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(論文)

When Hamlet Becomes Siavash

— An Analysis of *Doubt* (2009) —

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I- Introduction

As Shakespeare's longest play, *Hamlet* is also widely considered one of his most important and influential works, and the most popular, translated into more than 75 languages. Simultaneously, it is one of the most quoted works of English literature thanks to Prince Hamlet's famous soliloquy when he is contemplating about life and death: "to be, or not to be, that is the question".¹

More than 50 cinematic adaptations of *Hamlet* have been made since the early 20th century, including films of the Silent Era which showed moving images but no sound, and the modern-day adaptations that often are very loosely based on *Hamlet* and feature heavy changes. Among these cinematic adaptations, some such as Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* made in 1948 are well-known among both cinema lovers and Shakespeare enthusiasts.

Considering Shakespeare's overwhelming popularity and fame on an international scale, it becomes not surprising that his works eventually found their way into Iran as well; first through French to Persian translations done by the students of the prestigious *Dar ul-Funun* college, and later directly from English to Persian, Shakespeare's works have progressively seen more exposure in Iran. From being staged at theater houses and adapted into versions more suitable to Persian tastes and values, to being made into feature films and television shows. It must be said however that his fame and popularity in Iran, even for those who speak English, is comparatively much lower when compared to most countries around the world, fundamentally because of the difficulty of Shakespeare's English. According to Abbas Horri, "Shakespeare for an Iranian student of English is a foreign language within a foreign language" [Horri 2003, 69].

1

The famous soliloquy appears in the nuntery scene of *Hamlet*, on act 3, scene 1, 64-98 (Folger Shakespeare Library edition)

2

According to Horri, “*The Merchant of Venice* owes its attraction to the cautious attitude that many Iranians have long entertained towards Jews” [Horri 2003, 72]. This statement is still true in the Iran of today to some extent, however, a majority of Iranians, myself included, do not bear any prejudices or negative thoughts towards the Jewish people unlike the hateful political stance of the Iranian government.

3

The most famous of such legends is how in *Shahnameh* or *The Book of Kings* by Ferdowsi (1010), Kaveh the Blacksmith, starts a revolution that ultimately leads to the overthrowing of the evil ruler Zahhak the Snake Shoulder, a story well-known among Iranians of any age and background.

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To reference again from ancient Persian mythology dating back to the Avestan period (c.1500 – c.500 BCE), Arash the Archer, a mythical hero, sacrifices his life in letting loose an arrow that upon landing would mark the borders of Iran and Turan. He dies in firing the arrow with all his life blood put into the draw but manages to take back most of Iran’s lands that were previously occupied by opposing Turani forces.

Among all of Shakespeare’s works, besides *The Merchant of Venice*, the one that has been translated, staged, and adapted the most in Iran is *Hamlet*.² This is largely due to the fact that *Hamlet* in general is widely popular around the world, but at the same time, it also resonates with certain ideologies and thoughts instilled in the modern Iranian audience simply because of their Persian heritage.

Even before the Arab conquest of Iran (then known as *Persia* or *Pars*), the tales and songs of overthrowing ignoble and iniquitous rulers were common in Persian mythology and legends, and this has stayed viable to this day.³ Furthermore, the veneration of martyrdom for the greater good as an Islamic value has long been a Persian value ever since the olden days, much before the coming of Islam.⁴ Seen through this lens, *Hamlet* seems more compatible with an Iranian audience. Despite this fact, the only Iranian cinematic adaptation of *Hamlet* remains to be Varuzh Karim-Masihi’s *Doubt* or *Tardid* which made its way onto the silver screens in 2009.

In this paper, I dissect Karim-Masihi’s *Doubt* to its core, analyzing how themes of the Western *Hamlet* are juxtaposed with Iranian values, how this dichotomy functions when characters are added into the formula, and if *Doubt* could serve its purpose as a Shakespearean adaptation.

II- *Doubt*’s Making and Reception

Making a movie based on *Hamlet* in Iran is an undertaking that not everyone dares to take, as is usually the case when the source material is one such as a work of Shakespeare. Western literature, especially works of the Early Modern English period, more often than not include elements that are either too unfamiliar and alien for the Iranian audience to grasp because of simple cultural gaps or are in direct conflict with the values and sentiments of the Islamic Republic and are hence, subject to heavy-handed censorship without exception. This includes but is not limited to any display of affection between male and female characters, the consumption of any food or drink that is considered *haram* in Islam, or the depiction and aggrandizement of any thoughts and acts that could, even in

the slightest sense, be taken as a critical view of Islam and Islamic beliefs. As an example, a simple kissing scene in *Romeo and Juliet* which is seen as romantic, would not be written about, staged, filmed, or acted in Iran simply because the resulting work would be banned by Islamic jurisdictions.

When *Doubt* was being made, it was highly anticipated that Karim-Masihi would be making another masterpiece as he was and still is, considered a prolific director for his *The Last Act* or *Pardeye Akhar* (1991), which is itself a progressive movie that heavily depicts stage plays which were not popular with the general public in the 90s. Before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, Karim-Masihi worked as an assistant director and script supervisor for several movie directors, including the extremely prestigious and famous Bahram Beyzayi, a playwright, screen writer, theater and film director, and a master of Persian arts and Iranian studies. Karim-Masihi had also studied medicine in Germany in 1970 but had developed a liking for cinema and filmography which changed the course of his life. In an interview with Mehr News Agency, Karim-Masihi stated that he had been thinking about adapting *Hamlet* for a long time [Raziyifar 2009].⁵

Doubt was expected to be a movie that would put Iran on the map as a country that had not only made a masterful cinematic adaptation of the great *Hamlet* but also made it its own in the sense of a successful one; similar to China's *The Banquet* (2006), Japan's *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960), Canada's *Strange Brew* (1983), Finland's *Hamlet Goes Business* (1987), or even the U.S.'s *The Lion King* (1994), even if they all took their liberties in adapting *Hamlet*, it is thoroughly justifiable. According to Thomas M. Leitch, "Most Shakespearean adaptations do not mimic the setting of the Elizabethan era, nor do they conform to the time and setting of that specific play" [Leitch 2007, 30]. Hence, it can be said that Shakespearean adaptations, much like other adaptations, are products of their unique era, environment, and audience.

Whether *Doubt* succeeded in satisfying national and international expectations as a Shakespearean adaptation is highly subjective, however, it did not sell much in cinemas nation-wide as the general public was not particularly interested.⁶ Furthermore, it was marred

5

In the interview, Karim-Masihi talks about the strength and potential of *Hamlet*, how he always liked it, and how he wanted to be able to adapt it into a cinematic work for a long time. He did not aim for it to be situated in a certain historical period of Iran, like Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* which is based on *Macbeth*. This, according to him, would cause adapting *Hamlet* to be impossible. This impossibility is most likely since the current Iranian government is strongly against depicting previous dynasties or historical periods of Iran in a glorious or aggrandizing way since they are looked at as corrupt, un-Islamic, and unjust.

6

According to the Islamic Republic News Agency (2009), compared to other movies that ran parallel to *Doubt* screening period such as *Two Sisters* by Mohammad Banki, *Doubt* only made less than third of what they made.

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According to Vista Online Magazine, 2009. Karim-Masihi himself states in his interview with Mehr News Agency that he originally wanted to adapt *Hamlet* fully and faithfully, but he could not, it was not possible, and because of this, he ended up adapting it into what *Doubt* currently is. He had to change the setting, the time-period, the costumes, the character and contextual dynamics, and all these changes led to other uncontrollable changes. But he states that he tried his best so that some of the themes and characters would stay similar to their original strength in *Hamlet*. It can be said that if all these changes were not made and Karim-Masihi was left to freely adapt *Hamlet* in his original vision, we would have a much more faithful adaptation.

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According to Resalat Newspaper, 2009.

with issues such as Karim-Masihi's hospitalization leading to many of the original actors and actresses to be replaced due to delays in the production, a general lack of budget that resulted in the original screenplay of around three hours being diluted to only two hours, and other shortcomings. As Karim-Masihi himself stated, he liked the initial situation better; they were ideal. In principle, when there's a delay during a film's production, it hurts the film in ways that no one can alleviate. The crew did their best in the making of *Doubt*, but they had already lost many of the original good points.⁷

Despite the shortcomings, *Doubt* managed to win a couple of awards at Iran's 27th Fajr International Film Festival, namely the award for best director, and the best adapted screenplay. Although many critics harshly commented on the film not being a successful adaptation of *Hamlet*, I argue that Karim-Masihi was not on a mission to make an Iranian *Hamlet* per se, but was more concerned with the messages and themes it conveyed and did his own take as he depicted several Iranians of the upper echelon of the society, trapped in their Hamletian fate and their eventual escape or demise. As he has mentioned several times before, his sole focus with his movies was always to capture the attention of the above-the-average audience,⁸ and that usually translates to people that are either more familiar with Western thought and concepts or are curious minds that are interested in exploring.

III- *Hamlet in Iran and Iranians in Hamlet*

Soon after the alleged suicide of his father while Siavash was away from Iran, he returns and finds his uncle Roozbehan in full control of his father's business and profits. He is forced to sit idly by as his uncle plans a wedding to take his mother's hand (Mahtalat) into marriage, and this chain of events has forced him into deep seclusion that causes him nightmares. Not long after, Siavash begins to doubt the mysterious conditions of his father's death, and suspects that his uncle might have had a hand in it. This sets him on a path to seek the truth. Through a traditional southern nomadic ritual, Siavash meets the ghost of his father who reaffirms his doubts about

his suicide being in fact a murder orchestrated by his uncle. He then starts acting mad in order to gather more proof regarding his father's death, and not long after, comes to the realization that what is happening to him and the people surrounding him is identical to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Later, Siavash and his best friend Garo who have fallen to despair because of their helplessness to stop their supposed fate, are stirred into action by Mahtab, and together they try to stop the eventual occurrence of the tragic events of *Hamlet*.

Doubt can be sectioned into two vastly distinct parts. The initial hour or so of the movie which I like to entitle *Hamlet in Iran*, and the remainder which I call *Iranians in Hamlet*. The first part is a modern and mostly faithful reimagining of the famous tragedy set in Iran with some of the characters removed or changed, while the second part takes a different turn quite suddenly and becomes something unique and unpredictable.

As far as the first part goes, the audience that is familiar with Shakespeare and expects beforehand to watch an adaptation will immediately see the connections and similarities. From subtle hints such as the very first shot of the movie depicting a female doll that is drowned in water and the stereotypical skull conveniently placed on Siavash's table, to the more obvious ones such as Siavash's confession of love to Mahtab which is a direct translation of Hamlet's famous words to Ophelia in act 2, scene 2 of the play:

Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.

These hints are masterfully implanted within the film and are instantly recognizable to the Shakespearean audience. According to Karim-Masihi himself, most of the Iranian audience would not notice the hints so it was fine to include more than a few [Raziyyifar 2009].

As mentioned, to the unexpected viewer, the hints go unnoticed, and *Doubt* seems almost a different movie. For someone who does not know much of Shakespeare or the film's synopsis, *Doubt* masquerades as a family drama about the mishaps of extremely

9

Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from the movie are my translations of the original Persian since an official English subtitle does not exist.

wealthy Iranians who live in mansions, wear suits and ties on a regular basis, drive expensive cars and own large businesses; things that are not tangible or feasible for the vast majority of Iranians who would have comprised the actual audience. It is not until more than an hour has passed that Siavash decides to confide in his best friend Garo (Horatio) and tell him how his story is the same as Hamlet's, to which Garo replies: "What do you really want to say? That since your uncle has murdered your father, your life is similar to *Hamlet*, or since what happened in *Hamlet* is happening in your life as well, then your uncle has murdered your father?"⁹ This marks the starting point at which Karim-Masihi connects his two different audiences together and takes them on a journey to see his vision unfold. According to Gerald M. Camp, there's always a dilemma when it comes to attracting both the knowing and unknowing audiences of Shakespeare [Camp 1969, 109], but Karim-Masihi masterfully solves this problem at this point.

Karim-Masihi takes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and turns it into a tale of how people might or might not succumb to predestined occurrences. The second half of the movie is not about what happened in *Hamlet* or how faithful it can be adapted for the Iranian audience, but rather what the privileged Iranian characters would do if they suddenly found themselves confined in a situation direly similar to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and if they would be able to escape their fate or not.

IV- Hamletian Themes in *Doubt*

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is rich in its portrayal and contemplation of revenge, corruption, death, hesitation and inaction, religion and honor, and the differences between how things appear and how they really are. How these themes are chosen to be portrayed for the Iranian audience in *Doubt* is a particularly fresh topic as *Doubt* has not seen much academic attention both inside and outside Iran, mainly due to the fact that it has never received proper localization such as official subtitles or dubs, and it is particularly hard to find for audiences outside of Iran to view, therefore it is rendered inaccessible.

Hamlet is classified as a revenge play by scholars and critics, one

such case is Andrew Sanders who asserts *Hamlet* is a revenge play in which “Claudius destroys his brother, marries his sister-in-law, assumes the throne, and introduces a rot into the state of Denmark” [Sanders 1994, 154]. Therefore, it is unsurprising that revenge is a prominent and vital theme of *Hamlet*, and perhaps the most important feature of *Hamlet* for the audience of its time since, according to Arthur Kirsch, “the quest for vengeance satisfies an audience’s most primitive wishes for intrigue and violence” [Kirsch 1981, 17]. In *Doubt* however, revenge is insignificant, replaced in large by a sense of justice. The reason for this change is unclear but can be traced to the difference between the notion of revenge in Islam, how it is seen in Persian culture, and how it is depicted in *Hamlet*.

Firstly, in the teachings of Islam and Qur’an, the concept of revenge does not equate to a personal act of vengeance, but is rather seen as divine justice, an endeavor that would bring peace to those that were wronged.¹⁰ As an example, the hanging of a serial killer in Iran would be looked at as adhering to the will of God and bringing justice to the family of the dead. On the other hand, before the arrival of Islam, in ancient Persia, revenge was a noble thing that the rulers of Persia vowed to seek, such as when the Persian king Darius vowed to exact revenge against Athenians for the Ionian Revolt of 499 BCE. Depicting the theme of revenge in its original Hamletian sense in *Doubt* would be closer to its Persian notion as a personal act of vengeance instead of its Islamic value as an act of divine justice, therefore, it would perhaps subject *Doubt* to more troubles.

Unlike Hamlet who swears he will take vengeance after talking to the ghost of his father in act 1, scene 4 and schemes and thinks of murdering his uncle, the thought of revenge never crosses Siavash’s mind. From the very beginning, what pushes Siavash to unearth the truth behind his father’s death is his uneasiness with his father’s sudden replacement by his uncle, and how his mother and everyone else seem absolutely content with the situation.

Perhaps the knowing audience might assume that by the time Siavash eventually meets the spirit of his father through the ritual in *Doubt*, the spirit would instill in him the same vengeance that the ghost does in Hamlet, but that does not happen either. The spirit in

10

In Islam, Allah (God) has the right to enact holy vengeance on those that do evil, and the responsibility of this divine revenge falls on his faithful believers. This is why in the current geopolitical situation of Iran the Iranian government sees itself as faithful followers of Islam who must face the “evils” of the world such as Israel and the U.S. This sentiment is deeply different for most Iranians, especially in the recent decades, as there is a great rift between the people and the government. How the majority of Iranians think and act is vastly different from that of the Iranian government as many Iranians nowadays do not consider themselves as Muslims and do not follow the teachings of Islam, and they do not support the government. This great rift is evident in the recent revolts surrounding the death of Mahsa Amini because of forced *hijab* laws which resulted in the death of more than 1500 Iranians at the hands of the government with many more injured or arrested. Furthermore, in 2024 presidential elections the voter turnout rate was a historical low of only about 40 percent as reported by the Iranian government, a number that is considered by many to be most likely only around 20 percent and wrongly reported as much higher in a form of propaganda.

Doubt simply reassures what Siavash doubted, the fact that he did not commit suicide, but was rather murdered by his brother. He does not talk Siavash into murdering his uncle to exact revenge.

As extreme as it may seem when compared to Hamlet, Siavash never expresses any thoughts about murdering his uncle, so his famous soliloquy in which he contemplates vengeance or taking his own life never happens, at least from him. On the other hand, Siavash does seek to end his uncle's reign of corruption by talking to a police chief towards the end of the movie about bringing his uncle to justice for all the evil he has done, including the murder of his father.

The motive of revenge has not only vanished from the mind of the Hamlet figure of *Doubt*, but all the other characters as well. Laertes, for instance, is the ultimate downfall of Hamlet in the original play as he stabs him with a poisoned sword as an act of revenge for the death of his sister, Ophelia, who had gone mad and committed suicide after the death of her father who also died at Hamlet's hand. Danial in *Doubt* who is the movie's Laertes, is portrayed as a character suffering from down syndrome who is easily manipulated into trying to kill Siavash at the end by Siavash's uncle. This does not come to pass, however, in a cacophony of gunshots and violence, *Doubt* comes to a rather sudden conclusion when Danial goes on a senseless murderous rampage and shoots several people, including the Claudius figure, to death, but only manages to wound Siavash, before ultimately meeting his end in a car explosion. Again, revenge has no hand in his actions; they stem from Claudius and his corruptive influence.

The other notable seeker of revenge in *Hamlet*, Fortinbras, who wants to take back what his father had lost in battle, is absent as a character from *Doubt* as the movie takes the liberty of removing all political affairs from its narrative.

Another notable motif in *Hamlet* is the persistent presence of death, and how almost all major characters die beside a select few such as Horatio. This holds true for *Doubt* as well, although the second half of the movie takes a loose approach and there are clear differences.

The movie begins with Siavash's mind heavy with the shadow of his father's death, his mother still wearing black mourning

clothes, a cultural tradition in Iran and many countries around the world. As the movie progresses, the demise of characters seems and feels more imminent as the knowing audience would expect the characters who originally die in *Hamlet* to also perish in *Doubt*, but to the unknowing audience, the ending and the deaths come as a sudden shock.

Anvari (Polonius) falls to his death by an honest accident on Siavash's part, Mahtalat (Gertrude) hangs herself, Roozbehan (Claudius) and several others die to his own scheme, and Danial (Laertes) dies in a car explosion. But Siavash (Hamlet) and Mahtab (Ophelia) survive the ensuing chaos unlike in the original *Hamlet*. All the deaths are comparable to the original play in how bloody and gritty they are, and how they serve a function in showing the influence of corruption.

Corruption itself is a notable theme of *Hamlet*, as the young prince says "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" in act 1, scene 4 of the play, something and more is also rotten when it comes to Roozbehan (Claudius) and his control in *Doubt*. Although the themes of death and revenge are changed to varying degrees in *Doubt*, much like the original work they play a role in highlighting that the corruption of Claudius and his rule is the origin and stem of the everything that ensues.

V- The Role of Women in *Doubt*

When it comes to what has been changed most significantly in *Doubt* when compared with *Hamlet*, in terms of its social and cultural value for the Iranian audience, we cannot help but notice how the role of women is taken to new, seldom explored heights. This is especially worthy of note since Iran as a patriarchal Islamic society does not put women on the same pedestal as men but rather reserves the role of wives and mothers for them, forever bound to their husbands and fathers even for the simplest things.¹¹ Women in Iranian cinema, especially after the Islamic revolution, are exiles in disguise, forced to appear on the big screen with mandatory hijab, unable to act to the degree of freedom that male actors benefit

11

In Iran and many Islamic countries, women are legally bound to their fathers before marriage, and after marriage, to their husbands. This means that for many things, even simple ones such as trips abroad, they need their male guardian's consent to proceed. As previously mentioned in other notes, these notions are not shared by many Iranians as more turn their backs on the teachings of Islam.

from. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as well, true to the spirit of its Early Modern English era, women play marginal roles, clearly and devastatingly affected by the affairs of men who have much more control, power, and influence, while they are fragile, helpless, and dispensable. Ophelia and Gertrude follow this same pattern in *Hamlet*; at the end Gertrude drinks the poisoned wine and dies, and Ophelia goes mad after her father's death and drowns herself.

While Mahtalat, *Doubt's* Gertrude, is similar to her Hamletian counterpart, how she takes control of her end is worthy of praise. Many scholars believe that in *Hamlet*, Gertrude drinks poison out of her motherly duty to sacrifice herself and saves her son from dying, while another belief is that she had no idea the wine was poisoned and simply drank it to toast her son's performance in his bout and died accidentally. In both interpretations, Gertrude is a mother who drinks the wine not out of defiance, but in a sense of love and affection for her son.

In the case of Mahtalat, however, towards the end of *Doubt* she realizes Roozbehan's true nature and decides to take her life by hanging herself. This is either because she preferred death to being a part of her husband's corruption, or the possibility that she is driven mad by a sense of guilt for having married such a man. While in the second interpretation she seems a reflection of *Hamlet's* Ophelia when she drowns herself, in the first interpretation her character defies her gender roles as a mother and acts based on her individual views.

With Mahtab, her defiance against the patriarchal rule and refusal to submit to will of men around her is even bolder. As an example, when both Shahab and Garo are paralyzed into inaction by their impending doom, Mahtab is the only person who has the courage to spin them into trying to prevent their seemingly unstoppable demise. Upon hearing part of Hamlet's soliloquy, this time recited by Garo, she nonchalantly shuts down Garo's pseudo-philosophical thoughts and says to Garo: "Now I know why Hamlet gets killed, because he also has a friend like you who does nothing besides being a wet blanket!". She continues: "I will stop this tragedy! I will start directly with your dear uncle!".

To the knowing, Mahtab stands in stark contrast when compared

to Ophelia's character in *Hamlet* who succumbs to madness and does not benefit from the same prowess as Hamlet to withstand hardships. Ophelia does not benefit from Hamlet's mastery of role-playing; therefore, she cannot just play mad, she goes mad [Gorfain 1998, 162]. In *Doubt* Mahtab is a decisive, rational, and optimistic character who refuses to give up, does not surrender to the decision of men around her, and does not fall under the roles that the patriarchal and Islamic society of Iran has set for her. For the unknowing audience, this still holds true even if they do not have Ophelia in mind as a frame of comparison. Both types of audience can see and praise Mahtab for her courageous show of action while Siavash and Garo shudder in paralysis. On the other hand, the revolting and courageous nature of Mahtab would have not boded well with the more Islamic-minded audience as women are supposed to be subservient and docile, bowing to the will of their better and superior husbands. The Modern audience of today's Iran, especially the women who refuse to wear the mandatory hijab and express their opposition to the Islamic values based on how they dress, would certainly appreciate seeing Mahtab in *Doubt*. The transformative depiction of Ophelia in *Doubt* is perhaps the most important aspect of the movie because not only it serves as a literal and figurative symbol of women's rights, but it also refuses to reinforce the ideology of the Islamic Republic that men are in all senses, superior to women.

VI- The Importance of the Name of Siavash

Among all the character names in *Doubt*, the name "Siavash" has an immediate positive connotation for Iranians, mainly because it is the name of a mythical hero who appears in *Shahnameh (The Book of Kings)* by Ferdowsi, published around 1010. The tale goes that Siavash's stepmother, Sudabeh, who lusts after him, tries to seduce him into fornication but Siavash keeps refusing her repeated advances, threatening to report it to his father, King Kay Kavus. Sudabeh, who fears the king finding out about what she has tried to do, falsely accuses Siavash of rape. The king, in his fury, orders a

massive pyre of burning wood to be readied, and Siavash to be covered in holy but highly flammable camphor. The king orders that if Siavash is guilty, he shall perish in the fire, but if he is indeed innocent, he shall come out of the fire unscathed. Siavash's innocence is ultimately proven, and he does not die. This is significant as a reason for naming *Doubt's* Hamlet as Siavash, since it does give the Iranian audience a certain expectation that he is "the good guy".

This might also be the reason why Siavash is able to avoid his fate and does not die when Danial/Laertes shoots him. True to his namesake, Siavash in *Doubt* had his test of mettle in deciding to take revenge, or succumb to inaction, and as mentioned earlier, thoughts of revenge and murder do not even cross his mind.

VII- Conclusion

Looked at simply as an adaptation of *Hamlet*, one might take many issues with *Doubt*. How the characters do not line up with their original counterparts, how the pacing between the two parts of the movie is quite different, or how jarring it is to see both Hamlet and Ophelia alive at the end. A different look however, one that is not so old-fashioned and elitist, sees *Doubt* as a Shakespearean adaptation that accomplishes what it set out to do: to make *Hamlet* accessible for the Iranian audience, both the knowing who would recognize anything related to *Hamlet* at first glance, and the unknowing who at most only know *Hamlet* by name.

In exploring Siavash's chaotic mind, his hesitation, his uneasiness, and his quest for truth, the audience forgets that they are watching the lives of extremely rich Iranians, Siavash feels familiar and close, like any other person. The audience feels his pain for having lost his father, and for not wanting to accept his uncle as his stepfather. And at the end, when he does not succumb to the same fate as Hamlet, it solidifies their belief that Siavash's purity and his determination to not seek revenge through murder has saved him.

Mahtab on the other hand is the quintessential female character that all Iranian movies need, and although she is supposed to be the Ophelia to Siavash's Hamlet, she cannot be further apart from her

original character. She has what Siavash/Hamlet lacks the most: determination. She is determined to not lose Siavash, to not let her brother die, to stop the massacre, and to stop the tragedy, even if she does not manage to save all of them. At the same time, Mahtab serves as a role model for all the women in Iran who feel trapped in a cycle of social and religious gender roles that confine them to be subordinate wives, mothers, and daughters, without any real freedom or rights, and unable to break free. Mahtab breaks free of her roles and her fate set by Shakespeare courageously, refusing to go mad, refusing to obey, refusing to drown herself, be it in a large body of water, or in a patriarchal society.

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