (24). In a palimpsest, the global and the local simultaneously co-exist to produce an intercultural appropriation. Huang explains:

The key to theatrical interculturalism is the conscious process of exhibiting ‘incongruent’ foreign elements, or the simultaneous juxtaposition of the local and the foreign. The *fabula* of the foreign play—or its cultural location(s)—is recycled and reassigned to a new local context through theatrical (re)presentation. Bewildered and annoyed at one moment or another, the audience sees the concealment of old lines and the revelation of new ones. In this sense, cross-cultural stage translation resembles the making of a palimpsest. (“Shamlet: Shakespeare as a Palimpsest” 23-24)

In his article “The Lure of Intercultural Shakespeare,” Yeeyon Im contends that to label a Shakespearean appropriation as intercultural, equal relationships must be maintained between the Shakespearean work and the appropriation in which “Shakespeare does not ‘dominate’ over other cultural elements” (239). Answering the question: “What is the essence that makes a production Shakespeare even after metamorphosis?”, Im refers to Shakespeare’s logocentrism, spirit, and international currency that make Shakespeare visible even after the palimpsest (243). The essence, however, in the simultaneous universality and interculturalism of Shakespeare lies more in what Aristotle called a fable (*mythos*) which creates a plot or action (*praxis*) and serves as a basis for new dramas and revisions located in different cultures and pronounced in different languages. Sukanta Chaudhuri and Chee Seng Lim elaborate that “Shakespeare’s text is seen as the starting point of a sustained, open-ended intertextual discourse based on no single language or culture, and embracing much more than the written word” (ix).

I agree with Chaudhuri and Lim that the intertextuality of the recreations of Shakespeare’s plays indicates a process of intercultural encounters, yet I would argue that Shakespeare is not the real starting point in this intertextual stream of discourse. The *mythos* and *praxis* in Shakespeare’s plays are not authentically his. They are revisions of older fables that Shakespeare himself puts in a new Elizabethan locale and expresses through new language and medium. This subverts the idea that Shakespeare is the real center and repository of the fables. Shakespeare is part of a whirl of intertextual reproductions of older *praxes*. Yet, he could be seen as a hegemonic center and a literary colonizer of these *praxes*. The popularity of theatre in the sixteenth century (similar to today’s TV and Cinema) and the political and cultural superiority of Elizabethan England paved the way for Shakespeare to be a hegemonic center. The expansion of British colonies in the last centuries reinforced his position as a colonial symbol that permeated into the culture and the educational system of

the colonized countries. Shakespeare being a hegemonic center does not negate his universality. He is still a global icon in the contemporary geographical sense of the word and in the sense of connecting nations through history. I would contend that Shakespeare is not a prototype; he is an archetype that stands as a focal point when the fable is reconstructed.

The universality of Shakespeare remains hegemonic when his centrality is not shaken off. This hegemonic centrality runs the risk of delimiting the interpretation of the new works and denying the creativity of the host culture. The hegemony of the Bard is deconstructed when his plays are localized to different cultures and languages; and his characters change names, locations, and identities. The localized work stands as an independent creative recreation that refutes the disparaging view of adaptations as inauthentic reproductions of the original. Huang refers to this marginalization of adaptations when he writes: "Despite the significance of textual and performative appropriations, critical ideologies and biases have, for a long time, relegated them to the periphery and limited the interpretive possibilities" ("Shakespearean Localities" 189). Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon criticize this fidelity discourse concluding that "fidelity becomes a less than useful evaluative aesthetic criterion" (445). Bortolotti and Hutcheon analyze adaptation from a biological point of view arguing that the process of adaptation is similar to heredity where genes determine relationships between ancestors and forebears. Like genes, narrative ideas transmit from one work to another, get relocated into a different environment and projected through different media to give rise to a new independent story that shares a core narrative with the older heritage. Fischlin and Fontier remark that any adaptation of the Bard "is, and is not, Shakespeare" (4) since the adapted work invokes the Shakespearean play and yet remains different. I totally agree with Bortolotti and Fischlin's arguments and would add that Shakespeare is more decentered and the adapted work is more independent when the new production is more culturally and linguistically detached from the original. Faithful reworking of Shakespeare's plays is sort of duplication, whereas adaptations are evolutions.

The Arab Shakespeare localized on stage or in films and TV series decenters the Bard and pushes him to the background of the fable. Shakespeare makes only one element of the new recreation, while other elements are made of the adaptor's agenda, the local socio-cultural milieu, and the political contextualization of the revisionary work. The localized recreation becomes, to use Bortolotti and Hutcheon's words, a "phenotype" created through a "process of selection" (448) that fits the preoccupation of local audiences. Within the same biological analogy context propounded by Bortolotti and Hutcheon, I would suggest that what distinguishes the literary descendants of Shakespeare is not only the core narrative idea (*mythos and praxis*), but also the focus on human passions which connect all people regardless of one's culture, religion or

race. Shakespeare utilized stories from previous literature in order to serve the Renaissance humanist philosophy, of which he was an ultimate representative and example. Bernard D. Grebanier remarks:

Shakespeare is perhaps the perfect expression of Renaissance humanism. His profound sympathy for humanity enabled him to pierce to the very core of his characters; his unexcelled gifts as a poet made his men and women unforgettable creatures of flesh and blood. (qtd. in McClinton 15)

This aspect of Shakespeare could be viewed as the dominant gene that is always present in the literary descendants as well as literary forebears.

***Dahsha* as a “Palimpsest”: Replicating a Core Narrative Idea, Relocating Tragedy**

Dahsha (2014) [Bewilderment] replicates both a core narrative idea inherited from *King Lear* and previous works and the humanist philosophy of Shakespeare. It relocates the human passions of love, hatred and revenge in an Arab context through the story of an old patriarch descending into madness after giving away his vast lands in the village of Dahsha to his two perfidious daughters who flatter him before exposing their ingratitude and leading the whole village into chaos and anarchy. The core narrative idea of the drama makes the parallel to *King Lear* unmistakable. The drama, however, has its own storyline that looks purely Upper Egyptian for a person unaware of the Shakespearean source. Scriptwriter Abdelrahim Kamal deconstructs *King Lear* and constructs an Upper Egyptian TV tragedy in which characters are renamed, events are relocated, and relationships are redefined. Lear turns into an Upper Egyptian senile father and tycoon named Al Basel Hamad Al Basha and Gloucester into Al Basel’s brother Allam. Gloucester’s legitimate and illegitimate sons Edgar and Edmund become Allam’s sons Muntasar and Radi. The king of France transforms into Al Basel’s nephew Bilal who is in love with the youngest and most beloved daughter Neema (Cordelia). The dukes of Albany and Cornwall come to be Al Basel’s sons-in-law Abu Zeid and Amer who are married to his wicked daughters Rabha (Regan) and Nawal (Goneril). The fool is Al Basel’s nephew and the duke of Kent is his faithful guard Jaddallah. New characters are added to the drama to complete the family tragedy; they include: Sakan, Al Basel’s sister, and Muhran and Abu Deif, two more step-brothers of Al Basel.

The pre-Elizabethan patriarchal society of *King Lear*’s world gives way to an Upper Egyptian counterpart in *Dahsha*, and the dark prairie Lear wanders in turns into an Upper Egyptian remote village full of desert and dark streets.

Given the Egyptian context and the TV medium, the origin of *Dahsha* remains mostly unrecognized (except perhaps to educated elites) which leaves space to the receptors to interpret the tragedy away from the Bard's influence. The presentation of *Dahsha* in this context moves the Bard far from the center and creates an independent revision of *King Lear*. The hegemonic Shakespeare remains concealed in the background of the reinvented drama. The new appropriation acquires autonomy from the mutation of the fable: change of locale, language, medium, and geo-cultural and political thematic focus.

Shakespeare's senile Lear who gives up his authority in order to "shake all cares and business from our age, / Conferring them on younger strengths, while we/ Unburdened crawl toward death" (Shakespeare 1:1:37-40) transforms into a revengeful patriarch in *Dahsha*. While Lear's love-test is a "mere form, devised as a childish scheme to gratify his love for absolute power and his hunger for assurance of devotion" (Bradley 250), Al Basel's love-test is a scheme to show off his daughters' love in front of his step-brothers and to deprive them [his step-brothers] of his wealth after his death. It is also an attempt to redeem his masculinity since man's masculinity in Upper Egyptian culture is partly measured by his ability to conceive male children. Through transferring his fortunes to his daughters, Al Basel wishes to compensate them for the masculinity they lack and, hence, vindicate his virility. "God created you girls, and I will make you men" (*Dahsha*), Al Basel tells his daughters before distributing his lands among them. Al Basel's banishing of his youngest and most beloved daughter Neema is also an act of revenge since she insists on marrying her cousin who is considered to be her father's adversary. "In her heart lives my enemy" (*Dahsha*), Al Basel talks about his beloved Neema before swearing not to see her till his last day. The TV drama breaks then into a cycle of karmic events. Al Basel's sons-in-law decide to revenge the atrocities they believe he has committed in the past against their fathers. Amer, Nawal's husband, wants to overcome his inferiority complex since his father was one of Al Basel's servants. Abu Zeid, Rabha's husband, suspects that Al Basel has killed his father who was a partner in Al Basel's secret weapons business. The escalating hatred of the eldest daughters to each other and their growing sense of revenge emanate not from their sexual attraction to a common lover, but from their desire to satisfy their husbands' whims and hunger for power and revenge, as well as their fear of divorce which is a social stigma in Upper Egypt.

To dig deep into the origins of tragedy in *Dahsha*, a long history is recalled through flashbacks and reminiscence. The missing characters in *King Lear*, who make the King's behavior looks childish and pretenseful, are given lives in *Dahsha*. One of the missing elements that obscure the unnatural relationship between King Lear and his daughters is the absence of the mother figure. The only reference to the daughters' mother in *King Lear* occurs when Lear visits Regan after being dismissed by Goneril. Regan claims that she is glad

at seeing her father. Lear, in indirect reference to Goneril's ingratitude and in menace to Regan, says that if she were not glad, he would divorce her dead mother because she would have cheated on him to conceive dishonest daughters like Goneril and Regan: "If thou shouldst not be glad,/ I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,/ Sepulchring an adultress" (Shakespeare 2:4:120-122).

In "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*," Coppélia Kahn reads the mother figure metaphorically to be hidden in the king's inner mind and his hankering for motherhood. Kahn refers to the King's description of his state of mind after losing Cordelia as "*hysteria*" and links the word to the disease of "*hyster*," which means "the mother" (240). The mother figure in *Dahsha* is no longer a metaphorical subject. She exists in the person of Al Basel's mentally defective mother, Baraka. Al Basel's attachment to his youngest daughter and his feeling of revenge is closely linked to the history of his mother who is recurrently referred to in the drama's flashbacks. Al Basel's mother was forced by his step-brothers and step-mother to sleep in the barn and to unwillingly endorse documents that deprive her of her husband's inheritance. As a child, Al Basel had to strive hard to protect his mother and his sister Sakan after being dismissed from his father's house. Even after marriage, Al Basel spent most of his time doing business far away from his wife and daughters, which created an emotional distance between them. The only one who used to join him in his business travels was the youngest daughter Neema. In one scene, Rabha expresses her hatred to her father and her youngest sister because, as she tells Neema: "He [Al Basel] gave us his money, and he gave you his heart. I hate you and I hate him" (*Dahsha*). The daughters' mistreatment of their father is not an act of ingratitude brought up by natural wickedness anymore; it is the result of emotional distance that nourishes physical revenge.

The emotional suffering of Al Basel and the treachery of his daughters are expressed through animal imagery that translates the western baroque imagery used by Shakespeare in *King Lear* to an Upper Egyptian cultural context. Shakespeare uses a long list of animals in his play to describe Lear's downfall and the unnatural relationship between the king and his daughters. The list entails, among others, snakes, pelicans, snails, rats, mice, bears, boars, horses, dogs, and wolves. When Goneril asks her father to reduce the number of his men if he wants to stay at her house, he cries: "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is/ To have a thankless child.— Away, away!" (Shakespeare 1:4:285-286). He complains to Regan that Goneril "struck me with her tongue, / Most serpent-like" (Shakespeare 2:4:154-155) and says that he prefers to "be a comrade with the wolf and owl" (Shakespeare 2:4:204) than subject to his daughter's cruelty once more. The reference to Goneril as a snake reflects the Elizabethan people's obsession with animal imagery and implies a metaphorical biblical connotation of the snake as a treacherous and poisonous creature: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that

the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1). The snake metaphor suggests that the king, like Adam, is dismissed from his kingdom/heaven because of a treacherous daughter. In another situation, the King refers to both Goneril and Regan as “pelican daughters” (Shakespeare 3:4: 70), as if they were two pelicans that suck down his blood to feed their own families.

Abdelrahim Kamal deploys animal imagery in *Dahsha* that mirrors Upper Egyptian environmental and cultural contexts. Al Basel likens his daughter Nawal to a horned viper and a scorpion when she dismisses him from her house:

The horned viper, the scorpion bit me. How could I father a snake?! . . . Her name is not Nawal. Her name is Scorpion. . . . Rabha will take care of me and will cure the poison the scorpion has injected in my heart. (*Dahsha*)

The animals selected by Al Basel to describe his wicked daughter are familiar to Upper Egyptian villagers and audiences. The horned viper, for example, is one of the very dangerous snakes that live in Egypt and is known for its demonic appearance.

If there’s one snake in all of Egypt most likely to be mistaken for a devil, it’s the horned viper. This highly venomous desert snake has a hornlike scale protruding above each of its eyes, giving it a truly demonic appearance. (“List of Snakes that Live in Egypt”)

Describing Nawal as a horned viper reinforces her monstrosity and villainy as well as the locality of the story. When the eldest daughter Rabha refuses to welcome her homeless father, he stops by the poor people of the village and complains that “Rabha’s heart has been replaced with a biting dog that barks day and night” (*Dahsha*). Again, Al Basel refers to an animal which is common to see wondering in the Upper Egyptian villages’ streets at night.

Shakespeare and Abdelrahim Kamal use an animal imagery pattern not only to express the tragic heroes’ anger at their daughters’ perfidy, but also to foreground their nobility. King Lear associates himself with the horse, which was the main means of transportation in the Elizabethan age and the symbol of knighthood. The horse is the king’s means to escape the hell of Goneril when she grumbles about the riotous manners of his men and requests him to disquantity his train. The king orders to saddle the horses to escape the house of his treacherous daughter: “Darkness and devils! / Saddle my horses; call my train together: / Degenerate bastard! I’ll not trouble thee. / Yet have I left a daughter” (Shakespeare 1:4:240-243). Al Basel, on the other hand, associates

himself with the camel which is known for its patience, nobility and self-esteem, and often referenced to Arab culture. Al Basel compares his self-worth to the dignity of his camel which died from humiliation when unable to revenge his degradation. Al Basel remembers the story of his camel to teach his grandson the values of honor and self-esteem, and to echo the dreadful conditions he experiences at the hands of his two disobedient daughters. The camel was very compliant with Al Basel's commands. However, one day he refused to bow down when ordered by Al Basel who beat him harshly with a stick till the camel shed tears. That night, Al Basel was advised not to sleep near his camel as he used to do since the camel would probably avenge his humiliation. Al Basel put a filled burlap bag on his bed and hid to watch the reaction of the camel. The camel grunted and angrily kicked the burlap bag and tore it into pieces with his sharp teeth. In the morning the camel was shocked at seeing Al Basel still alive. He stopped eating for three days and on the third day he died of a broken heart. In another instance, Al Basel's sadness at leaving his favorite daughter Neema is replicated in the story of his favorite camel, Zahzahan, who was born on the same day as Neema. When Al Basel takes Zahzahan from his old house and moves to live with Nawal, the camel feels terribly sad about leaving his attendant Jabra and stops eating till he dies. Al Basel repeats Zahzahan's story when he is mistreated and dismissed by Nawal. He refuses to eat and starts to perceive that he has made an abysmal mistake against Neema.

Another parallel between *King Lear* and *Dahsha* is the commentary given through the stories of Lear and Al Basel on the two works' contemporary contexts. *King Lear* was written with the backdrop of the succession crisis in England after the death of Queen Elizabeth and the ascension of King James I (James VI of Scotland) to the throne. *King Lear* reveals the Jacobean liaison between monarchy and patriarchy which maintained a mythical image of the monarch as the protector of nation and family. The play also reflects a stage of political turmoil and instability in England when the idea of unity between Scotland and England was popularly negotiated. *King Lear* represents a highly reverend king whose abuse results in the rage of nature and the distortion of national and familial order. This political background of the play makes it a rich source for adaptations that give political commentary on global and local political unrest. Sainte Heloise notes that "every time political unrest occurs, Lear will appear again as an alarm signal" (1). R.A. Foakes argues that the play was acted and understood in the mid-twentieth century within the context of political dictatorship and oppression in Europe:

Only after the outbreak of the Second World War was serious attention given to the 'political chaos' shown in the play, and Edmund, Goneril and Regan began to be seen as precursors of the Machiavellian 'realpolitik' associated with fascism and Nazism. . . . It was not until about 1960 and after that the play

began to be considered in direct relation to a new political consciousness engendered by the Cold War, the rediscovery of the Holocaust, the renewed interest in Hiroshima, and the development of the hydrogen bomb, and then the building of the Berlin Wall. In this context the tyranny and obsession with power of Lear himself became more noticeable, and the similarity between his behaviour and that of Goneril and Regan, emphasized by Peter Brook in his 1962 production, turned the play, as noted earlier, into bleak vision of negation. (70-71)

The scriptwriter of *Dahsha*, Abdelrahim Kamal, categorizes the series as “an Upper Egyptian TV social drama that has nothing to do with politics” (Mahmoud). Despite Kamal’s de-politicization of the drama, I tend to see it in the context of Egyptian politics in the second decade of the twenty-first century. *Dahsha* regenerates the ideas of aging, political instability, abuse of power and anarchy which resonate in both Lear’s story and 2011 Egypt. Al Basel’s mastery over Dahsha and his maintenance of power and peace through a dictatorial rule repeat the status-quo of Egypt before the revolution of January 25, 2011. Ex-president Mohammed Hosni Mubarak was often presented to the public as a father-president figure in order to maintain the image of his presidency as protecting both familial and national structure. Mubarak’s old age and notorious delegation of authority to his son and political businessmen were popularly believed to be the main reasons behind the Egyptian revolution, the following chaos, and the re-installment of order. The main slogan for demonstrators marching the streets of Egypt in January 2011 was “Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice”, which echoes the people’s need of economic prosperity, freedom of expression, and fair distribution of wealth. In *Dahsha*, Al Basel starts to lose his power as a capable leader when he cedes his authority to his daughters and their husbands. His escalating decline stems not only from his sons-in-law’s sense of revenge and hunger for power, but also from the people’s need of security and subsistence which he could not provide after losing mastery. This leads to the dissolution of discipline in the village and the spread of chaos and anarchy. A parallel could be clearly noticed between the drama’s events and 2011 Egypt in one of the most painful scenes in the series when the people of Dahsha kill one another for the gold spikes Al Basel wants to give to his beloved daughter in front of the whole village. Neema, the delicate daughter who represents fidelity and good intentions in the drama, is crushed in the stampede for the precious fortune. Security and peace could only be restored by the end of the drama when a new police force takes over the police check point in Dahsha and fills the security gap in the village, in clear reference to the riots and chaos in 2011 and the Military Supreme Council rule of Egypt after the stepping down of Mubarak.

The TV drama refers also to the common belief that the post-January 25 chaos in Egypt was partly created by foreign interference. The disorder and turmoil in *Dahsha* are fueled by a foreigner whose name is El Afandi [the gentleman] and who is only concerned with stealing Al Basel's weapons and gold spikes. El Afandi speaks in a dialect different from the Upper Egyptians of *Dahsha* and the other "Arab Sheikhs" with whom he conducts secret weapons business. He is the one who tricks Abu Zeid into believing that Al Basel has killed his father and succeeds to feed his revengeful spirit against his father-in-law. The Pandora box opens in *Dahsha* when, like Lear, Al Basel fails to realize the disastrous consequences of dividing his lands and trusting unfit people to rule the village. The same picture could be seen with Mubarak failing to realize that the failure of his regime lies in handing over the country's economy and administration to incompetent businessmen.

It is not only the place, themes and characters that are localized in *Dahsha*, the concepts of tragedy and hamartia are also contextualized to achieve catharsis for Egyptian audiences. It is universally accepted that in his tragedies Shakespeare tries to follow the model of tragedy proposed by Aristotle. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines this model as follows:

A tragedy . . . is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (Butcher 23)

Aristotle clarifies that in a tragedy the events are "terrible and pitiful" (39) and lead eventually to "reversal" of the hero's fortunes from good to bad to "recognition". Aristotle explains recognition as "a change of ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune" (41). In both *King Lear* and *Dahsha*, the tragic heroes experience reversal of their situations from being a highly respectful king/village chieftain into mad old men humiliated by their own daughters. Lear's death in Shakespeare's play is the ultimate source of pity and generator of catharsis for Elizabethan audiences, whereas the tragic hero in *Dahsha* remains alive after the death of his two wicked daughters and his beloved Neema, which is seen in an Upper Egyptian context more serious, agonizing and cathartic than death. For Egyptian audiences, death is a path to rest and peace. Life after the death of one's children is a path to misery and pain. This terrible agony is described in a famous poem titled "Yamna" by Upper Egyptian poet Abdurrahman Al Abnudy, in which his aunt muses over her past life and the approaching of death:

Don't you ever live for one day past your kids
 Don't you ever, Abdurrahman!
 Life is full of all sorts of pain and grief
 That people do not know,
 But the hardest is when you live
 After your kids go
 Only then
 Will you learn what death is!! (Aboubakr)

In the twenty-third episode of *Dahsha*, the father of the village's check point officer tries to kill Al Basel thinking he has killed his son. He retreats and decides not to shoot him because in death Al Basel would find relief, and in life he would see suffering and humiliation after losing his dignity and sanity. The officer's father says:

I want to kill Al Basel Hamad Al Basha, not an insane person. What does death have to do with a dead person like you. Your relief is now in death, and your misery is in life. I won't relieve you. You are not even Al Basel any more. You are his remains. (*Dahsha*)

The last episode of the TV drama gives a very distressing picture of Al Basel living beside the tomb of his beloved daughter who was killed by the mob fighting for the gold spikes. Al Basel is seen crying, praying for death, and begging the caretaker to take him down into the grave and put an end to his miserable life. Al Basel's tragic flaw is his desire for revenge and the catharsis arises from his wish for death which is not fulfilled.

Conclusion

The core narrative idea in *Dahsha* is both connected and disconnected to the Shakespearean tragedy of *King Lear*. The old man who is wronged by his daughters and descends into madness is present in the TV drama but repositioned in a new environment and culture, which makes Shakespeare both present and absent in the story. The localization stands as part of an intertextual series of writings and shakes off the centrality and hegemony of the Bard. In this realm of intertextuality, no writing is original. All writings become sequences of intercultural and intertextual reproductions. "A text", according to Barthes, "is a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146). If the idea of originality is not existent, authority ceases to exist, and the creativity of adapted texts, and sometimes their superiority over Shakespeare's plays, remains open to question and analysis.

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