

PERFORMING HAMLET IN MODERN IRAN

(1900 - 2012)

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Abstract

The interest in the reception of Shakespeare beyond the borders of Britain has always been great, and scholarly writings on the issue have been very extensive. However, there are very few research projects focusing on the aspects of this reception in a country with a totally different cultural, political and social setting. It is well known to scholars in performance studies that local context could strongly influence a play's staging and interpretation. The socio-political situation and the influence of the dominant political powers on art are among the most decisive determinants of the context. When in 1932 the Shah invited a Russian-Armenian Hamlet to perform on stage in Iran, intellectuals and reformists attached great expectations to a "Hamlet" performance as a vehicle for fostering progress of modern theatre and facilitating modernisation. In the meantime, the state, as mobiliser of this phenomenon into the country, had its own political intentions. Since that date any production of "Hamlet" deals with a dynamic cultural and social exchange. This research aims at investigating this cultural mobility and its effect in the history of modern Iran. Iran is a country with a century-long history of performing "Hamlet" under three different authoritarian political regimes. The research tries to

find out why Western theatre had always been an important and critical subject for Iran's political systems, and what happened to "Hamlet" while passing cultural borders and dealing with impediments of the destination country.

The evolution of Western drama from the cycles of mystery and miracle plays is well known. Less well understood is the parallel development in Iran. By the late 19th century, the mystery play, "Taziya" was on the brink of giving birth to a secular Iranian drama. However, due to the turbulent history of the Constitutional Revolution at the beginning of the 20th century and the fundamental social and political changes in the big towns of Iran, "Taziya" lost royal and upper-class patronage. From the middle of the 19th century onward, the production of Western dramas was encouraged. Iranians had their first glimpse at Shakespeare through a translation of "The Taming of the Shrew" in 1900, and since then Shakespeare absorbed significant attention of Iranian elites who presumed theatre as the best instrument for importing modern culture to Iranian society. Shakespeare's importance in view of the Constitutional Revolution is, to some extent, that this constitutional period can be called Shakespeare period. Among all of Shakespeare's translated works, "Hamlet" received the widest attention in modern Iranian theatre.

The victory of the Islamic Revolution was followed by enthusiastic efforts aimed at transforming this very Western art

of drama, into a fully local form of art based on the new revolutionary culture and values. There is no doubt that every major social event, particularly cultural and political revolutions are followed by their own specific culture, literature and art. After the initial onset of the Islamic Revolution, more Farsi translations and adaptations of “Hamlet” have appeared than of any other Shakespeare's works. Hamlet's nature, as persona, is of such fluidity that it enables him to conform to diverse circumstances. With significant growth in the use of symbolism and signs in theatrical performances, “Hamlet” turned out to perform as the best metaphor of the current situation. With the help of a descriptive research method my research tries to clarify the circulation of “Hamlet” from text to performance on Iranian stages and the role of agencies in this transportation. Based on qualitative data collection, interviews and analysis of the theory of cultural mobility and semiotics, four effective elements are being analysed: Religion, Power, Gender and Agency. The research will be narrowed by Case Study of nine highly relevant “Hamlet” productions in the historical epoch of 1900 to 2012.

TO

Prof. Dr. Peter Stähelin

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	7
To the Land of Sophis	10
Back with the Thieves of Mercy	27
Chapter 2: Effects of Religion - "Saw? Who?"	39
Chapter 3: Effects of Power - "Something is rotten in the state..."	88
Chapter 4: Effects of Gender - "I think nothing, my lord"	147
Chapter 5: Effects of Agency - "Speak the Speech"	226
Chapter 6: Conclusion - "To Be or Not to Be"	261
Appendix	267
Bibliography	285

List of Illustrations:

Figure 1: An Iranian Naqqali performance (Story telling)	268
Figure 2: Iranian Moqalleds play in Kheymeh Shab Bazi theatre.	268
Figure 3: Siyavash (Hamlet) in a scene of Tardid movie, Director: Varuzh Karim Masihi.	269
Figure 4: A Gowati Ritual in Baluchistan	269
Figure 5: the director and Actor of “Fire Keeper” Movie with Yoricks Skull on the Cover of a Film Magazine.	270
Figure 6: The scene of Chase in “Fire keeper” movie; Sohrab (Hamlet) Running away from his horse riding Father	271
Figure 7: Map of Persia- Qajar Era	272
Figure 8: Takiyeh-Dowlat	273
Figure 9: Young Actor Vahram Papazian poses with Yoricks Skull.	274

Figure 10: Palace Cinema and Hotel-Pahlavi Era	274
Figure 11: Actresses of a Female Passion Play (Taziyeh Zananeh)- Qajar Era	275
Figure 12: A Group photo of missionaries with their wives- Tehran.	276
Figure 13: Atabak Palace and Park	277
Figure 14: An still photo of Sa'di theatre performers in a scene of “Lady Windermere's Fan” play.	278
Figure 15: A picture of “Hamlet” directed by Reza Gouran- 2012.	279
Figure 16: Poster of “Pig/Child/Fire” Published for Shiraz festival of Arts-1977.	280
Figure 17: Poster Of “Hamlet” directed by Asgar quds and Hamid liqvani- November 1987.	281
Figure 18: Hamlet came back from honeymoon, in “Hamlet Seasonal Salad” directed by Hadi Marzban- April 1991.	282
Figure 19: Shiva Ebrahimi as Gertrude in “Hamlet” directed by majid Djafari-November 2002	283

Figure 20: Afshin Hashemi in “Hamlet the prince of grief”

directed by Mohammad Aghebati.

284

Chapter 1: Introduction

In Scene two of Act three, Hamlet clarifies theatre's purpose to a group of performers:

"...Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

Hamlet is trying with all his means to hold a mirror to the State of Denmark and force it to face the truth. During the play of *Hamlet*, Denmark is going through some remarkable changes as the regime shifts from *Hamlet's* Senior's reign to Claudius. One of the primary shifts is toward a multi-layered political domination. Hamlet is struggling with different layers of a totalitarian monarchy; developing a spy network, inversion of reality, seed of dissent, physical elimination of opponents and lack of freedom of speech. This society is not so different from the one in the history of modern

Iran; a country, in which Western theatre played a major role in terms of its cultural and political modernization. Analogous to Hamlet, Iranian intellectuals strongly believed in the power of theatre. Modern theatre was imported as a cultural commodity to function as a tool of refinement, the dissemination of ethics, imposing modern social moralities, modernisation and democracy.

Iranian intellectuals' faith in theatre as a vehicle for promoting democracy, gave a decisive political and social role to Western theatre. The Greeks invented both, democracy and theatre, together with a political theory, which retrospectively is called "Theatrocracy", to conceptualise relations between the other two. Plato's inter-locking critiques of democracy and drama formulated a general intuition, according to which theatre played a central role in the political life of the democratic city. During the Iranian Constitutional Revolution¹ (1905-1911) theatre was imported and mobilised to the cultural scene of Iran. "Theatrocracy" starts in Iran, at this decisive point of Iran's history. The Constitutional Revolution also marks the beginning of social activities aimed at (social and economic) modernisation. During this constitutional movement, theatre was at the forefront of integration policies. In fact, Western theatre was mobilised to Iran because of constitutional movements. This leading role can be explained by a made-up term: "Theatrocracy".

The term “Theatrocracy” is the absolute rule of the Athenian democracy, exercised in the form of mass meetings in the theatre. Jacques Rancière’s theory is based on theatrical presence of people in public space; this is exactly the base of what I mean by “Theatrocracy in the Constitutional era”. Looking back into the history, there remains no doubt on the particularly political atmosphere of that period. And this political aspect is important because we interpret it, as a social partnership out of official will. Alain Badiou explains:

“An event is political if the subject of this event is collective, or if the event is not attributable to anything other than the multiplicity of a collective. “Collective” is not a numerical concept here. We say that the event is ontologically collective, inasmuch as this event conveys a virtual requirement of the all. “Collective” is immediately universalizing. The effectiveness of the political emerges from the assertion, according to which, “for every x, there is a thought.”²

This collection, this gathering in new places with new functions, this propensity toward protest, needed an aesthetic form and that was theatre. Drama by its nature is a production of a society as a whole, without any flaw; little by little the institutions within determine their independence and beginning. Even if we reject the argument that theatre was instituted, fostered and performed during the constitutional movement because of politics, or disregard Rancier’s argument and refute the claim that “Theatrocracy” came about during the

Constitutional era, there are still several political reasons for drama's emergence at this point in history. Western drama had a critical character and drama was a proper medium for mirroring a revolutionary, politically critical situation in Iran's history. Western drama was physically imported through the northern borders of Persia. That moment of passing through real geographical borders is the point at which I shall start tracking theatre's cultural mobility.

The fact, that for several years, Iranian intellectuals had put so much hope on the democratic implications of Western theatre, and its effects on the cultural and political scene could be analysed on the basis of cultural studies and, specifically, the "cultural mobility theory" by Stephan Greenblatt:

*"This mobility is not the expression of Random motion but of exchange. A culture is a particular network of negotiations for the exchange of material goods, ideas, and- through institutions like enslavement, adoption, or marriage- People ... Great Writers are precisely ... specialists in cultural exchange. The works they create are structures for accumulation, transformation, representation, and communication of social energies and practices... They take symbolic materials from one zone of the culture and move them to another, augmenting their emotional force, altering their significance, linking them with other materials taken from a different zone, changing their place in a larger social design."*³

To the Land of Sophis

Throughout history, Persians freely adopted aspects of other cultures. However, their adaptations were a creative process. They initiated a dialogue with the source culture and the outcome was a unique cross-cultural product. Indeed, an eclectic cultural elasticity has been said to be one of the key defining characteristics of the Persian spirit and a clue to its historic longevity.

Mīrzā Fath-Ālī Ākūndzāda (1812-1878), an Iranian elite, playwright, philosopher and the founder of modern literary criticism had a great effect on modern Persian drama. He is the first Iranian playwright, who is known as the Iranian-Azerbaijani Molière. *Ākūndzāda* emphasizes the importance of Western theatre and playwrights in a letter to *Mirza Āqā Tābrizi*:

“...Moliere and Shakespeare deserve a bow.”⁴

He understood the social essence of theatre and its role in reforming civic habits:

“One should build foreign style theatres in Iran instead of Tāziya Halls.”

Ākūndzāda had a great effect with regard to Shakespeare’s introduction to Iranians. Born and raised in Iran and immigrated to Azerbaijan, he wrote his plays in Turkish. Six Molièresque comedies of him were published in a Caucasus newspaper in 1851-56. Those plays not only taught Iranian writers the structure of modern

theatre but also encouraged them to write plays with local themes in Persian. His ideal theatre was one which demonstrates social responsibility; in his point of view a play should have been critical about social corruption and teach morality to its audience-readers.

His educational notes on drama to *Mirza Āqā Tābrizi* have been a crucial educational source for Iranian intellectuals to understand the structure of non-traditional text-based theatre. Previously, Iranians had only a visual and vague reception of drama due to their visits to Europe or a few partially translated plays. Most visits were to France, England or Russia. St. Petersburg in Tsarist Russia was a common destination for most Iranian intellectuals and royals. Furthermore, Russia performed as a connecting bridge between Iran and Europe. In the 18th and 19th century Shakespeare plays were performed often in Russian theatre halls, and Iranian tourists grabbed the chance to attend some of those performances.

According to archived documents of theatre and literature in the Mashruteh Era⁵, it is obvious that Shakespeare attracted wide attention. The (social) elite's propensity for translating and performing Shakespeare plays was so strong during the Constitutional era (1905-1907), that this epoch is mentioned as "Shakespeare era" or "The Age of Shakespeare". During the Qajar monarchy, Iranian elites were already familiar with Shakespeare and the playwright's name appeared in several newspapers. *Yusef Etesami* (known as *Etesam al-Mulk*) dedicated a complete edition of

the Bahar newspaper to the introduction of Shakespeare to its Iranian readers. This was the first Iranian encyclopaedia on Shakespeare containing an extra introduction to drama and its different genres. He also translated selected parts of “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” and “*Macbeth*”, which he published at the end of the article. The first complete Farsi translation of a Shakespearean play was published in 1900: “*The Taming of the Shrew*” by Hossein-Qoli Mirza Salur. His source was a French version of the play and he did not compare it to the original English text. A few years later, *Abul-qasem Khan Qaragozlou (Nasser al-Mulk)* translated two Shakespeare plays from their original English text. *Nasser al-Mulk* was the first Iranian student at Oxford University and he learned English from a private tutor in England.

One evening, enjoying a friendly gathering with other London-based Iranians, a member of the community mentioned Shakespeare and his greatness in world dramatic literature. One of the attending colleagues stated that translating the masterpieces of Shakespeare into Persian was beyond the bounds of possibility. He believed that the apparent structural contrast between the two languages and cultures would make this a “mission impossible”. *Abul-qasem-Khan* refuted the claim, and, to prove him wrong, he began to translate some lines of “*Othello*” -a play he had picked up randomly from the bookshelf. Hence, an evening conversation with good friends prompted *Abul-qasem-Khan* to translate the whole play

during his retirement. The manuscript of the translation was ready in 1914. During his stay in Europe, *Nasser al-Mulk* edited and revised the translation several times, and it was finally published in 1917 in the wake of World War I in Paris. After translating “Othello”, he rendered the whole text of “The Merchant of Venice” into Persian and copied it in his own handwriting after several revisions in 1917. The ultimate version was masterfully bound and illustrated with watercolour vignettes by his daughter, *Fatemeh Ala*. A century later, in 2008, this edition was finally published in Iran for the first time.⁶ *Nasser al-Mulk* passed away in 1927, just five years before Hamlet’s first appearance on Iranian public theatre stages.

Shakespeare is the most performed playwright in the world at large.⁷ Among his plays, “Hamlet” is the most popular play that has been appropriated for centuries in several countries. Shakespeare plays easily cross national and linguistic boundaries. Through this journey, the play faces linguistic translations, cultural adaptations and in some cases adjustments to comply with the ideological policies of its ultimate destination. It is impossible to ignore the play’s worldwide importance. *Dennis Kennedy’s* “Shakespeare without his Language” clarifies how important it is to have an “intercultural” approach to Shakespeare plays, in connection with appropriations in languages other than English “*to understand what happens when Shakespeare travels abroad.*”⁸ *Kennedy* believes this task is the most important one Shakespeareans face. Surprisingly,

this task has been neglected by Shakespeareans and scholars of performance studies, in the case of “Persia-Iran”.

Shakespeare mentioned Persia in five of his plays and refers to Iran as the "Land of the Sophy". Elizabethan England was especially fascinated by Persia, whose deep-rooted culture was then flourishing under the Safavid dynasty (1502). An Englishman first visited Persia in 1562, two years before Shakespeare's birth. More contacts between England and Persia followed, prompted by hopes of a lucrative trading relationship and a possible military alliance against the Ottoman Empire. A pair of English adventurers, *Anthony* and *Robert Sherley*, spent years attempting to establish these ties, not always scrupulously, and their story was well known to England's greatest dramatist. *Abbas Milani*, a well-known professor of Iranian Studies refers to this fact in his speech:

“If we had time, we could talk of the unusually large number of invariably favourable references to Persia in Shakespeare's poems and plays. You might have been surprised to learn that Shakespeare was familiar with the writings of the Sherley Brothers and other English travellers to Persia. It was probably the reports of these brothers that led Shakespeare to equate Persia, the land of the Sophy, with luxury, lavishness and beauty.”⁹

“Hamlet” has been one of the first foreign performances that formed a multi-cultural theatre event in Iran (1932). Among Shakespeare plays, “Hamlet” is the most frequently translated play in Persian. However, it took more than two centuries for Iranians to

even become aware of Shakespeare's existence. As mentioned before, Shakespearean drama was introduced in Persia-Iran during the Constitution era through translations and individuals' trips to the West.

Mirza Saleh Shirazi, a young Iranian student and subsequently envoy in England (1815 - 1823), was the first one who mentioned Shakespeare as a great English playwright in his memoirs¹⁰. This was probably the first encounter of Iranian intellectuals with Shakespeare's name. Although Iranians had been introduced to Shakespeare very late, the fact that Shakespeare was ahead of his time, and even ahead of our present time, reduces the negative effects of this delay. In order to find out what happens in the process and aftermath of this cultural-mobility, the quality of the first introductions are more important than the reason for its delay.

Who was the Shakespeare whom Iranian intellectuals introduced to Iran's theatre scene? What brought "Hamlet" to Iran? Where and when did this mobilisation happen? What happens to "Hamlet" in a country in another continent with a totally different cultural background? Is there an "Iranian Hamlet"? Ever since the 17th century Shakespeare has been appropriated and re-appropriated to serve the changing political objectives across the world. What are the characteristics of the Iranians' appropriation of "Hamlet"? This thesis tries to define and answer these questions and paint a portrait of the contemporary "Persian Hamlet". It may come as a

surprise that this dissertation is the first one of its kind that tries to complete this important task.

Language can be a reason for the play's late introduction in Persia-Iran. Shakespeareans who are mostly based in the English literary tradition are not usually familiar with the intricacies of the Persian language. Unfortunately, there are very few published English sources on the theatre history of Iran. Furthermore, most adapted texts from "*Hamlet*" and local performances are not translated into any other widely spoken languages of the world. Although Iranian literary scholars showed interest in analysing translations of "Hamlet"¹¹, they never approached it as a cross-cultural performative text. This may be due to the lacking insights in the area of performance and cultural studies. The fact that Iranian scholars are more engaged in and busy with the crucial task of introducing Western analytical treatises to their students leaves little or no time for an intercultural approach.

Furthermore, the arguments related to the foreign Shakespeare "Reception History" have not adequately addressed and analysed the performances of his plays in countries with a different religious background. There is also an almost pandemic perception that drama is neither a live cultural text and nor a desired medium in Islamic countries. *Dennis Kennedy* mentions this misconception in his "*Shakespeare without his language*":

*“Any approach to Shakespeare that enquires about his prevalence in world culture is obliged to notice that he is not valued everywhere. Claims of Shakespeare’s universality cannot be substantiated, at least on a literal level, since there are numerous areas in which he is not read, performed, or studied with enthusiasm: by the enormous populations of the Islamic countries, for instance (where no dramatist is highly valued, though poets certainly are), in much of south-east Asia, in most of Africa.”*¹²

On the other hand, *Margaret Litvin* shows in her remarkable and unique book *“Hamlet’s Arab Journey”* that there exists a reception history of Shakespeare and, in particular of *“Hamlet”* performances, in Arab countries - mostly with Islam as their official religion. She shows *“Hamlet’s”* socio-political effectiveness in the Arab world and makes us familiar with the Hamlet persona Arabs have appropriated. Similarly, *Kennedy’s* argument does not reflect the Iranian performance history, especially in Persia with its long history of theatre and dramatic performances.

The evolution of Western drama inspired by the Oriental tradition of mystery and miracle plays is well known. Less well understood is the parallel development in Iran. The Persian theatre tradition goes back to antiquity (641-1000 BC). Religious plays, performative rituals, humorous satirical skits were performed all over Persia and have been a major part of its culture. Archaeological artefacts, such as figurines, seals and stamps from Western Iran dating to late 4000 BC in the Brooklyn Museum and the Albright Art

Gallery are also thought to represent mythical sorcerers playing the part of animals or humanised animals. It is also possible, that they were masked actors, who served as Iran's earliest entertainers.

Herodotus mentions "The Feast of Magophonia" as a celebration in memory of a general massacre of Magi¹³ in 522 BC. Between the third and seventh centuries AD, buffoons, musicians and dancers were an Integral part of public entertainment. Later on, Naqqali¹⁴(Figure No.1), the story- telling tradition, was well known in the sphere of public entertainment. Tales of epic legends and romances were performed with the aid of pantomime, hand gestures and a painted curtain hanging in front of the audiences. There is evidence of other public performative rituals during pre-Islamic Iran such as "The Ride of the Beardless Man", "Day beh mehr" (Day of Idols), "Mir-e Nowrouzi" (The Prince of the New Year), "Kin-e Siyavosh" (Revenge of Siyavosh). It is believed that "Kin-e Siyavosh" was later adapted to post-Islamic rituals to give birth to Tazīya.¹⁵

Tazīya, is a world-known Iranian traditional theatre. During the Safavid monarchy (1501 - 1736), the powerful Muslim dynasty of Persia, religious plays such as Tazīya had the privilege of receiving the state's support in every aspect. In fact, the development of this play in areas with a Shi'ite population, i.e. in Iraq, Syria, parts of Lebanon and Afghanistan, was due to the support from the Safavid dynasty in the 16th century. Tazīya is a form of Islamic passion play and a religious drama. This Shi'ite dramatic performance is a

mourning ritual commemorating the Shi'ite holy martyrs in Karbala. The Safavids gave Taziya a central position in the cultural and religious identity of Persians and found it an effective media to propagate their opposition to the Sunni hegemony and especially the Ottoman Empire. Taziya dialogues are written in verse and it is the only written form of Persian traditional theatre. There exists a tradition of performing comedy and indigenous plays in various celebrations and wedding ceremonies. "Baqqāl-bāzī", "rūḥawzmī" or "taḵht-ḥawzī" and "sīāh-bāzī" (in which the central comedian appears in blackface) are an important part of the Iranian popular culture. Professional groups of puppet players were touring all over the country to perform "ḵhīāl-bāzī" (shadow play), "ḵhayma-šab-bāzī"¹⁶ (marionette show) (Figure No.2), and "arūsak-bāzī" or "arūsak-e pošt-e parda" (shadow play). Most of these plays had fixed characters (with similarities to the characters' personae in the Commedia dell'arte) and contain domestic quarrels, conflicts about love and encounters between members of lower and upper classes. One can find traces of Shakespeare's *"Romeo and Juliet"* tragedy in those plots during the Pahlavi era (1925 – 1979). Without any text, performers were used to following standard plots and improvising during the performance.

In the 18th century, traveling to Europe, specifically France, Russia and Great Britain, became a habit of every Qajar king (1785 – 1925). The Qajars were interested in communicating with Western

countries. Their foreign visits awakened their passion for modernism and progress. The court thus decided to send young talented men to the more progressive European countries in order to learn military skills, technology and language. Iranian students sent to Europe came back to Iran with a strong interest in Western culture and life-style. They found theatre to be a beneficial and intellectually educational public entertainment. Molière and Shakespeare plays were translated to Persian and published in the recently established governmental print offices of the period. The texts of the plays were subject to more complex process - more than a simple translation; they were adapted and appropriated to their new destination's culture. Plays were simplified, Persianised, and local proverbs and stories were incorporated. Through this process, characters, names, places and personalities were appropriated in such a way that the text was ultimately more Persian than a simple translation would have been.

From the middle of the 19th century onward, the production of Western drama was encouraged. Following the Qajar ruler *Nasir al-Din Shah's* (1848 – 1896) and his entourage's extensive travels in Europe, a theatre hall was established at the local polytechnic in Tehran. In this early period, Iranians merely adapted French plays, mostly by Molière. The audience consisted chiefly of the members of the court. Iranians got their first glimpse of Shakespeare plays through a translation of "The Taming of the Shrew" in 1900, and

since then Shakespeare absorbed considerable attention of Iranian elites who presumed theatre to be the best instrument to introduce modern Western culture into Iranian society. Among all of Shakespeare's translated works, "*Hamlet*" received the broadest attention.

During the last years of Qajar rule, attending theatres and reading plays in newspapers became a common popular habit. Audiences had the chance to choose between musical comedies, adapted texts, serious critical dramas, traditional plays and Tazīya.

By the late 19th century, the mystery play, Tazīya was on the brink of giving birth to a secular Iranian drama. However, due to the turbulent history of the Constitutional Revolution at the beginning of the 20th century, Tazīya lost its royal and upper-class patronage. The successful conversion of religious ritual drama into secular drama was thwarted for two reasons: firstly, the intellectual elites considered Tazīya to be a backward superstition-ridden ritual, and secondly, they were far more attracted to Western-style theatre.

State corruption, the democratic intention of the opponents and the heavy financial debts the Qajar monarchs owed to European countries facilitated the fall of the Qajar dynasty and the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty. When *Reza Khan*, a former Cossack, took the power in the early 1920s, he followed his passion for Westernising and modernising the country. Promoting modern

Western theatre was part of his nationalistic cultural plan. One of his first actions was a ban on Tazieh, claiming its content and rituals to be backwardly.

He invited foreign theatre groups and companies to perform in Iran and helped professional Iranian theatre activists to establish the National Theatre. However, in the ensuing years the government's autocratic policies proved to be an obstacle for Iranian theatre. The government started a strict censorship on every play and specifically censored and prohibited staging plays that were assumed to be critical of the regime. "*Hamlet*" was the number one in the blacklist.

A century ago, in 1932, when a Soviet-Armenian Hamlet put his first steps on the stage of an Iranian theatre, the state censorship agencies tried to appropriate it in such a way that it would function as a collaborator for the dominant regime. This particular, thoroughly multi-cultural, performance of "Hamlet" failed to fulfil the demands of the ruling power. As a result, "Hamlet" faced extreme resistance for more than half a century.

Since *Reza Shah's* ambitions for modernising Iran needed strong nationalistic emotions, only plays glorifying pre-Islamic Persia or containing nationalistic themes were supported by the Pahlavi government. Most theatre groups had a supportive and compliant attitude toward this suppression; there were, however, small groups

and some famous dramatists, who criticized the Shah's forced modernisation efforts in their theatre productions. Of course, consequences to their resistance were inevitable. It is not surprising that the authoritarian monarch fell in love with another contemporary dictator. Accordingly, *Reza Shah* imported hundreds of German technicians and advisors for new modern projects. *Reza Shah* tried to show his admiration for Hitler by highlighting the Aryan race of Persians. He even went so far as to change the country's name from Persia to Iran.

*"In 1935, at the suggestion of Persia's misguided Ambassador to Nazi Germany, the country's name was changed to Iran. That was the heyday of Aryan supremacy and the word Iran literally means <land of the Aryans>."*¹⁷

This admiration for Hitler resulted in the production of plays showcasing Iran's ancient Persian glory and of Schiller's plays.

During World War II, *Reza Shah* showed great empathy with Hitler. In fact, Germany was Iran's largest trading partner. Although Iran remained neutral, the country enjoyed a strategically prominent status. The Allies decided to cross Iranian borders in order to supply the Soviet forces. The king tried to resist for a while, refusing the Allies' requests to expel German nationals residing in Iran, and denying the Allies the use of Iranian railways. Consequently, the Anglo-Soviet forces occupied Iran in August 1941. Finally, *Reza*

Shah was forced to abdicate and subsequently exiled to South Africa, where he died a few years later.

Initially, this monarch and his nationalistic propaganda enjoyed the support of a middle-class majority, largely due to his efforts in stabilising the social structure, and society at large was hopeful that the reforms could eventually lead to the establishment of a future Republican form of government. However, creative and critical productions, even if it was not directly aimed at the regime, was suppressed from the beginning of the 1930ies. When in 1941 the Allies occupied Iran, the King was largely isolated and none of the social circles of influence had a favourable view of him. His fall was eagerly awaited for a considerable period of time.

To this end, *Mohammad-Reza Shah*, his oldest son, was put on the throne. The influence of *Mohammad-Reza Shah's* studies in Switzerland and the propensity of the colonial forces for a democratic monarchy resulted in a decade of relative political and cultural freedom. Several theatre halls were opened and, once again, Iran became the scene of "theatrocracy". The open atmosphere paved the way for the comeback of the "Merchant of Venice" and "Othello" on Iranian stages. The former Soviet director's interest in Shakespeare had its effects on the Iranian Communist director *Abdulhossein Nushin*.

Unfortunately, this sort of safe haven did not last very long: *Mohammad-Reza Shah's* fear of losing power and control converted him to another autocratic monarch. Meanwhile, British and American concerns about nationalistic and communist tendencies among Iranian elites led to further cultural oppression. In 1948, the Tudeh party, the Iranian Communist party, was banned and its leading members, including *Nushin*, known as the father of Iran's modern theatre culture, were imprisoned. In the ensuing years, theatre halls were either forced to close or burned by populist supporters of the monarch.

The situation remained unchanged until the 1960ies when the Department of Fine Arts decided to invest part of its increased budget¹⁸ in drama. Several drama schools were founded and foreign teachers were invited to improve the artistic skills and dramatic knowledge of theatre students. *Patrick Quinby* of Bowdoin College in Maine was invited two times to teach drama at the University of Tehran. Classic European plays, including William Shakespeare's "The taming of the Shrew" were translated and staged by a group of students. A new wave of playwriting started, although most of them glorified nationalistic topics. Traditional drama, such as *Taziah*, was promoted as a touristic attraction and folk epics, and stories were performed embracing Western dramaturgy. It seems that "*Hamlet*" was still on the boat on the way to his death, since one can find no

trace of any public and official “Hamlet” performance by Iranian theatre groups in those years.

On the other hand, a highlight of world theatrical events in the history of the Iranian theatre tradition was initiated in 1967: the annual “Arts Festival of Shiraz”. Under the auspices of *Queen Farah Pahlavi* several talented foreign artists who were thought to have a bright future together with well-known theatre companies were invited and well remunerated for staging extremely experimental productions. The festival was held for eleven years and a whole generation of talented Iranian playwrights were encouraged and supported by the festival. When foreign theatre groups were encouraged and financed to mobilise their theatre culture in Iran, Iranian theatre groups came under pressure and reacted with considerable resistance against any adaptation of “Hamlet”. Ultimately, and despite considerable objection, this cultural event brought a number of experimental and post-modern theatre productions to Iran.

With the onset of the Iranian Revolution in 1978, the 12th “Shiraz Arts Festival” was cancelled – out of concern for the safety of the performers. The political repression of the Shah government and social discontent led to a popular uprising in 1978-79 resulting in the toppling of the Pahlavi dynasty in April 1, 1979. The Shah, suffering from cancer, fled the country even before the fall of the army.

The Iranian Revolution is also known as Islamic Revolution because it led to the establishment of the State of the Islamic Republic.

Back with the Thieves of Mercy

As a consequence of the emergence of the Islamic Republic, revolutionary playwrights dominated the stage. They either sympathised with the Communist party, which felt the duty to highlight social issues or Islamic thoughts, serving the purpose of promoting their Islamic State utopia through ideological performances. For at least a year, the theatre scene became a live scene of dialogue and debate between different political parties and revolutionaries. Once again, “theatrocracy” was revitalized. Unfortunately, democracy went into eclipse with the beginning of the Iran-Iraqi war, providing a solid legitimation of the Islamic state and empowered it to purify the cultural scene from what the ruling clergy called “imperialist culture”. The Islamic Cultural Revolution (1980 – 1987) thus led to the obliteration of an open Iranian Arts scene. “*Hamlet*” was kept off the stage for a few years on account of restrictions applied to the publication of any foreign texts. However, this also fostered a significant growth in the use of symbols and signs in theatrical performances; directors remembered the potential of “*Hamlet*” as the best metaphor for the prevailing corrupt situation. The long list of adapted plays that were written on the “*Hamlet*” theme, and the “*Hamlet*” performances in the seven years

following the Islamic Revolution, highlight the eminent role of the “*Hamlet*” metaphor.

With this brief history of theatre in modern Iran, it is clear that the most significant contact zones of cultural mobility emerge after revolutions, fundamental reforms or political crises. Based on this finding, I have chosen these critical epochs of history as the cornerstones of my research:

1. The Constitutional Revolution, 1905
2. The rise of *Reza Shah*, founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty, 1925
3. The Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran, with *Reza Shah*'s abdication, 1941
4. The White Revolution, 1963
5. The Iranian Revolution, 1979
6. The Islamic Cultural Revolution in connection with the Iran-Iraqi war, 1980-1983
7. The Iranian Reform Movement, 1997
8. The Green Movement, 2009

However, the chapters of this dissertation are not aligned to these historical epochs. Since influential elements on “*Hamlet*”'s appropriation recurred periodically, the relevant analyses are divided into four main chapters in line with the effective cultural

developments. The artistic interpreter would have to decide how he/she would like to appropriate the text. The interpretation is influenced by art, culture, politics, gender and knowledge about Shakespeare and his plays. In general, local circumstances and the receiver's agency has an enormous effect on the text appropriation.

Each case study is anchored in a different historical epoch. My intention is to build a clear picture of Iranian performative culture through "Hamlet" productions and its mobilisation.

As Jan Kott wrote:

*"There are many subjects in Hamlet. There is politics, force opposed, to morality there is discussion of the divergence between theory and practice, on the ultimate purpose of life; there is the tragedy of love, as well as family drama; political, eschatological and metaphysical problems are considered. There is everything you want, including depth-psychological analysis, a blood story, a duel, - and general slaughter, one can select at will but one must know what one selects, and why. Hamlet is like a sponge. .. it immediately absorbs all the problems of our time."*¹⁹

The research aims at identifying the Iranian readers' response to "Hamlet's" multi-layered text. Simultaneously, the outcome of cultural interaction between the Iranian theatre society and "Hamlet" in different socio-political situations is analysed. The question of which themes were of great concern and the arguments leading to their selection is also addressed. The research tries to

determine what shape “Hamlet” assumes in the path of to his journey through modern Iran?

The focus of this research is on “Hamlet’s” theatricality: the intercultural encounter of text and director and the communication between actors and audience. It seems clear that what shapes a community’s engagement with a foreign text are the specific talents and circumstances of local theatre-makers and their audiences. A set of questions is provided to investigate the nature of the cultural encounter of the original Hamlet persona with different Iranian appropriations thereof. The research focuses on analysing the process of this cultural mobility with the help of theories emanating from the field of “Cultural Studies”; different critical theories are thus being applied in each chapter. These critical and analytical approaches help to discover which social, political and cultural circumstances have imposed changes on the perception/interpretation of the Hamlet persona, and what does an appropriated Hamlet reveal about the atmosphere of its relevant time-span. Why did directors choose or not choose “Hamlet” as a metaphor for mirroring their own manifesto?

This research was never intended to focus on “Hamlet’s” text in a literal manner, but it is not possible to neglect the importance of translators as the very first mobilisers of “Hamlet”. What happens in the process of this transformation? What is its literal and theatrical effect on the reception of “Hamlet” performances in Iran? Even a

native English speaker may face difficulties in understanding Shakespeare's language and decoding the text. How do Iranian translators solve this issue? It is with the help of their linguistic transformation and professional skills that Iranian readers can open the secret doors to "*Hamlet's*" world.

In Chapter I, "Saw? Who", I try to show that there were instances in which Iranian translators may not have had the correct keys. Fundamental differences in the religious backgrounds of writers and translators play an important role in this matter. To examine such cultural differences, two contemporary film adaptations of "*Hamlet*" are being elaborated: "*Doubt*" directed by *Varuzh Karim Masihi* and "*Firekeeper*" by *Mohsen Amir Yusefi*.

Chapter II explores research in connection with political surveys. The function of power and its encounter with "*Hamlet*" is being investigated under "*Something is rotten in the state—...*". Hamlet is living in a totalitarian monarchy, Claudius is not a legitimate leader and the state is corrupted and gradually weakened under his influence. Iranians with 100 years of autocratic and totalitarian leaderships have experienced similar situations. What is the reaction of power to such representations of a monarch? If there is a constraint, how do individual agencies react to it? The first performance of "*Hamlet*" in Iran, directed by *Vahram Papazian*, is a good example in this case.

The effect of gender policies and, in particular Women representation on stage, is the central issue of Chapter III. Ophelia's representation on stage and its Iranian appropriations can help us to discover women's performative situation in Iran's society. "Hamlet Reza Gouran", a contemporary theatre adaptation of Hamlet with Ophelia as its main character is chosen for this discussion. Finally deciding on Fortinbras's presence or absence on stage, will lead us to our conclusion. The conclusion will reflect aspects of "Hamlet's" cultural mobility to Iran.

Does Hamlet's madness function for lucidity under the circumstances of living under the surveillance of a totalitarian power? Was the option of "theatre-in-theatre" or of the fool used for expressing condemnable opinions that the Iranian director disavows? Is there a chance for the individual artists to act as an agent and "*speak the speech*" through a political appropriation of *Hamlet*? This reception and its probability are being examined in Chapter IV. Analysing Post Iranian revolution through five theatre productions of "*Hamlet*" might help us find an answer to the above questions.

The study aims at exploring the following questions:

1. Where and how do Shakespeare's plays reach Iranian directors? What happens to "Hamlet" in the transfer of text to performance on Iranian stages?

2. What are the circumstances of the ultimate destinations in this act of mobility and what were the interactions between Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and the Iranian theatre and cultural traditions?
3. Are the contents of "Hamlet"-the play, contradictory to its recipients' cultural background and how does "Hamlet" adjust to its new context, and what is the role of agents in this cultural transportation?

The research is done with a descriptive research method and tries to answer the above-mentioned questions through qualitative data collection and documentary analysis based on Cultural Studies theories with a central focus on the Cultural Mobility theory by *Stephen Greenblatt* and the use of other related theories such as Translation Studies, Cultural Materialism, Gender Studies and Semiotics of Theatre. The research is narrowed down by analysing six theatre productions of the "Hamlet" topic. These case studies refer to important "Hamlet" performances staged between 1932 to 2012 in line with the above-mentioned cornerstones. Documents from official governmental archives and private collections inside and outside of Iran were used to track the traces of "Hamlet's" Iranian journey. Among them, the valuable archive of SOAS University, London, the small but unique archive of the Tehran City theatre and private archives of two professional Armenian theatre groups were very helpful.

Historical and semiotic analyses were also done based on photographs and movies and video records of performances, where such artefacts were available. Unfortunately, Iran does not have a long tradition of video recordings of theatre productions. Even some veterans believed that a theatre should not be documented since the recorded film material would not have the same quality. Others did not have enough financial resources for recording live performances or were afraid of generating legally sensitive documents against themselves at the hands of censorship authorities.

To fill some of the black holes of Iranian theatre history, several interviews with Iranian theatre activists and informants either in Iran or the diaspora have been conducted. Interviews were either done verbally and in person or through email. Wherever the access to informants was not possible, his/her previously published interviews were used. These sources of Oral History have been a crucial help since documents of Iranian performances are spread all over the world. It is very hard to gain the trust of owners of private collections and it took me months - and in one case a year - to get my hands on a number of very limited sources. Since some artists are rather self-centered and ignorant toward other theatre activists; facts derived from such interviews are not 100 percent reliable. Therefore, any claim or fact has been double-checked using other archive materials. Also, some newspaper articles are exaggerated

and one cannot accurately assess their authenticity, as some of these sources were written under strict censorship.

A huge and important part of official archives is claimed to be destroyed as a consequence of the Islamic Revolution. Some revolutionist invaders who entered the Ministry of Art and Culture assumed stage photos and films, burning them in the courtyard of the Ministry. The archive material documenting the second Pahlavi monarchy's cultural activities and specifically the "Shiraz Arts Festival" are among them. Fortunately, the Oral History of Iranian modern theatre lightened up the dark and abandoned parts of the road that Shakespeare and particularly "Hamlet" took.

Notes:

1. Mashrouteh - Iranian revolution, 1905–11, caused by dissatisfaction with economic stagnation, influence of Western power, and results of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 and the Russian revolution of 1905. It was sparked by the beating of a merchant accused by Tehran's governor of raising prices. Mullahs and merchants took sanctuary in Tehran's royal mosque, demanding justice from the shah. Radical preaching and violence ensued, as well as the demand for establishment of a parliament. The first majlis were created as a result in 1906, granting power to popular-class guilds. The intent was to set up a constitutional monarchy with power held by a parliament and chosen ministers.
2. Alain Badiou, "L'être et l'événement", coll. "L'ordre philosophique," (Paris 1988), 153
3. Stephen Greenblatt, "Culture", in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2nd edn., eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, (Chicago and London 1995), 225-32; 229.
4. Mirza FATH-Ali Akhundzade, *Articles*, (Tehran, 1976), 7
5. *Constitution Era*
6. published by Niloufar Publishing House in Tehran, Iran.
7. Dennis Kennedy, "Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance", (Cambridge, 2004), 2
8. Dennis Kennedy, "Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance", (Cambridge, 2004), 300
9. Milani, Abbas. "The Great Land of the Sophy" Iranian.com.<http://iranian.com/History/2003/February/Persia/p.html> (Accessed Nov. 2012)
10. Mirza Saleh Shirazi Shirazi is known for writing one of the first books in Persian about a Christian country under the title of "Travelogue" (Safarnameh). It narrates his court-sponsored trip to Europe via Iran and the Caucasus between 1815 and 1819.
11. Horri, Abbas (2003) *The influence of translation on Shakespeare's reception in Iran: three Farsi Hamlets and suggestions for a fourth*. PhD thesis, Middlesex University.

12. Dennis Kennedy, "Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance", (Cambridge, 2004), 290
13. "Magi" is the plural of the latin word Magus.
14. Naqqali or Parde-khani is a Persian performing tradition, the story telling is inspired by historical and religious events, symbolize epic spirit and resistance. The common theme is the hero tales of love and sacrifice, and of resistance against the evil.
15. For more information refer to: Beyzayi, Bahram, "A study on Iranian Theatre", (Tehran, 1965)
16. Kheimh-shab-bazi is a Persian traditional puppetry. It is performed in a small chamber. There are two people involved in the performance: a musical performer and a person called Morshed. The dialogue is between Morshed and the puppets. The method of performance, its characters and the techniques used in writing the puppet show make it unique and distinguish it from other types of puppetry. Also, a new genre of Iranian puppetry emerged during Qajar era. Puppetry is still very common in Iran. Rostam and Sohrab puppet opera is an example of the most notable performance in modern day Iran.
17. Milani, Abbas. "The Great Land of the Sophy" Iranian.com.<http://iranian.com/History/2003/February/Persia/p.html> (Accessed Nov. 2012)
18. A boom in Oil industry led to increase in Budget.
19. Jan Kott, Shakespeare, Our Contemporary, 1966, 64

Chapter 2: Saw? Who?

“Remember me.”

Thousands of us have heard this strong command of Hamlet’s Ghost for nearly four hundred years and it still echoes on the ramparts of Elsinore.

Many scholars focused their attention on the multi-layered characters of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and specially the Ghost of King Hamlet. Stephen Greenblatt suggests in his „Hamlet in Purgatory“, published in 2001, that Shakespeare may have chosen the Ghost for the simple reason that on-stage Ghosts seem to have been the vogue in all the works of leading Renaissance English playwrights¹. In this paradigmatically modern play, the Ghost hearkens back to the late medieval world of magic and superstition, the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, as well as the generic conventions of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy. In a crucial manner, the whole plot of “Hamlet” depends upon the Ghost.

Greenblatt surmises that Shakespeare was clearly fascinated by what we may call “evacuated ghost beliefs” - beliefs attributable to panic, superstitious dread, or psychological projection. He saw that he could draw upon a range of traditions, including not only the classical Hades and the popular Hell but also the banished realm of the Catholic Purgatory. He saw too, the uncertainty – including, perhaps, his own uncertainty - about the very option of ghosts as being in itself a valuable theatrical element. More than anyone of that era, Shakespeare grasped that there were powerful links between his art and the haunting of spirits².

The Ghost’s presence on stage is quite serious and is not only intended for the audience’s entertainment. In “Hamlet”, the Ghost has the most dramatic power. The Ghost, in brief, inhabits the imaginative space left open by the Anglican Reformation's banishment of Purgatory in 1563. The Ghost returns from Purgatory, and in effect brings Purgatory back with him. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, Purgatory is the state or place of purification or temporary punishment through which those who die in a state of grace are believed to become ready for Heaven. Only those who die in a state of grace can be in Purgatory, remaining there for a certain period of time, but not forever - and no-one goes to Hell after having been purged.

For more than 150 years Shakespeare's religion has been the subject of some scholarly debates. But direct evidence of his religious affiliation indicates that he was a conforming member of the established Anglican Church. However, many scholars have speculated about his personal religious beliefs, based on analysis of the historical record and of his published work. Some evidence suggests that Shakespeare's family may have had Catholic sympathies and that he himself was a secret Catholic. Though the truth or falsehood of this claim is not very important in our study. By 1563, almost 40 years before Shakespeare's "Hamlet" was written, the Church of England had explicitly rejected the Roman Catholic concept of Purgatory and the practices that had been developed around it. Most probably, at that time, the audiences of "Hamlet" might still have remembered Catholic beliefs, deep inside and might still have felt connected to such beliefs.

In general, the Protestant creed rejected the doctrine of Purgatory. The general Protestant view is that the Bible contains no overt, explicit discussion of Purgatory and therefore it should be rejected as an unbiblical belief. Some Protestants hold that souls in the intermediate state between death and resurrection are without consciousness, a state known as Soul Sleep.

"The Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping, and Adoration, as well as Images of Relics

(of Saints or even Jesus), and also invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the word of God."³

It was possible for Shakespeare in Elizabethan theatre to absorb some of the imagery of Purgatory into the representation of ordinary life. But it would have been highly risky to represent any specifically Roman Catholic doctrines or practices in a favourable light. Theatre productions were censored; censors were acutely sensitive to controversial political and doctrinal questions. Greenblatt suggests that in response to Elizabethan censors the term Purgatory had not been mentioned at all in the play but there are clear references to this Christian belief in the text.

Shakespeare tries not to get into serious trouble, still only uses a network of allusions: "for a certain term", "burned and purged away", "yes, by Saint Patrick", "hic et ubique"⁴.

In Act 1, Scene 5, the Ghost clearly implies that he has returned from Purgatory.

*"I am thy father's spirit,
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires
Till the foul crimes done in days of nature
Are burnt and purged away".*

The above quote suggests that the only difference between the excruciating pains of Purgatory and of Hell is that the former only lasted for a certain time. There is more verbal evidence in Hamlet's response to Horatio in Act1, Scene 5:

*“Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,
And much offence, too. Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you.”*

The assertion that the Ghost is "honest" seems to mark Hamlet's acceptance of its claim that it has come from a place of purgation (where the only possible manner is honesty), while it does not link Shakespeare with the Protestant argument that ghosts are even frauds or demons. Furthermore, one should pay special attention to the mention of Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Purgatory.

When Hamlet adjures his friends to take an oath that they will not reveal what they have seen, the Ghost, from under the stage, cries: "swear". When they shift ground to a new position, the Ghost once again cries out beneath them, and Hamlet asks,

"Hic et ubique?"

Hamlet, as a scholar speaking Latin, can be considered a theological resonance but it could also be specifically relevant in connection with Purgatory. The traditional Catholic ritual in

England included a prayer to be recited for the dead who had been laid to the rest in the churchyard.

“God's mercy and forgiveness of sin are begged on behalf of all of those souls here and everywhere (hic et ubique) who rest in Christ.”⁵

These words would have been utterly familiar to any Catholic and deeply suspect to a Protestant. But what if this address doesn't flip? What if the recipient's historical and cultural memory is unable to remember?

We all know that the interest in the reception of Shakespeare beyond the borders of Britain has always been great. *Dennis Kennedy* mentions in “Foreign Shakespeare”, published in 2004, that Shakespeare, by far the most popular playwright in England and North America, is actually the most performed playwright in the world at large.⁶ His plays regularly cross national and linguistic boundaries with apparent ease. The cultural attitudes inherent in his work and the Anglo-centric approach has been assumed to be the common heritage of Shakespeare's art, thus not only asking for linguistic translation but also for cultural adaptation when being transferred to a foreign environment⁶. For this adaptation one should consider the culture, political situation, audience, ... and religion of the play's ultimate destination - in this case study Iran.

Although the very first “Hamlet” in Iran was performed in 1912 by a non-Iranian-Armenian director, *Vahram Papazian*⁷ and since then “Hamlet” has been performed on several stages in the country, but has not met any noticeable fame among Iranians until its first screening in cinemas. The first “*Hamlet*” movie, directed by *Grigori Kosintsev*⁸ and produced in 1964, was dubbed and initially projected on Iranian cinema screens in the same year. For many, it was their first encounter with Shakespeare. The film made “Hamlet” very popular and the best-known Shakespeare piece in the whole country. It was the first time that many Iranians from different strata of society heard the Ghost’s cry: “*Remember me*”

To find out what has happened in the process of mobilising the Ghost into Iranian adaptations of “Hamlet”, fourteen Iranian productions have been chosen and analysed with special attention to the Ghost’s representation and function in their plots and live performances. Here is the outcome:

1. Four productions kept the Ghostly King character on stage. These performances are hardly adaptations; in fact, the director is just reproducing “Hamlet” for local audiences while being too faithful to the original classic English version. One should keep in mind that the production is based on a translated text of “Hamlet” that was available for staging. Even

though the Ghost appears on stage, it does not seem to have its originally intended function and impressive presence on Iranian stages.

2. Five adaptations considered the Ghost and its appearance a bother and tried one of the following tricks to get rid of projecting a ghostly character on stage:

2.1 Putting the Ghost's words in other characters' mouth', such as Horatio, Marcellus or the soldiers.

2.2 Referencing the important scene of Hamlet's first encounter with his father's ghost through narrations of Horatio.

2.3 In Act I, Scene V, Hamlet wanders on stage listening to the ghostly voice from an unknown source, while neither Hamlet nor the audience can see the actual Ghost.

3. Two performances and a movie justify a ghostly appearance by summoning him in Hamlet's dream. The father reveals the truth of his death and asks for revenge while his own legitimacy cannot be proved; the only witness is the dreaming Hamlet.

4. One stage performance and the first Iranian movie adaptation of "Hamlet", use the opportunity of Iranian rituals

such as Zaar, Dahmal or Gowati for justifying the Ghost's appearance in Hamlet's everyday life.

Why did Iranian directors either neglected the Ghost's important role or transformed its appearance into another dramatic phenomenon? Do Iranian directors face the same sensitive religious censors as the ones during the Elizabethan era did? Despite censorship in the Elizabethan theatre, it was possible for Shakespeare to absorb some of the imagery of Purgatory into the representation of ordinary life. One cannot believe that Iranian directors with years of experience in reflecting forbidden concepts would not have had the capabilities of dealing safely and symbolically with the issue.

Still, given the fact that none of the concepts staged in public performances must not contravene Sharia, it can be surmised that legal restrictions in Islamic Republic of Iran might have played a role in the neglect Iranian directors have applied to the role of the Ghost. According to the most recent resolution of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution⁹ regarding the criteria for monitoring stage performances and issuing the required permits, performances which do not contravene any of the following rules may be staged in public theatres:

1. Not to deny, distort or insult the principles and branches of the Holy Religion of Islam

2. Ban of any insult to the Prophets of God, Imams, Imam Khomeini, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, and Islamic Clerics.

3. Interdiction of any defamation of the religions officially recognized by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

4. Interdiction of disillusionment of the principles of the Islamic Order and Revolution.

5. Interdiction of any insult to national, political or scientific personalities of the country.

6. Ban on promoting corruption, prostitution and acts incompatible with public chastity.

7. Ban on promoting racism and denial of human equality and especially ridiculing Iranian tribes and ethnic groups.

8. Interdiction of undermining national unity and security and the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

9. Ban on severe weaknesses of the performance in terms of artistic qualities in a way that would negatively affect or provoke the good taste of audiences.

10. Ban on promoting, encouraging or training harmful and dangerous addictions and how to earn money from illicit jobs such as trafficking and so on.
11. Interdiction of supporting cultural or political or economic influence of foreigners and of opposing the country's independence policy.
12. Interdiction to promote ideologies of combatant groups and illegal sects and defending authoritarian and arrogant governments.
13. Ban on falsely narrating Islam and the Islamic Revolution events in order to mislead audiences.
14. Desecrating a class or caste of society.

Since Purgatory is a Christian belief there should not be any legal oppression against staging this concept. However, I found it beneficial to justify this view by interviewing a member of the Quality and Oversight Council. In an unofficial interview with a member of the Center of Dramatic Art's "Quality and oversight Council"- or more frankly, the censorship council of Iran's dramatic arts centre, the person claimed that the Ghost persona and life after death are in no case listed as forbidden concepts; but rather, its denial is forbidden. Investigating the very different

political and social circumstances of each performance proves that the effect of governmental restrictions is either minor or cannot be relevant at all. It seems that the Ghost faces some strong conceptual barrier inherent in the individual directors. This barrier may be due either to deep religious or intellectual anti-superstitious beliefs.

The Islamic conquest of Persia (637–651) led to the end of the Sassanid Empire¹⁰ and the eventual decline of the Zoroastrian religion in Persia. However, the achievements of the previous Persian civilisations were not lost, but rather - to a considerable extent - absorbed by the new Islamic polity. Islam has been the official religion of Iran since then, except for a short period of time after the Mongol raid and the establishment of Ilkhanate¹¹.

Before the Islamic conquest, the Persians had been mainly Zoroastrian, however, there were also large and thriving Christian and Jewish communities. Eastern Iran was predominantly Buddhist. There was a slow but steady movement of the population toward Islam. When Islam was introduced to Iranians, the nobility and city-dwellers were the first to convert, Islam spread more slowly among the peasantry and the dihqans¹², or landed gentry. By the late 11th century the majority of Persians had become Muslim, at least nominally.

Though Iran is known today as a stronghold of the Shi'a Muslim faith, it did not become so until much later, around the 15th century. The Safavid¹³ dynasty made Shi'a Islam the official state religion in the early sixteenth century and aggressively proselytised on its behalf. It is also believed that by the mid-seventeenth century most people in Iran had become Shi'as, an affiliation that has continued. Over the ensuing centuries, with the state-fostered rise of a Persian-based Shi'ite clergy, a synthesis was formed between Persian culture and Shi'ite Islam that marked each indelibly with the tincture of the other.

During the 20th century, Iran underwent significant changes such as the 1906 Constitutional Revolution and the secularism of the Pahlavi dynasty. The Iranian state became an Islamic Republic after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Nowadays, Islam is the religion of 98% of Iranians; 89% of them are Shi'a and 9% are Sunni.

The Iranian Revolution (also known as the Islamic Revolution) transformed Iran from a secular, modernistic monarchy under *Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi*, to an Islamic Republic based on the doctrine of "Velayat-e faqih-guardianship" of the Islamic Jurist, under Ayatollah *Ruhollah Khomeini*, the leader of the revolution and founder of the Islamic Republic. Iran's government is unique in following the principle of

guardianship of the jurist, according to which, government must be run in accordance with traditional Islamic Sharia, and for this to happen a leading Islamic jurist, “faqih”, must provide political guardianship, “velayat”, over the people.

The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran mandates that the official religion of Iran is Shia Islam, though it also mandates that other Islamic schools must be accorded full respect, and their followers are free to act in accordance with their own jurisprudence in performing their religious rites; it recognizes Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians as religious minorities.

Iranian directors are mostly consumers of translated texts. In 2012 one could have found ten different Farsi translations of “Hamlet” in the Iranian national library. Among them, two have been adapted for performing on stage, and others claim to stay faithful to the original text. The truth is, less than half of those are translated from an English version of “*Hamlet*”. There are even editions that are re-written or re-translated based on older Farsi translations that carried a hefty language.

In fact, “*Hamlet*” has been translated into Farsi more often than any other of Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare’s difficult

language has been a great challenge for Iranians from the beginning of their efforts in comprehending his plays. To arrive at a reasonable comprehension of a play, the translator needs to penetrate many unfamiliar layers of linguistic, cultural and situational ambiguity.

Despite the large number of translations during the third and particularly the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, there is no record of a Farsi translation of Shakespeare's plays prior to 1900. Englishmen became aware of Iran and its *Shah Abbas* much sooner than Iranians were aware of England and its famous playwright Shakespeare. Englishmen's awareness began in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a result of a series of commercial and diplomatic missions to the Safavid court¹⁴. English theatre-goers of the period learned about the well-attested generosity of Sophy (Shah of Persia) through Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night".

Since the 1850s there have been at least 50 translators of Shakespearean drama, but to this day the translator whose excellence is still unmatched is the Iranian-born, Paris-educated career diplomat, *Hovanness Massehian*¹⁵. In addition to Armenian, he was fluent in English, French, Persian, Russian, German, Arabic and Turkish. His earliest "Hamlet" translation

dates to 1894, and during the years that followed, he translated “Romeo and Juliet”, “The Merchant of Venice”, “Othello” and “Macbeth”. When he died, further translations were discovered: “Much Ado About Nothing,” “The Tempest”, “Julius Caesar”, and “Coriolanus”. *Massehian* was a rare individual who served as Iranian ambassador to London and to Berlin during his career in government services¹⁶.

Armenians managed to connect Iranian theatre with the world’s theatre early on. In 1916 *Hovannes Khan Massehian* was invited to participate in the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death in Stratford-upon-Avon; he modestly explains his challenges in interpreting Shakespeare plays and the culture woven in them in the context of the firm and ancient culture of Persia:

“I came here as an eager pilgrim for attending the 300th Shakespeare death remembrance. For a character that translating his works has been my only aim in life... an educated Iranian person in the first encounter with this great poet-playwright will become subdued and stunned by his greatness. He feels himself in front of a huge and impervious forest...and he can’t find his way through it. But little by little when he gets to know him more, he will feel in Shakespeare the soul of story-telling of his national poet Ferdowsi, and philosophy and belief of Rumi, the breeze of Sa’adi and Hafez poems and wisdom of Omar Khayyam. The first encounter of

an Iranian with Shakespeare has such a great influence that disappoints him of translating it to his native language. The first difficulty in translating Shakespeare, is the huge difference between Eastern notion and Western people because Shakespeare thoughts, has a Greek and Latin template. Second issue, is the use of free verse, with using poetry and prose, that is a very beautiful combination for expressing dramatic means...”

He is most informative in his introduction to Hamlet, wherein he mentions the enormous response of the Armenian public to his first translation of Shakespeare in the 1890's ("Hamlet"), which encouraged him to proceed to some of the other plays. Eventually, he translated twelve plays, of which seven were lost and five published. He makes the interesting remark that his first translations of Shakespeare were made under the influence of Victor Hugo, who regarded every word of the original text as sacrosanct. But when *Massehian* encountered other translations, such as the German one by Schlegel, he got to the point that good translators were guided by entirely other principles, and that an artistic translation of Shakespeare demanded certain departures from the original in order to retain its spirit and meaning. *Massehian* also took note of the fact that in this respect the French translations of *Maeterlinck* had gone so far as to provide the reader (or performer) with a variety of interpretations. The intelligent translation is, of necessity, an interpretation of the original. The responsibility of the

translator is heavy, not merely to reflect the letter but also the spirit of the original. It is the latter obligation, which is the undoing of most translators, and it is here that *Massehian* proves his mettle. He compared himself to the painter who beholds in wonderment, mixed with despair, the scene in nature he must transpose to his canvas. The success of *Massehian's* effort is attested by the fact that just as every line of the original is marked with that individuality which enables immediate identification, so too is the Armenian infused with that same "breath of Shakespeare".¹⁷

Armenians were the real initiators of theatre in Iran. In 1878, for the first time, a play was staged in an Armenian quarter in Tehran. A group of young Armenians, who were interested in theatre and had studied abroad, gathered together in the same year and formed a theatre group. One or two years earlier or later Armenians initiated theatre activities in Tabriz. In 1879, the Reverend *Papazian* was the dean of the Armenian school in Tabriz. According to his notes, he decided to stage a play and for that he invited young Armenians to "cooperate"; a decade later we see the same situation in Isfahan and Rasht.

In 1888 a group of Armenians interested in theatre art, gathered in the Jolfa quarter in Isfahan and made an announcement for a theatre group constitution. With people's

financial help they built a stage in the main hall and collected costumes, and in the spring of 1888 the first play was staged. Armenians formed theatre groups, thought theatre, built theatre halls and translated texts into Persian and Armenian¹⁸.

It is not easy to ignore the fact that theatre dissemination had been initiated by a minority group among Persian citizens. It cannot only be related to their propensity for Caucasian political and cultural developments: rather, they may have established “theatrocracy” in four points of Iran because they faced less inner resistance. Although the Armenian Khalifah-head of the Armenian community of Iran- prohibited theatre for a period of seven years for fear of the Iranian state’s reactions.

As mentioned in the previous chapter; the audiences of Armenian theatre were Armenians, elites, and expats; common people did not show any interest in it until the Constitutional era. It was only during the Constitutional era that theatre opened its doors to the public, and members of different castes of society found themselves welcome in theatrical events. Since then, public announcements and invitations became regular.

Despite the dissemination of translations, started with the establishment of *Dar al-Fonun* in 1851, Shakespeare remained

unknown to Iranian readers. However, before the end of the nineteenth century, *Hosseinqoli Saloor (Emad al-Saltaneh)* undertook the translation of “The Taming of the Shrew” which was published in 1900. *Saloor* was educated in France and that was the reason he based his translation on a French version of the play. The publisher's note in the second edition (1985), neither provides any reason of *Saloor's* choice, nor of how long it took him to accomplish the work. There is not much evidence either, on how this translation was received by Iranian readers of his time.

One of the first translators of Shakespeare plays was *Naser al-Molk*. He was the first Iranian who studied in Oxford. How he got to translating Shakespeare has an interesting story. A friend challenged his skills in English in a friendly gathering mentioning the complications of Shakespearean language and the capacity of Farsi in transmitting its concept. He claimed that *it would be impossible to translate Shakespeare to Farsi*. *Naser al-Molk* asked for few days' time to try translating a part of Shakespeare plays. The same night he found “Othello” in his library and translated its first page. But his longing to find out what was to happen next and also his keen interest in this translation led him to finish the text in 1917.¹⁹

Among the ten different translations of “Hamlet” mentioned before, I chose to focus on three Persian translations: by *Pazargadi* (2003), *Beh-azin* (1965) and *Farzad* (1963). This choice is based on three factors: 1. Most mentioned as stage-friendly by Iranian directors, 2. Significant date and era of translation, 3. Availability.

Comparing these translations with the English text unveiled the fact that: "Something Is rotten" in various translations of “Hamlet”. The determining concept of Purgatory of the source text has not been fully preserved in the translations due to insufficient awareness of the culture, linguistic differences and religious codes that are embedded in the text.

In table (1) next page, I have tried to show this comparison between the published translations of the hints related to Purgatory:

	For A Certain Term	Purged	By Saint Patrick	Hic et Ubique
Farzad	Part of Night Time	Purged	Translator Omitted these words	Here and Everywhere
Beh-Azin	Translator Omitted these words	Purged	Saint Patrick	He hears us everywhere.
Pazargadi	To appear at night for some time	Purged	Saint Patrick Translator added a Footnote: Saint Patrick is the primary patron saint of Ireland. Maybe Hamlet swears to him because the northern-European countries learned science for the first time from Ireland, or maybe Shakespeare made a mistake.	Are you also here?

Table 1

Farzad's and *Beh-azin's* translations of "Hamlet" are both in prose. While *Farzad* has seemingly chosen Dover Wilson's Hamlet, *Beh-azin*, having been more at home with the French language, used an intermediary French translation of one of

Yves Bonnefoy's “Hamlets”; most probably his latest version (1988), for which *Bonnefoy* has used *John Dover Wilson's* (1934-36) and *Harold Jenkins* (1982) editions of “Hamlet” (Heylen 1993: 93). Interestingly enough, *Bonnefoy* was a staunch advocate of blank verse as the most appropriate form for the translation of the play, and his fascination with Shakespeare motivated him to produce five translations of “Hamlet”: 1957, '59, '62, '78 and '88, each time striving to improve upon his previous achievement²⁰.

In their brief introductory remarks, *Farzad and Beh-azin* do not mention any specific problems they may have encountered in translating Shakespeare's tragedy. However, *Farzad* seems to have been well aware of the gravity of the task, declaring:

“I took up this translation thirty years ago (around 1927) and tended it intermittently for more than three years (until August 1931). I perused seven times through the translation, making amendments. Eventually, I made an attentive comparison of the translation with Sami al-Joreidini's Arabic version of Hamlet: 1922, Egypt Al Balal Press, Nobar Ave, No 4, which proved beneficial to me.

Nevertheless, I admit that if I were to translate Hamlet again, regarding the style of Farsi phraseology and the interpretation of the English concepts, I would not hesitate to adopt translation strategies wholly different from those of the present translation”²¹

It is obvious that his only uncertainty is the style of phraseology and he does not have any doubt on his ability and

accuracy in transferring Shakespearian concepts to Iranian readers.

Beh-azin claims his “Hamlet” to be almost flawless, and unlike *Farzad* he has managed to reflect the effect and the intensity of Shakespeare's writing in his translation. He writes:

*“I deem it necessary to mention that unlike my renowned predecessor, I have not allowed myself freedom of translation, have left no point of the Shakespeare text non-translated, and have not, for the sake of clarification, interposed self-made phrases and sentences into the body of the work. I, therefore, can claim that, on the whole, the style of Shakespeare's writing has been properly reflected in the present translation, and that its cohesiveness has rarely failed throughout the work.”*²²

Pazargadi is even more confident of his reception and translation:

*“There wasn't a big issue in translating Shakespeare's tragedies, most challenges were in the case of comedies and in some comical scenes that Shakespeare concluded in his Tragedies to soften the anxiety and sadness of the audience or reader. Some words have double meanings and since there are no equivalent Farsi translations for these words; the translator has to choose only one meaning and use footnotes to conclude others.”*²³

Despite his confidence and satisfaction with his translation, he points out the inevitable process of purging which he had to go through:

*“In some cases Shakespeare used words and phrases that even though they suited to his time-being culture, but publishing a faithful translation of them is against Islamic moralities. Therefore, they have been superseded with other synonyms and phrases in order to maintain Islamic moralities.”*²⁴

These censored words and phrases surely do not include the ones referring to Purgatory. Literary works, being the outflow of free and uninhibited imagination of their creators, cannot provide for exactness in translation. When translators decide to render a literary text into a foreign language, especially an unrelated one such as Farsi, they set themselves against a host of inevitable linguistic and cultural problems. Considering translators' claims of accuracy and fidelity to the text, disregarding all those Purgatorial codes in “Hamlet” may have occurred just because of a lack of decoding tools. The Iranian translator does not have any memory of *Purgatory* to be awakened by reading those lines. Perhaps the problem of different religious doctrines is an answer to this neglect.

The Mariam Webster dictionary defines Purgatory as a state after death according to Roman Catholic belief, in which the

souls of people who die are made pure through suffering before going to *Heaven*; a place or state of suffering; an intermediate state after death for expiatory purification; specifically: a place or state of punishment wherein, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, the souls of those who die in God's grace may make satisfaction for past sins and so become fit for Heaven; a place or state of temporary suffering or misery.

In the two most credible English-Persian dictionaries; Haim Dictionary and Farhang moaser English, the Persian Millennium Dictionary, the term Purgatory is translated as Barzakh.

Barzakh is an Arabic word. In Islamic eschatology *Barzakh* is the intermediate state after death in which the soul of the deceased is transferred across the boundaries of the mortal realm into a kind of "cold sleep" where the soul will rest until the Qiyamah²⁵ (the Day of Judgment). This concept corresponds to that of Soul Sleep, more similar to the Protestant definition of this state, rather than that of the Catholic Purgatory.

After death, Heaven or Hell developing in the heart is unfolded and becomes the world in which one will live in, – not with the physical body of this life but the 'spiritual' body formed by the person's deeds – till the Day of Judgment. The souls of the unrighteous will face punishment of grave (*Azzab al-Qabr*)²⁶. This does not necessarily lead to entering Heaven in terms of

Resurrection. Hell or Heaven still awaits them according to their deeds.

Barzakh is mentioned only three times in the Qur'an, and just once specifically as the barrier between the corporeal and ethereal. A place in which, after death, the spirit is separate from the body, freed to contemplate the wrongdoings of its former life. Despite the gain of recognizance, it cannot utilise action.

"Until when death comes to one of them, he says: My Lord, send me back so that I may do some good I did not do (in the world). But Nay! These are mere words which he utters and behind them is a Barzakh until the Day of their Resurrection." (Qur'an 23:100)

In Islam, the soul and the body are dependent upon each other. This is significant in Barzakh, because only a person's soul goes to Barzakh and not their physical bodies. Since one's soul is divorced from their body in Barzakh, the belief is that no progress or improvements to one's past life can be made. If a person experienced a life of sin and worldly pleasures, one cannot try to perform good deeds in order to reach Heaven. Whatever one does in his or her lifetime is final and cannot be changed or altered in Barzakh.

Maintaining the literal meaning of 'Barzakh' as a veil or a barrier that stands between two things and does not allow the

two to meet; this emphasizes the fact that it is impossible for the dead to pass the barrier and enter the real life.

The idea of Purgatory is a place where people go after death. At this stage, there is punishment and purification for those who are not fit to enter Paradise just yet. People who are in this place do not have enough sins to warrant their entrance into Hell, but they do not have enough good deeds to go to Paradise quite yet. Even though this is a temporary place and may be similar to *Barzakh*, the latter is actually closer to the idea of *Limbo*, a place that is between life and the true afterlife. In this place, people await their final judgment, much like in *Barzakh*.

The soul (al-Rooh) is connected to the body in *Barzakh*. There are Ahadith²⁷, which clarifies that life is never restored to the body before the Day of Resurrection.

"The souls of the Believers are inside green birds in the trees of Paradise until Allaah returns them to their bodies on the Day of Resurrection." ²⁸

Islam teaches continuous progress of the soul so it cannot return to this world after death of the body. Souls can meet their relatives and family members but there is no possibility to connect through their corporal bodies. Furthermore, they are able to watch us and we are not able to see them.

The other two occurrences of Barzakh refer to it as an impassable barrier between fresh and salt water.

“Whilst fresh and salt water may intermingle, an ocean remains distinct from a river.” (Qur'an Sur 55: 19-20)

Pertaining to Barzakh, this notion implies that although the physical and spiritual realms are distinctly separate, transmigration through Barzakh between the two is possible, as later expanded by Sufi Mystics. In Sufism²⁹, a human soul can be *visited in Barzakh* only during sleep and mediation.

According to the Islamic definition of *Barzakh*, there is no possibility to meet the Ghost in everyday life, as prince Hamlet and his friends meet the Ghost of King Hamlet wandering in pain asking for remembrance and revenge.

Protestants argue that ghosts, when they are not simply frauds, are demons. Also in Muslim's public belief a visible Ghost is either a demon or Jin³⁰. So, he is a frightening devil character who neither arouses sympathy of Iranian Audience nor can he be trustworthy enough to fund such a tragedy. Hence, the Iranian public would reason, that if the sad royal creature is a Jin then it should be clear for the educated *Hamlet* that the Ghost is a fraud.

The Ghost as the projection of fear, the Ghost as the spirit of history, the Ghost as the shadowy embodiment of deep psychic disturbance: according to Greenblatt these three modes of representation are the principal ways that Shakespeare brought the dead onto the stage. But what kind of theatrical response do they constitute to the great sixteenth century change in the relations between the living and the dead? What would an audience, even remotely alert to the conflicting Protestant and Catholic positions, make of these figures? None of Shakespeare's Ghosts (or even the illusions of such Ghosts) is depicted as a demon; disguised, as the wandering should of the departed; none is a purgatorial spirit, begging for sufferance from the living. They do not greatly resemble the Ghosts depicted in ballads or in public inquiries into popular superstitions, nor do they conspicuously come from a classical *Hades*³¹.

The psychological aspect in Shakespeare's tragedy is constructed almost entirely out of the theological, and specifically out of the issue of remembrance that, as we have seen, lays at the heart of the crucial early sixteenth-century debate about *Purgatory*.

For a Renaissance audience, the dramatic representation of a Ghost from Purgatory would evoke a rich context of legends and lore that makes no connection with Muslim Iranian audiences in

the 20th or 21st century. This could be the reason of the overwhelming emphasis on the psychological dimension, crowned by psychoanalytical readings of the play in the 20th century. This approach has the odd effect of eliminating the Ghost as ghost, turning it into the prince's traumatic memory or, alternatively, into a conventional piece of dispensable stage machinery.

But if we believe that theatre - the art of hypocrisy - is the turning of dreams into realities³², then even an Iranian ghost can find an escape into the world of imagination. The procedure and outcome of this escape is being analysed by the case study of “Tardid” and “Fire-keeper”. “Tardid” - doubt in English - tries to stay faithful to the story of “Hamlet”, while in “Fire-Keeper” the character of Hamlet and his Father’s “Ghost” are projected in a world that reminds us of Dante’s Divine Comedy.

In the first Iranian film adaptation of Hamlet -"Tardid" (Doubt), directed by Varuzh Karim Masihi in 2009, the “Gowati”³³ or “Dhamaal” ritual is cleverly used as a solution for resurrecting the Ghost. (Figure No.3)

Varuzh Karim Masihi (born in 1953) is an Iranian-Armenian film director, film editor and screenplay-writer. “Doubt” is his second movie after eighteen years pause in his career as a director, before “Tardid”, the *Supreme Supervisory Council of*

Cinema did not give him the legal permit for any of his scenarios. His first movie “The last Scene” was a great success and “Doubt” won the prize of best movie and best-adapted screenplay at the “Fadjr International Film Festival” - a major annual Iranian film festival.

Siavash Rouzbehan, the film’s protagonist is a young anthropology researcher from a wealthy family who spends his time documenting Iranian tribal rituals. He has lost his father due to his mysterious suicide and his uncle is managing his father's wealth. He is in love and engaged with his cousin Mahtab whose father (Anvari) is the councillor of the family. Back from a research trip in Baluchistan, Siavash gradually realizes that only four months after his father’s death, his uncle is going to marry his mother. Silently disagreeing to such happenings around him, he decides to leave everyone - even his fiancé - and run away when two men from a Baluchi tribe contact him to inform him of a problem caused by a Ghost who claims to be his father. With the help of the “Gowati” (Figure No.4) ritual, Siavash talks to his father’s Ghost through Khalifah’s body. The ghost discloses the truth, i.e. that he has been murdered. But at the moment of revealing the name of the murderer, Siavash faints. Haunted by doubt and uncertainty, he chooses madness as a trick to get involved in his uncle’s business and company. He discovers that the huge wealth of his

father comes from medicine trafficking and his family is the leader of a big Mafia organization. After a series of happenings he discovers a lot of similarities between his own life and of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. He asks his best friend Garo - an Armenian architect - and his fiancé Mahtab to help him. He invites an Armenian theatre group to perform *Hamlet* at his mother's wedding celebrations in order to overcome his doubts. Although his uncle and mother do not react in public to the theatrical trap, his mother confronts him with strong protest the very same night, criticising his disturbing attitude. Anvari descends a ladder to hear the mother and son struggle through the window. When Siavash closes the window, he accidentally falls from the second floor and dies while listening covertly to them. Frightened and hopeless to change the destiny, Siavash tries not to take any action by hiding in Garo's office in a Cinema-its wall is covered with posters of "Gamlet" by Kosintsev. Mahtab leaves Siavash's father's funeral to find Siavash; she wants to hear the truth from him. Siavash and Garo explain her the whole story of Hamlet and even draw a table of similarities between Shakespearian characters and Siavash's life. She motivates Garo and Siavash to try their best for stopping this chain of murder. They try to change the end of the tragedy but Daniel-Mahtab's brother who has Down Syndrome-has been brain washed by Hamlet's uncle and tries to shoot Siavash in their Father's funeral ceremony. Siavash only gets wounded but Daniel kills

Hamlet's uncle, Unable to bear the agony, Siavash's mother hangs herself. Siavash survives, police interferes and in the end we meet Siavash and Mahtab in love beside a pond with a reflection of Mahtab in it.

In my interview with Varuzh Karim Masihi he emphasized that he adores Shakespeare because his characters are very close to real people around us. His first intention was to image an Iranian "Hamlet" in ancient Iranian history in 1990s but he found it impossible due to lack of Budget. Finally he adapted his own contemporary "Hamlet". In "Doubt" The Kingdom in Denmark changes to a Mafia Emperor. His Hamlet doesn't reveal his thoughts and doubts through soliloquies but he discusses them with his best friend and love or expresses them in philosophical dialogues every now and then. He mentions that he tried to reflect Shakespeare thoughts as much as the situation of Iranian Cinema allows him.

While he believes that adaptation means being as much as possible faithful to the original text, he didn't want at all to omit the Ghost. In "Doubt" he tried to adapt "Hamlet" to local situation and meanwhile remain faithful to Shakespeare text. Using the theatrical potential of Gowati and its spiritual concept seems a very clever solution for projecting a trustworthy ghost on screen.

The purpose of Gowati ceremony is to cure mental illness through contact with the possessing spirits (not ghosts), which cause maladies. This connection is made through ritual dance and music. Gowat or Gowati ceremony has religious routes and is considered a kind of music-therapy. Gowat literally means wind and Gowati refers to a sick person who is occupied by wind and lost his mental balance. In Baluchistan, Gowat is kind of mental sickness that occurs mostly in women. Different kinds of winds and suspicious spirits are categorized according to their effect on the person, the gender of ghost, and being believer or non-believer.

The evil spirit enters the victim's body and only music and Litanies can bring it out. During playing special instruments by Gowati music group, other participants in the ceremony repeat a motif and Zhikr³⁴, this reputation leads the victim to ecstasy and unconsciousness. The leader of the ceremony is Gowati-mom. Most victims are women therefore the leaders are women too. Gowat-mom has to recognize the category of the spirit and the intensity of illness. Each Gowat has a specific melody due to its category and the intensity of sickness. If the sick person is a man then the ceremony is called Dhamaal and the leader is Khalifah.

In "Tardid" Two men leave a message for Siavash that he should meet them in a hostel. Siavash finds the hostel in a troublesome and dangerous area of the city. There he discovers the men belong to a Baluchi tribe that he documented their Gowati Ritual months ago. Now Khalifah himself is Sick and they believe a ghost who knows Siavash haunted him. The ghost even talked through Khalifah body with them and asked to meet Siavash. Full of fear and doubt Siavash enters a small room in the hostel and the Gowati ceremony starts. Affected by ecstasy of music and Zhikr, the room changes to a magical desert in Baluchistan and the ghost of Siavash's father starts talking to Siavash and asks for revenge and remembrance through Khalifah's body.

According to *Greenblatt*, Shakespeare seems to have staged ghosts in a spirit of self-conscious theatricality. That is, his ghosts are figures who exist in and as theatre, figures in whom it is possible to believe precisely because they appear and speak only onstage. The audience is invited to credit their existence in a peculiar spirit of theatrical disavowal³⁵. *Varuzh Karim Masihi* cleverly summons ghost in a theatrical ritual, a ritual that is believable and exists in the reality of an Iranian audience's life. He translates the ritual in such a way that it becomes a proper setting for the appearance of ghosts.

Karim Masihi comes from a Christian cultural background; hence, the concept of “Purgatory” should have been familiar to him. Yet, the influence of the view on “Purgatory” in Iranian culture seems more dominant in his mind. In an interview we had in 2012, he clarified that although he is Christian-Armenian, he himself does not believe in “Purgatory”. However, believing in spiritual rituals is permissible. Doubt emerges in a house and on a larger scale in a society rife with numerous superstitions. Every character has its own belief in spiritual, supernatural phenomena and magic. Siavash’s mother believes in presages and tries to influence Siavash and even her husband by means of certain medicaments. Siavash himself never doubts the actuality of his father’s ghost.

Greenblatt introduces three fundamental perspectives of ghost personae in Shakespeare plays:

*“The Ghost as a figure of false surmise, the Ghost as a figure of history’s nightmare, the Ghost as a figure of deep psychic disturbance. Half-hidden in all of these is a fourth perspective: the Ghost as a figure of Theater.”*³⁶

Emerging from a supernatural realm, the post-death appearance of the father’s ghost wields his power on the educated Siavash: he discloses a real-world secret that Siavash

had already hoped to evade before his encounter with reality. In “Hamlet”, the “Ghost’s” revelation triggers a chain of tragic revenges which, according to Greenblatt, are not the principal intent of the “Ghost”. The “Ghost” in “Hamlet” is not simply a plot device, a generic convention of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy, as sometimes assumed. Its power, both for the audience and for young Hamlet, goes far beyond its function as a plot catalyst. In this sense, the primary imperative of the “Ghost” is to “remember,” not to “revenge”.³⁷ In “tardid” the “Ghost” appearance leads to the unveiling of several truths about Siyavash and his family and what destroys the family is the truth.

Just in the very first minutes of the movie version, we are informed through Shiavash’s narration that the “Ghost’s” presence reflects the remembrance of his father, who had always been the most eminent figure in Shiavash’s life. Since Siavash does not doubt that his father is embodied in the Khalifah persona, whatever the apparition says has the same relevance as his father’s statements had when he was still alive. Here, the “Ghost” longs for “revenge” and does not disguise his wish as a plea for “remembrance”, his apparition has the quality of a figure reflecting history's nightmare.

What, in fact, does the “Ghost” harken back to in “Tardid”? His entire world collapses: being haunted by the “Ghost”, not only makes him question his mother’s relationship with his uncle, but he also finds out devastating facts about his father. His self-perception and his past is destroyed. The struggle for remembrance and revenge reveal aspects that undermine Siavash’s identity and force him to question his perception of his father when he was still alive. The father’s “Ghost” speaks to Siavash only once; we never see him or see a trace of his presence anywhere else in the movie. It seems as if the “Ghost” were aware of the fact that not only his sins could not be purged, but that he had also lost his previously respected position in Siavash’s life. In fact, Siavash is racked by doubts about his history and his identity.

Discovering shocking similarities in his own life and that of Hamlet, Siavash finds himself doomed to share Hamlet’s destiny. In Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”, love is a victim, while in *Varuzh’s* “Doubt”. love stands strong in front of fate and survives. Mahtab, the character resembling Ophelia in this movie, does not believe in a predestined fate. She is not the Ophelia who obeys the father figure, neither in the form the “Ghost” nor in that of Hamlet’s own father or Hamlet himself. She forces Siavash to choose “to be or not to be Hamlet”. If Hamlet himself is unable to act, Ophelia has the ability to save him. At the end of the movie

we see an illusion of Ophelia in the pond. Love survives and it is the wounded Siavash who is purged instead of the “Ghost”, getting shelter under the shadow of Ophelia.

In “*Atashkar*” (Fire Keeper) a movie by Mohsen Amir Yusefo, the mobilisation of “Hamlet” into another culture and society takes place on a very large scale. *Mohsen Amir-Yousefi*- A documentary and fiction film-director- transposes Hamlet into a cast of blue-collar workers in Iran, which an Iranian audience is not used to watch as protagonist on the screen.

In 2006 *Amir-Youssefi* produced and directed “*Fire Keeper – Atashkar*” (Figure No.5). The film is an Iranian interpretation of Dante's “Divine Comedy” and “Hamlet” woven into one plot. “*Atashkar*” is the story of a hard-working blue-collar worker, Sohrab, who – urged by his wife - is planning to undergo vasectomy³⁸ to avoid having more children, but his father's ghost strongly disagrees with this plan. Despite working in a very modern factory and living in an industrial atmosphere, Sohrab cannot put aside his traditional thoughts. With four daughters, he is still dreaming of fathering a boy, thus mitigating his father’s ghost’s conviction, that without a male heir, Sohrab would be deemed not to have any children at all. Sohrab’s wife does not let him enter the bedroom until he has undergone vasectomy. An inner struggle starts in Sohrab’s mind. The father’s “Ghost” harkens back while warning and threatening

him in his nightmares and subconscious mind. Other workers in the factory try to use his weakness point and take his superior position. Despite the pressure of his father's "Ghost" and many emotional ups and downs, including discussions with other workers, he finally submits to a vasectomy. This film was banned for several years before being screened and was severely criticized by state newspapers and various officials. *Amir-Yousefi* insisted on its screening and was ultimately given the chance to show the film in a few cinemas, albeit for a short period. "*Fire Keeper*" was submitted to the Montreal Film Festival in 2009, where it received the Innovation Award.

The movie is structured through three scenes: Heaven, Hell, Barzakh (Purgatory). In the section of "Heaven", Sohrab's father's "Ghost" describes the heavenly realm of an after-life without vasectomy. Influenced by his father and scared of losing his manly reputation among other workers, Sohrab decides to resist his wife's plea and ignores all appointments for vasectomy. In the section of "Hell", he decides to go for vasectomy in order to overcome his sexual and emotional deprivation inflicted by his wife. The father's "Ghost" threatens him with images of hell in his dreams, ultimately dominating his everyday life by triggering his sense of guilt. In the last section "Barzakh", Sohrab remains doubtful. He tries to find an answer to his most important Hamlet-like question: "To undergo vasectomy or not to

undergo?” Which for him is equivalent to “To be a man or not to be”. Sohrab starts to free himself from the ghostly presence of his father, the limiting atmosphere and patriarchal roles of his job, and ultimately makes his own choice.

In the context of this play, two cultural phenomena are being mobilised. In fact, cultural mobility is happening on two parallel paths. One is transforming Hamlet into Sohrab’s life and the other one is embedded in the context of the story: integrating modern technology into the beliefs of a firmly rooted traditional society.

Sohrab and the film’s audience meet the father’s “Ghost” for the first time during his anaesthesia-induced nap on the surgery table. His father’s “Ghost” invites him to his garden in “Heaven”, but before entering the place he has to exchange his modern clothes for the traditional rural garments offered to him by a servant just in the entrance hall. Indeed, Sohrab-Hamlet has to leave his modern world behind the doors of the ghost’s “Heaven” and enter his father’s heavenly realm in the traditional habit. Sohrab’s refusal to submit to his father’s “Ghost’s” order of having further children and not to forsake vasectomy, the “Ghost” starts chasing him on his white horse with a whip while Sohrab is trying to escape on his motorcycle (Figure No.6).

Presenting the “Ghost” in Sohrab’s dream (nightmare) is important from different viewpoints: for Iranian audiences encounters with the apparition of a deceased person in the form of dreams is not an unbelievable concept. In this way, the father’s “Ghost” is not separated from the haunted. Haunter and haunted are the same, and - in this case - the ghost is embodied in Sohrab’s unconscious mind. The “Ghost” is part of Sohrab’s thoughts, of his ideology and a hidden traditional personification of Sohrab.

Sohrab never doubts the truth of the “Ghost’s” presence, but questions his future identity and position. The “Ghost” is aware of whatever Sohrab does, and of his mental turmoil. While the “Ghost’s” presence is not visual, his voice can be heard threatening or ordering Sohrab to do whatever the “Ghost” wishes. In the second part, where we meet the father’s “Ghost” again in “Hell”, Sohrab is to be confronted with the punishment intended for the sin of vasectomy. The film implies that Sohrab is haunted by his father’s pressures and actually embodies the “Ghost” himself, thus submitting to his father’s will, thus purging the “Ghost’s” sins, which will improve the conditions of the father/the “Ghost” in the heavenly realm.

Being dominated by the “Ghost’s” pressures exhausts and frightens Sohrab; therefore, he solicits the doctor’s help in

freeing him from nightmares, thus seeking refuge in a modern medical technology. In a scene of the movie we see that the doctor and Sohrab's wife are aware of Sohrab's unusual attitude. Here, the "Ghost" is a figure of deep psychic disturbance. While Sohrab remembers his father and his ideology all the time, the "Ghost" does not need Sohrab's remembrance - he is just seeking eternity through his male descendants.

In the third part, we realise that it is not the "Ghost" who is depicted in "Barzakh", but Sohrab himself being stuck in a purgatory situation between "Heaven" and "Hell". He admits several times that he is hesitant and unable to decide on "to be or not to be" (vasectomised), i.e. violating the traditional beliefs of his father.

Throughout the film Sohrab consults a mullah, a symbol of religion, whom he considers to be the ultimate authority with regard to moral choices. He needs the mullah's permission to free himself from the responsibility for his own decisions. This blue-collar, passive Hamlet wants the mullah to decide for him - the mullah who resembles Horatio.

Sohrab finally reaches his decision: one very early morning, riding his motorcycle in a mesmerized state, he enters the doctor's office and lies down on the operating table, telling the

doctor that he does so, not on account of his wife's wishes, nor with regard to his four daughters and neither as reaction to the obstinacy of his father, but solely of his own free will: "When you know something is right, you have to do it!"

He decides to stop being dominated by the pressures and expectations of others, thus putting an end to the traditional beliefs of his family, and opening the path for development of new generations. He demonstratively accepts modernisation.

Notes:

1. Stephen Greenblatt, "Hamlet in Purgatory", (Princeton 2001), 156.
2. Stephen Greenblatt, "Hamlet in Purgatory", (Princeton 2001), 157
3. Edgar C. S. Gibson, "The thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, 2 vols." (London: Methuen & Co., 1897) 3, 2:537.
4. Stephen Greenblatt, "Hamlet in Purgatory", (Princeton 2001), 237.
5. Stephen Greenblatt, "Hamlet in Purgatory", (Princeton 2001), 235. Cited: Missale Sacri, ed. Francis Dickinson (Oxford: J. Parker, 1861-1883), 878.
6. Dennis Kennedy, "Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance", (Cambridge, 2004), 2.
7. Vahram Papazian (1888 in Istanbul - 1968 in Yerevan) was a Soviet actor who was an ethnic Armenian, mostly known for his Shakespearean roles. See Chapter "Something is Rotten in the State (of Denmark?)" for further information.
8. Grigori Mikhaylovich Kozintsev (1905 Kiev – 1973 Leningrad), was a Soviet theatre and film director. He was named People's Artist of the USSR in 1964. Kozintsev is most renowned by his adaptations of William Shakespeare plays (King Lear and Hamlet) and Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote.
9. The Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution is a conservative-dominated body based in Qom; it was set up at the time of Ayatollah Khomeini. It is in fact continuation of the Cultural Revolution Headquarters. It declared itself the highest body for making policies and decisions in cultural, educational and research activities within the framework of the general policies of the system and considered its approvals indispensable. This group is expected to compile all the cultural policies of the country.
10. The Sasanian/Sassanid Empire was the last Iranian empire before the rise of Islam, ruled by the Sassanid dynasty from 224 CE to 651 CE. The Sassanid Empire, was recognized as one of the main powers in Western and Central Asia, alongside the Roman-Byzantine Empire, for a period of more than 400 years.

11. The Ilkhanate, was a breakaway state of the Mongol Empire. It was established in the 13th century and was based primarily in Persia as well as neighbouring territories, such as present-day Azerbaijan, and the central and eastern parts of present-day Turkey.
12. The Dihqan or Dehqan, were a class of land-owning magnates during the Sassanid and early Islamic period, found throughout Persian-speaking lands.
13. The Safavid dynasty was one of the most significant ruling dynasties of Persia (modern Iran), and "is often considered the beginning of modern Persian history". They ruled one of the greatest Persian empires after the Muslim conquest of Persia and established the "Twelver-School" of Shi'a Islam as the official religion of their empire, marking one of the most important turning points in Muslim history. The Safavids ruled from 1501 to 1722 (experiencing a brief restoration from 1729 to 1736) and, in the most glorious years of their reign, they controlled all of modern Iran, Azerbaijan, Bahrain and Armenia, most of Georgia, the North Caucasus, Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan, as well as parts of Turkey, Syria, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Safavid Iran was one of the Islamic "gunpowder empires", along with its neighbours, its arch rival the Ottoman Empire, and Mughal Empire.
14. Abbas Horri, "The influence of Translation on Shakespeare's Reception in Iran", (Dissertain, Middlesex University, 2003), 73.
15. Hovanness Massehian (1864–1932), was a Persian-Armenian translator and diplomat, well known as the translator of Shakespeare's works into Armenian. Since 1912 he was the Persian Ambassador to Germany. From 1927 to 1929 he was the Persian Ambassador to the Great Britain. He was the first Ambassador of Persia in Japan. Masehyan's translation of Hamlet was printed in 1894 by the Armenian publishing society. According to Gevorg Emin, Masehian's translations are "excellent" and "sound so wonderful in Armenian".
16. Andranik Huvayan, "Armenian artists of Iran", (Tehran), 385-86.
17. Edward Alexander, "Shakespeare's Plays in Armenia, Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 9, No. 3" (Summer, 1958), 387-94
18. Andranik Huvayan, "Armenian artists of Iran", (Tehran), 226-27.
19. Farkhondeh, Reza. "Shakespeare's Iranian Translators" [iran.britishcouncil.org.https://iran.britishcouncil.org/en/underline/literature/shakespeare-translators](https://iran.britishcouncil.org/en/underline/literature/shakespeare-translators) (accessed July 2014).

20. Abbas Horri, "The influence of Translation on Shakespeare's Reception in Iran", (Dissertation, Middlesex University, 2003), 91.
21. Masoud Farzad, "Hamlet", (Tehran 1965), 11.
22. M.A. Behazin, "Hamlet", (Tehran 1967), 2.
23. Alaedin Pazargadi, "The complete plays of William Shakespeare", (Tehran, 2003) thirteen
24. Alaedin Pazargadi, "The complete plays of William Shakespeare", (Tehran, 2003) twenty-one
25. Yawm al-Qiyāmah -the Day of Resurrection or the Day of Judgment-is believed to be God (Allāh) final assessment of humanity. The sequence of events (according to the most commonly held belief) is the annihilation of all creatures, resurrection of the body, and the judgment of all sentient creatures. Many verses of the Qu'ran, especially the earlier ones, are dominated by the idea of the nearing of the day of resurrection. Belief in al-Qiyāmah is considered a fundamental tenet of faith by all Muslims.
26. Punishment of the Grave -torment of the grave- is an Islamic concept of the period following death but prior to the Day of Judgment, when the souls of the unrighteous are punished in the grave. The Qur'an does not refer to the Punishment of the Grave but instead it is mentioned in the Hadith. In Islamic belief, the grave constitutes a "third stage" of human existence, with the first two being the womb and then mortal life, and the fourth being eternity in heaven or hell. The punishment of the grave applies regardless of manner of death or of the corporeal state of the deceased, and is measured by criteria unlike those of the living. The living cannot perceive these things with their eyes, ears or inner senses. However, the dead person is completely aware of them, but according to the criteria of the afterlife.
27. Ahadith, in Muslim religious use is often translated as prophetic 'traditions', meaning the corpus of the reports of the teachings, deeds and sayings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. The hadith literature was compiled from oral reports that were in circulation in society around the time of their compilation long after the death of Muhammad. The Hadith also had a profound and controversial influence on molding the commentaries on the Quran.
28. Prophet, At-Tabraanee.
29. Sufism is a concept in Islam, defined by scholars as the inner, mystical dimension of Islam; Classical Sufi scholars have defined Sufism as "a science whose objective is the reparation of the

- heart and turning it away from all else but God”.
30. Jinn or djinn, are unseen creatures in Islamic belief, Islamic mythology as well as pre-Islamic Arabian mythology. They are mentioned frequently in the Quran (the 72nd Sūrat is titled Sūrat al-Jinn) The Quran says that the jinn are made of a smokeless and "scorching fire", but are also physical in nature, being able to interfere physically with people and objects and likewise be acted upon. The jinn, humans and angels make up the three sapient creations of God. Like human beings, the jinn can be good, evil, or neutrally benevolent and hence have free will like humans and unlike angels. The shaytan jinn-Devil Jinn- are the analogue of demons in Christian tradition, but the jinn are not angels and the Quran draws a clear distinction between the two creations.
 31. Stephen Greenblatt, “Hamlet in Purgatory”, (Princeton 2001), 195
 32. Stephen Greenblatt, “Hamlet in Purgatory”, (Princeton 2001), 173
 33. Gowati
 34. Dhikr or Zhikr , is the Arabic word for remembrance and can be equated to Rosary in the Catholic tradition, which is a religious exercise-a devotional act - in which short phrases or prayers are repeatedly recited silently or aloud.
 35. Stephen Greenblatt, “Hamlet in Purgatory”, (Princeton 2001), 196.
 36. Stephen Greenblatt, “Hamlet in Purgatory”, (Princeton 2001), 157.
 37. Peter Goldman, “Hamlet’s Ghost: A Review Article, *Anthropoetics* 7, no. 1”, (Spring/Summer 2001).
 38. Vasectomy is a surgical procedure for male sterilization or permanent contraception. During the procedure, the male vas deferens are severed and then tied or sealed in a manner so as to prevent sperm from entering into the seminal stream (ejaculate) and thereby prevent fertilization. In the beginning of 1990s the government had an effective population control program and encouraged men to go under vasectomy operation. In 2014, the supreme leader- Khamenei ordered the government to stop this program and instead encourage Iranian Muslim couples to have more children.

Chapter 3: “Something is rotten in the state...”

During the period, in which the play “Hamlet” is set, Denmark is dominated by a multi-layered political system. Hamlet is struggling with different layers of an arbitrary monarchy; developing a spy network, inversion of reality, sowing of dissent, physical elimination of opponents and lack of freedom of speech. The contemporary ideas of politics are evident in “Hamlet”, in that - to some extent - they reflect actual situations and controversies of Shakespeare’s time. This situation is not so far different from the dominant historical situation in modern Iran: a country, in which theatre played a major role in its cultural and political modernisation. Iranian intellectuals imported modern theatre as a cultural commodity, as a tool for fostering modernisation and democracy. They put much hope on theatre’s political and cultural impact during several historical periods and this seems to continue despite any oppression. Among the initially imported plays, “Hamlet” has been one of the first performances to be staged in Iran.

When Hamlet's ship docked for the first time in the harbour of Iranian theatre, the flags of the Pahlavi dynasty were dancing proudly in the sky and Iran was ruled by *Reza Shah*, the first king and founder of the Pahlavi dynasty. The first "Hamlet" of Iran's modern theatre history was performed in 1932 in Tehran, in the Imperial Palace's theatre, essentially a salon for circus and cinema. A legendary Armenian-Soviet director and actor was invited by *Reza Shah* to perform plays in Iran in order to raise money for the Red Lion and Sun Society¹ of Iran.

Reza Shah Pahlavi (15 March 1878 – 26 July 1944), was the Shah of Iran (Persia) from 15 December 1925 until he was forced to abdicate by the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran on 16 September 1941.

In 1925 *Reza Pahlavi* was appointed as the legal monarch of Iran by the decision of Iran's constituent assembly. The assembly deposed *Ahmad Shah Qajar*, the last Shah of the Qajar dynasty, and elected *Reza Shah* by amending Iran's 1906 constitution. *Reza Shah* was the first democratically elected monarch of Iran. He founded the Pahlavi dynasty. He established a constitutional monarchy until it was overthrown in 1979 during the Iranian Revolution. *Reza Shah* introduced many social, economic, and political reforms during his reign, ultimately laying the foundation of the modern Iranian state.

The second half of 19th century is particularly important in the history of contemporary Iran. A wave of expanded socio-political changes were initiated and a Constitution – Mashroutiyat – established. The transition from the Qajar dynasty to Pahlavi dynasty in the early 20th century is important because in the meantime political power accepted semi-structural changes and the modern state of Iran or, as we call it, a “Nation-State” was formed in combination with autarchy.

The new socio-political structure needed some type of intermediary or mediator for its emergence. Theatre seemed an appropriate mediator for this purpose. Investigating the role of drama in the context of the new socio-political structure will help us achieve a better recognition of the impacts of this relationship. Here, the relationship between politics and culture is not only regarded as a hierarchical order where politics determine culture, but also a double-sided process of interaction in that cultural productions influence politics and politics shape the modes of cultural representation.

In order to understand how theatre found this position in the modernisation process and state ideology, it is crucial to trace the relationship between state ideology and culture – specifically in the area of theatre - from way back before Reza Shah.

Western theatre was introduced to Iranians by the early nineteenth century. Elites and court members were mostly those who had the privilege of attending a theatre performance in Europe. Persians' first encounter with Masters of western theatre was through travel notes or diaries. The first to mention Shakespeare in a written text, namely his diary, was *Mirza Abolhassan Khan Shirazi*², the first Iranian ambassador to England. He attended a performance of Shakespeare's "King Lear" at Covent Garden, and in June 1810 a theatrical performance at the Sadler's Wells theatre, which included dancing, a pantomime, and a play. On his return to Iran, *Abu'l-Hasan Khan* was minister of foreign affairs for a long time and he also financed the performance of religious drama (Ta'ziyeh) in Tehran. These experiences and their remarkable effect on the members of the Persian elite played an important role in the modernisation of the local theatre culture in the 19th century.

Occasionally, European actors were touring in Iran too. Such theatre groups entered the country through Russia or Azerbaijan and Tbilisi(Figure NO.7); with the latter two provinces having been part of the Persian empire until the middle period of the Qajar dynasty; many theatre groups also toured in the Tabriz or Orumiyeh area. On April 15, 1835, for example, Italian actors performed at the public court of *Malek Hoseyn Mirza's* palace in Orumiyeh³.

However, European theatre was not the success that its patrons had expected. Iranians did not appreciate certain forms of European theatre; *Perkins*, the founder of American missionary activities in Orumiyeh, reported on April 11, 1835:

*“The Persians are not very fond of such (i.e., theatrical) entertainments. A German ventriloquist was here, not long ago, and the people ascribed his performance to the direct agency of the devil and treated him with corresponding abhorrence.”*⁴

Perhaps theatre in its European style was a new phenomenon to ordinary people while European culture as such was introduced to Iran during the Safavid period (1502–1736). European culture became dominant in the Qajar epoch due to the direct political and economic control England and Russia exercised on Persia, which was further compounded by the royal courts’ belief in the superiority of Western civilization and its interest in European culture and technology. The differences in attitude between the Safavid and Qajar rulers, however, are based on the fact that although the Safavid rulers realised that they needed the Western military technology to survive, they were aware and proud of their strength in philosophy, religion, science, culture, art, and morality. Nonetheless, the sovereigns of the Qajar period, from the time of *Fath Ali Shah*, viewed themselves as politically and militarily inferior, believing that the West should be their role model in almost all aspects of life, even in clothing and social manners. Unfortunately,

this belief had a negative impact on how Iranians pictured themselves and their identity internationally and rendered the country susceptible to European influences. Nevertheless, these influences created a fruitful environment for exchanges in art and science and the introduction of new technology.

Qajar kings and aristocrats deeply believed in the superiority of Europe's more recently achieved amenities of civilisation. As the leading patrons of schools and the educational system, they transferred such a belief to the people. The Qajar monarchs and aristocrats, therefore, focused their attention on European culture by visiting Europe, sending their sons and talented students there to study, opening European-style schools in Iran, hiring European teachers, importing new inventions, translating books, and even wearing European-style clothing, which became more fashionable after the time of *Fath Ali Shah*⁵.

Sending Iranian students to Europe is very important in the case of cultural mobility and modernisation in Iran. In 1857 the first Qajar ambassador went to France together with 42 students, who were to study at institutes of higher education in France. *Jules Thieury* mentions them as "Children of Iran" in his notes in 1860⁶. These were the first wave of students introduced to liberal ideologies, thoughts of the Enlightenment era, *August Kent's* "Positivism" and the principles of the French Revolution. They are

the ones who encountered modern theatre on a real stage and were, of course, fascinated by its magic.

The first drive for modernisation was led by *Abbas Mirza*,⁷ the crown prince; to safeguard it, he opened the country's first permanent missions abroad in Paris and London. To insure its future, he dispatched Iran's first students to England with the permission of the ruler. They were sent to study such practical subjects as military science, engineering, gun-making, medicine, typography, and modern languages. Unfortunately, the crown prince's ambitions to introduce major changes based on Western technology came to an end with his sudden illness and death in 1833. *Fath Ali Shah* died one year after his son *Abbas Mirza*, and *Mohammad* was crowned King in Tehran in 1834.

Unable to analyse or change the political aspirations of England and Russia⁸, *Mohammad Shah* searched for possible changes in other areas. He invited European politicians, travellers and artists to his court, and he sent several groups of students to France to study. He showed great interest in bringing inventions to Iran; these included photography, which reached Iran in 1844. *Mohammad Shah* ordered a ninety-page book about Napoleon Bonaparte in French and Farsi. Moreover, the monarch even allowed a French lady to become the nurse and tutor of the prince, *Naser-al-Din*, and his sister, as well as hiring a second French teacher for the

prince. While *Mohammad Shah's* achievements did not enhance the educational system as such, he was, nevertheless, perceived as a ruler who brought Western culture and technology into Iran.

After the death of *Mohammad Shah* in 1848, his son, *Naser-al-Din Mirza*, acceded to the throne. *Naser-al-Din Shah* was even more enthusiastic about European culture than his father. In the first years of his rule, the monarch's first minister and chief commander of the military, *Amir Kabir*, took advantage of *Naser-al-Din Shah's* interest in Western improvements and initiated fundamental changes in the educational system. This was the beginning of the second drive for modernisation.

Amir Kabir founded the country's first official newspaper, the "*Rouznameh-i-vaqa-yi Ittifaqiyeh*" (newspaper of current affairs). More importantly, he built the country's first secular high school, the *Dar al-Fonun*. *Dar al-Fonun* - the Polytechnic School of Skills - offered its students, mostly sons of the aristocracy, classes in foreign languages, political science, engineering, agriculture, mineralogy, medicine, veterinary medicine, military sciences, and band music. It is crucial to note that this school was not the first school in Iran. Schools had always been part of the educational system of the country. *John Chardin* (1643–1813), the philosopher and traveller who visited Iran twice during the Safavid period, mentions that the royal family and aristocrats hired tutors to train their children,

while ordinary people sent their children to school twice a day. By the end of the Safavid dynasty, however, the educational material and the style of teaching in those schools had never been adapted to more recent knowledge, and students were no longer exposed to new ideas in religion, philosophy, and the sciences. Moreover, the rapid changes in technology and science in Europe, on the one hand, and Iran's social catastrophes after the Safavid period, on the other, placed the country in need of recovery.

Amir Kabir adopted the idea of adapting the *Dar-al-Fonoun* school to the model of a school in the Ottoman Empire, which was deemed to represent the most advanced educational system of any Islamic country. *Dar-al-Fonoun* was officially opened in 1851 and built near the main bazaar in Tehran and Golestan Palace, the main residence of the king and his harem. The school also included a lithography studio for publishing schoolbooks and a theatre for plays and music. Although this theatre hall was the second Western-style performance space in Tehran it played a decisive role in exposing Iranian audiences to modern theatre. In 1882 *Naser al-Din Shah* ordered the construction of this theatre hall, a 300-seat European-style space, in the main building of the school. The theatre was finished in 1886/1887 and "Gozeresh-e Mardomgoriz" (The Misanthrope), translated by *Mirza Habib Esfahani* (printed in Constantinople in 1869), and some of Moliere's other plays were performed there.

However, theatre did not develop as expected, as *Naser al-Din Shah* and *Amir Kabir* were soon confronted with opposition from mullahs and religious teachers, who had regularly attended the *Dar al-Fonun* performances. At first, there were rumours about the content of plays, with the clergy worried about morality and the consequences of such gatherings. These pressures led to the rule that entering theatre performances were restricted to the royal family and its guests. Later, objections were raised to devoting such a space to such nonsensical Western rituals while faithful Muslim students were not given any proper place for their daily prayers. According to available records, the theatre hall subsequently served as a prayer hall for students. Nevertheless, every now and then, a few theatre performances were held there until 1891, when it was closed to theatre activities - probably because the shah considered it as a real threat. Ultimately, the space was transformed into a lecture hall.

This was not the only unsuccessful attempt of *Naser al-Din Shah* to build a theatre hall. During his first voyage to Europe in 1873, *Naser al-Din Shah* attended a concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Back in Teheran, he gave orders to build a similar theatre next to the Golestan Palace within the Citadel (Arg). The shah sent an engineer to Europe on a special mission to study for the construction of a new royal theatre-Later named Takiyeh-Dowlat (Figure No.8). This circular, four-story building was a marvel of the

Qajar architectural and technical ability. The walls were about 24.4 m high and 15m thick and the diameter of the circle about 60 meters. The building's capacity would have accommodated about 3'000 persons. In the opinion of numerous Western visitors, the royal Iranian theatre's sumptuous magnificence vastly surpassed that of Europe's greatest opera houses. The American statesman, *Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin* (1837 – 1914), who visited Iran as the first American minister, compared the theatre to the arena in Verona.

“I was invited to attend on the fifth day of the Tazieh. We arrived at the Takieh towards noon. On alighting from the carriage, I was surprised to see an immense circular building as large as the amphitheatre of Verona. Solidly constructed of brick.”⁹

Once again, the clergy and some members of the royal court raised objections regarding the budget allocated for the construction of such a theatre, which would be of no use to the public. Although meant to emulate European theatre halls, religious pressures and the mullahs' recommendations transformed this marvellous place to a “Takiyeh”¹⁰, It is gratifying to know that the place witnessed many marvellous and magnificent “Taziyeh” rituals and even other theatrical events (mourning ceremonies, announcements of the demise of the Qajar and Pahlavi reigns, and even court gatherings) during its lifetime. Also, women could freely attend these religious rituals and had special seats for themselves. As a consequence of

cultural policy changes in the Pahlavi era, the “*Takiyeh Dowlat*” was destroyed in 1947 and a bank building was constructed on the site.

Although the reformer *Amir Kabir* had held office under *Naser-al-Din Shah* for four years only, he established the basis of a high-quality educational system in Iran. Influenced by his mother and other opponents, *Naser al-Din Shah* dismissed *Amir Kabir* and scrapped some of his reform programs. Kabir’s execution did not, by any means, stop the progress of modernisation. In fact, *Naser al-Din Shah* and his ministers, brought about many innovations over the longest period of the Qajar reign, which lasted until 1896. However, instead of fostering rapid change, these innovations induced a slow drift toward change: instead of defending the state against external enemies, they were aimed at buttressing the court against internal opponents. Instead of forming a cultural dialogue after periods of intensive anxiety, cultural exchanges were restricted to the royal family or aristocrats or even abandoned completely. Such cultural imports did not merely lead to intense pleasure but also raised intense anxiety. Nevertheless, cultural mobility ultimately found its path to Iran.

Naser al-Din Shah established a translation school, and a new government printing office. These together with *Dar al-Fonun* and the older printing office in Tabriz, published more than 160 titles in the course of the century. They included 88 military textbooks,

language manuals, and medical handbooks; 4 biographies of famous Muslim leaders; 10 travelogues of journeys to the West, including *Naser al-Din Shah's* own account of his European tour; and most important for cultural mobility: 10 translations of European classics, including Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe", Moliere's plays, Dumas's "Three Musketeers", Verne's "Around the World in Eighty Days", and James Morier's famous satire on Iran, "The Adventures of Haji Baba"; 10 volumes of Iranian history, notably Malcolm's "History of Persia" and "Markham's Short History of Persia"¹¹. This brought a new experience for Iranians: seeing themselves through others' eyes.

One can see that cultural productions found their gateway into Iran together with technological goods. It was the economical exchange that gave a chance to cultural exchange. Looking back to the effects of foreign powers and economical exchanges between Iran and other countries, it is obvious that England and Russia maintained the oldest and most significant relationships with Iran. Why then, would French plays, particularly so Moliere's, be preferred in Iran?

As mentioned, European modern theatre was very new to Iran; plays were never performed according to their published text before the process of modernisation. The indigenous types of Iranian theatre, mainly storytelling, "Kheymeh shab bazi" and "Ro-howzi"

were either based on improvisation or oral history passed on from one generation to the next. The few plays written by Akhundzadeh¹² are not suited to be played on a stage, but rather resembled ideological texts written in the format of dialogue. Stage directors were, therefore, dependent on translations of foreign plays.

At the time, Iranian students from affluent families were sent to France and after their return to Iran, adopted French as the “aristocrats’ language”. The official foreign language of *Dar al-Fonun* was French; Austrian and Italian teachers also spoke French, because their Iranian translators were fluent in French, and the schools of *Alliance Francaise* in Tehran were the main source of introducing European culture and science to eager young Iranians. Institutions of Lazarist missionaries provided access to modern education and they were very successful in promoting the French language and literature to Muslim and non-Muslim elites in Iran.

On the other hand, Iranian modern theatre truly owes its existence to Armenian theatre activists and most plays performed for the various Armenian communities were translated from French. Foreigners were a very important target audience for Iranian theatre groups, and French expatriates made up the majority of foreigners in Tehran. According to *Etemad al-Saltaneh*¹³, in 1887, there were 4000 to 5000 people in Tehran who knew French.

Having access to plays was another decisive factor. *Amir Kabir* had gathered a group of translators in the ministry of education¹⁴; a French translator named *Forouqi*, was appointed manager of this section. *Amir Kabir* ordered *John David*¹⁵ to import French books to Iran in order to be translated, and to this end, 293 books and 323 geographical maps were imported from France to Iran in 1850.

After his trip to Europe in 1873, *Naser al-Din Shah* ordered *Mozayyan al-Dowleh*, a teacher of French and painting at the *Dar al-Fonun* school, to organise the performance of modern theatre in Tehran for the court. Given the negative connotations with which Iranians perceived the history of Iranian-British relationships, i.e. Imperialistic history, it seemed safer to perform a French play. French plays were not faced with scepticism by the Ulama and court members. With the help of foreign residents in Tehran, *Mozayyan al-Dowleh* translated a number of French plays into Persian, amongst which “The Miser” (L’Avare) by Moliere, and put them on stage. The preference of the Iranian public for French, rather than British culture, may be the reasons why Moliere’s plays were the first to be translated, or rather adapted¹⁰ for Iranian audiences. Since theatre directors did not have a vast knowledge about different foreign plays, it seems natural that they only followed the pioneers’ taste in their future choices.

Naser al-Din Shah commissioned many of these translations to glorify the monarchy; but the same translations, inadvertently drawing the Iranian readers' attention to the contrast between their shahs and the most famous kings of Europe, and between the poverty of Iran and the prosperity of Europe, tended to weaken the Qajar monarchy. The readers were from a new class of society. Western influence helped coalesce many Bazaar merchants into a propertied middle class, and contact through travels, translations, and educational establishments led to the emergence of modern ideas, modern aspirations, modern values, and, thereby, modern intellectuals. Although these intellectuals formed a somewhat undefined middle class during the 20th century, they had represented a mere stratum in the 19th century, as their numbers had been too few and too heterogeneous for emerging as a social class: some were aristocrats, even royal princes, others civil servants and army officers, and yet others clerics and merchants. Despite occupational and social differences, they still formed a distinct stratum sharing a common desire for fundamental economic, political, and ideological change.

Western history persuaded them that human progress was not only possible and desirable but also easily attainable if they broke the three chains of (1) royal despotism, (2) clerical dogmatism, and (3) foreign imperialism. They abhorred the first as the inevitable enemy of liberty, equality, and fraternity; the second as the natural

opponent of rational and scientific thought; and the third as the insatiable exploiter of countries under development , such as Iran. Moreover, Western education convinced them that true knowledge derived from reason and modern science, not from revelations and religious teaching. The intelligentsia thus considered constitution-based government, secularism, and nationalism to be the three vital means for establishing a modern, strong, and developed state of Iran. The first, they argued, would destroy the reactionary power of the monarchy. The second would eliminate the conservative influence of the clergy, and the third would eradicate the exploitative tentacles of the imperialists.¹⁶

The very first modern public theatrical event was brought about by an anti-imperialistic action:

In the late 19th century, foreign governments were increasingly asserting control, and in some cases, Iranian governmental civil servants adopted a fatalistic attitude about being colonised by Britain or Russia, both of which were competing for power in Iran. In this atmosphere, the Shah of Iran signed a secret agreement with a British company in March 1890, granting them a concession over all Iranian tobacco. The tobacco trade constituted a significant part of the Iranian economy, and the concession gave the company a monopoly not only covering the export of Iranian tobacco, but also the domestic production and trade of tobacco.

Iranian farmers would have to sell their tobacco to the British company and then buy it back again for domestic use. Not until the late 1890ies, did a Persian newspaper, published in Istanbul, reveal the existence of this concession, after which the news made its way to Iran. In the spring of 1891 massive protests began to rock Iran, triggering the first and largest strike in Iran. This general strike led to a religious fatwa against the use of any tobacco, spreading into a state-wide consumers' boycott. The consumers' boycott, receiving support from the Russians, from the Mujtaheds in Karbala, from menacing demonstrators in the streets of Tehran, and even from women of the royal harem, forced *Naser al-Din Shah* to rescind the concession.

The crisis revealed the fundamental changes that had taken place in 19th century Iran. It demonstrated that local revolts could now spread into general rebellions, that the intelligentsia and the traditional middle class could cooperate, and that the shah, despite his claims, was a titan with feet of clay. The tobacco protest, in fact, was a dress-rehearsal for the forthcoming Constitutional Revolution. This public protest can thus be considered the first, albeit inadvertent, theatrical event happening simultaneously in the streets of several major cities of Iran. The involuntary tendency to appear in public space or transforming the perceived inequality harboured in the minds and personal territory of individuals into an arena dominated by the state, suddenly became real. Members of

the middle-class had learned to perform; theatre, despite its limited opportunities, readied them for performative action. State-owned public arenas, such as streets, mosques, bazaars became a stage; in fact, theatre was mobilised into public space.

Among those protestors there were theatre lovers who remembered that the first theatre in Tehran did not even have a proper stage. In 1878 a group of young Armenian-Iranians, some of whom had studied in Europe, established a theatre group. An Armenian who was interested in theatre, dedicated one of his buildings with large rooms to these performers. In 1880 the Armenian community built a school and next to it a theatre with a stage. The theatrical groups' purpose was the education of the country's youth, the development of the art of theatre, and financial assistance to the school. The "club" was further supported by several Armenians, who translated famous European plays.

One of Armenian's most prolific translators was *Hovhannes Khan Masehian (Mosa'ed al-Saltaneh)* who translated plays by Molière and Shakespeare into Armenian and Persian; ultimately non-Armenian theatre groups were also able to perform these plays. There were also separate performances for Armenian women. The Armenian theatre group not only performed in Armenian but also in Persian (for the non-Armenian Iranians) and French. In the latter case, the target audience was the expatriate European community.

The outcome of those street protest-performances mentioned above, was the worst nightmare for the future of modernisation. In the years following the tobacco crisis, *Naser al-Din Shah* turned toward more political repression, throttling “dangerous” innovation. He curtailed the growth of the *Dar al-Fonun* school, barred the opening of new schools, and turned a blind eye on a religious mob burning down a modern teaching establishment in Tabriz. He discouraged publications that introduced the Western world to Iranians, restricted government scholarships for studying abroad, prohibited travels abroad by Iranian citizens, including visiting relatives from and to Europe, and boasted that he favoured ministers who did not know whether Brussels was a place or a cabbage and, fearing anti-government rumours, unsuccessfully tried to shut down the many teahouses of Tehran on the pretext that “storytellers and dervishes encouraged idleness and other vices among the lower classes.”

This combination of repression, isolation, and manipulation, the hallmarks of the *Naser al-Din Shah* era ended abruptly in 1896. While preparing the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of his reign, *Naser al-Din Shah* was shot dead by a bankrupt trader. The killer’s bullet not only ended the *Naser al-Din* era but also heralded the demise of the Qajar dynasty. While the new monarch, *Muzaffar al-Din Shah* (1896-1906), still hoped that a liberal policy would calm

down the opposition, its “thirsty souls” used this chance to form semi-clandestine organisations.

During these years of repression, the Armenian community of Tehran continued with its performances of Armenian and translated European plays. They also opened the path for half of the society to present themselves on stage. Another benefit of the liberal policy was the emergence of female actresses on stage as of 1897. There are records of female theatre directors among Armenian theatre troupes. In 1902, two sisters from Tabriz, *Vartir* and *Haranush Faligian*, came to Tehran and created the Tehran Women’s Theater Group (grouh-e te’yatre banovan’e Tehran).

While the intelligentsia were trying to remain active, their attitude was somehow reactionary. Although the intelligentsia perceived secularism as a vital goal on their achievement list, their actual policy, especially in the area of cultural activities, was rather conservative. *Malekzadeh* commented years later that these secular “radicals” were obliged to seek the assistance of the religious authorities because the “lower class” was still dominated by the “ruling class” of royal princes, tribal chiefs, local magnates, and landed patrons¹⁷. Such cagey or unlikely alliances seem hardly conducive to fostering cultural development, as *Greenblatt* mentions: “in most cases, cultural mobility took the form of attempted cultural (and, of course, actual) murder.”¹⁸

As mentioned before, one of the important mobilisers of European theatre was *Akhundzade*. He believed that the purpose of drama was to cultivate people's morality and foster the development of readers and listeners¹⁹. This expectation of drama had a long-lasting influence on his successors, Iranian translators and stage directors. Plays known as socially and morally valuable were of interest and the wave started with the translation of Molière plays into Persian. Translations were mostly adaptations of the original text. *Edward Granville Browne*²⁰ describes these adaptations in his notes:

*"The characters are Persianised, and the text is in verse, following the original very closely, although Persian idioms or proverbs are occasionally substituted for French expressions."*²¹

This cultural encounter between original text and translator was happening on several layers: changing characters' names to Iranian ones, changing the name of venues, replacing various personae with characters who are more familiar to Iranian audiences, but also injecting moral messages in the play and adapting endings such that the evil will always lose and goodness will always win. The translators politicised the text in accordance to the contemporary Iranian situation while the play still featured Molière's name, but without the knowledge of the original text, one could hardly recognise its cultural origins. Such encounters also

happened at more individual levels, where personal exchange was largely dependent on the individual actors' preferences and skills. Grounded in the tradition of Iranian plays, where improvisation is an important part of acting, Iranian performers felt free to improvise on stage.

As stated by *Greenblatt*, the development of any given interpretation was largely based on a figura model:

“The cunning of this form of interpretation was that it left things standing in place and at the same time emptied them out in order to claim that a full actualisation of the precious cultural resource ... could only be realized in the religion that had come to displace and triumph over it.” ²²

In 1905 the Constitutional Revolution was approaching victory with increased speed. On August 5, following weeks of Ulama and opposition protagonists seeking refuge, *Muzzafar al-Din Shah* appointed *Mushir al-Dawleh*, a senior official with liberal views, as his prime minister, and signed a proclamation convening a Constituent National Assembly. The revolution had ended, but the struggle for a formal constitution had only just begun. These events of the summer of 1905, i.e. convening the Constituent Assembly and the elections for the National Assembly, were catalytic for the development of political organisations and radical newspapers throughout the country. The number of papers and journals published within Iran jumped from six on the eve of the revolution

to over one hundred during the ten months after the Constituent Assembly, and many such papers featured highly optimistic, nationalistic and radical names. It seemed that intellectuals, after years of enforced silence, were now rushing to the printing presses to publicise all their newly acquired political ideas. Since the reformers were in favour of theatre they published their theatre-related argument, for example, in the newspaper “*Tarbiyat*” in 1897.

Muzaffar al-Din Shah, at the urging of his spiritual advisors and the more moderate of his ministers, ratified the fundamental laws on December 30, 1907, only five days before his death. *Muhammad Ali Shah* ascended the throne, determined to rule less like his father and more like his grandfather *Naser al-Din Shah*.

The Constitutional Revolution of 1905 boosted modern Iranian theatre. In its wake, many plays were published and played by newly formed theatrical groups. In fact, the power of theatre had grabbed the imagination of many deputies such that draft laws for newly established municipalities also aimed, among others, at creating theatres. However, such laws were not adopted, but their proposition was a symptom of the aims and intensity of the reform-oriented forces and their interest in the cultural and educational values of theatre. It was strongly believed that theatre was one of the vehicles to diffuse the reformist and constitutional ideas among the population at large. The failed counter-revolution, the political

associations or *Anjomans*, and the arrival of theatre groups from the Caucasus would reinforce these interests. The reformists wanted to express their desire for political freedom and their other ideals in public, and theatre was deemed a suitable vehicle on their long journey.

The cultural scene of Iran was experiencing a breeze of freedom and significant progress with the help of such democratic achievements as a constitution; in the meantime, *Reza Khan*, a Cossack brigadier, who had supported the coup against government tried to advance his position in Iran's political scene. In 1925, a specially convened assembly deposed *Ahmad Shah*, the last ruler of the Qajar dynasty, and named *Reza Khan*, who earlier had adopted the surname *Pahlavi*, as the new shah.²³ *Reza Shah* took the stage; ironically, he proclaimed the downfall of the Qajar dynasty in Takiyeh Dowlat.

Reza Shah's great ambition of modernising Iran was expected to form a supporting atmosphere for development of modern theatre in Iran. Indeed, theatre profited from the fluky freedom that was granted because of the state's special situation. The first years of the Pahlavi dynasty were devoted to suppressing several rebellions all over the country and stabilising the Pahlavi monarchy and its ideologies through the constitution and governmental structures.

Reza Shah himself was in favour of theatre and believed in its effectiveness in the modernisation process.

To understand the function of drama and theatre in Iran, it is necessary to consider “Mashrouteh”, i.e. the Constitution era; this scrutiny serves to analyse the social structure, and how it was affected by the changes of the political structure. The socio-political developments of “Mashrouteh” led to the birth of Iranian drama. It was in this hopeful and encouraging atmosphere that Iranian writers and members of the intelligentsia found the courage and felt the necessity to write plays.

Protestors and opponents of the Qajar dynasty expressed their goals and aims during the Constitutional Revolution. However, there seem to have been a few common denominators. *Ervand Abrahamian*²⁴, points out three major concepts as common goals of the “Constitutionalists”, which I have mentioned before: constitutionalism, secularism, and nationalism²⁵. These three terms or key concepts of “Constitutionalists” were strongly connected to society and domination, and were all extremely effective with regard to the future of Iran’s literature and arts situation. The effect of these newly imported terms became determining factors, regardless of their success in achieving the desired goals or of the strong objection from the dominating power. The truth is that the state policies were sometimes so blatantly opposed to “Constitutionalist”

goals that the attempts to establish any policies for their achievement dismally failed. Therefore, one cannot find documents referring specifically to cultural policies but every sporadic effort was a step forward.

Nationalism had its roots in the Constitutional movement, but it was during the first Pahlavi era that it became the main objective of the state - not only in terms of government slogans, but also in terms of exposing cultural activities. Nationalism was the heart of the Pahlavi reign and the blood in the veins of political change. *Reza Khan* wanted to form a new identity for Iranians around this concept.

Reza Khan's concept of nationalism differed substantially from that of the "Constitutionalists". The "Constitutional" era is more related to the concept of a royal constitution and its parliament with its educated modernist members, while *Reza Khan's* era is more related to nationalism itself. The importance of this concept went further than the state's intentions and was massively reflected in the imported phenomenon of nationalism and its intended impact on state policies: theatre and drama. Nationalism and its intentions, is reflected in all documents referring to this era. If one should choose a main headline for local theatre and drama during those two decades, it should definitely be

“Nationalism”. Jamshid *Malekpour*²⁶ claims that *Reza Khan’s* domination was based on nationalism:

*“... and because of that he benefited from elements of which, one of the most important was <A throwback to our Glorious Ancient Past> and the other one was stimulating <National Sentiments>. These played an important role in forming his intended style of Nationalism.”*²⁷

Of course, political and social changes were much more than an intention toward national romanticism. Defective changes occurred in the state’s power structure: the emergence of a “nation-state” or “national state”. This term was the political “credo” in 19th century Europe.

Nation-state ideology is not only limited to forming a united nation and state, it triggers substantive changes in political structure and the dominant power centres. These changes also led to the emergence of several movements and the creation of institutions that shaped foundations of a modern society. Max Weber mentions the following sequence: defined territory, monopoly of use of physical force, and legitimation.

This new form of political structure does not only lead to power enforcement. Like it or not, it exposes intentions that may be opposed to those of the relevant power circles. Theatre as a diversion of the new nation-state, a phenomenon that had been

supported and founded by *Reza Shah*, is subsequently triggering undesired opinions. Under such political circumstances censorship was imposed.

The nation-state gave birth to institutions, which were thought to be potentially threatening. On the one hand, the state tried to expose this concept naturally in different fields (development of different regimes of beauty in the performing arts and literature) and on the other hand, the state feared for its autarchy.

Even though theatre had been chosen to promote this new state and its identity, it was not as successful as it had been expected to be. The reason may be related to another institution fostered by the new nation-state: the bazaar.

In the case of drama, the bazaar was not only an inadequate institution , but could have shut drama down. Drama does not have a close and conceptual connection with consumerism, so how can one consume drama? It is hardly possible, or at least it cannot be sold as a commodity, especially in Iran where the printing tradition has never been comparable to that of central Europe. A product should be sellable in order to be consumable and selling drama is an abstract concept. Drama is chained to theatre and performance to the form of its presentation. So, making drama consumable needs something more than turning it into a sellable object. There are other requirements for exposing drama, in fact, two indispensable

requirements: architecture and an audience. The subsequent need for gathering and forming an interested community will further postpone or at least slow down its consumption. Drama consumption is thus transforming into communication. Drama will be limited to a special caste of society, the ones who can afford attending such gatherings. Also, such gatherings and their audiences were considered a threat to the nation-state itself.

So, this modern state did not really help Iranian drama – or did it? Statistical data related to the theatre’s situation in the Constitution era can give an answer to this question. One can compare the situation of Iranian drama and its circumstances during nearly three decades before the nation-state was established. At the time, playwrights were limited to few names: *Akhundzadeh*, *Tabrizi*, *Fekri Ershad*, *Kamal al-vezareh mahmoudi*²⁸. The nation-state had a huge impact on increasing the quantity of plays performed. Literacy increased due to cultural and financial developments; as a result, attending theatre performances was not just an intellectual act anymore. Little by little a middle-class emerged, which counted leisure as being part of civilization’s custom and theatre as a relevant part of it. When Western architecture became a trend in constructing public buildings and reconstructing old urban structures, theatre halls became a part of this progress.

When a broader range of the population became familiar with elements of Western life-style, an increase was seen in the quantity of theatre performances. Even though this growth can be seen as the continuation of constitutional effects on theatre, it owes its significant development to the new nation-state and its products, such as universities, offices, a skilled workforce, social institutes and cultural institutions. It was a radical occurrence of identification and cross-border exchange that brought cultural mobility out of its closed circular movement in royal families and exposed it to members of the middle-class. This quantitative increase in theatre performances and audiences did not necessarily lead to progress in the quality of plays and did not give enough courage to lower classes and common civilians to attend theatre.

Why did the Constitutional movement choose drama, and drama chose the Constitutional movement? This time, the nation-state is not implicated; maybe the answer is a die-hard phenomenon: revolution. Revolution represents politics. And constitutionalists believed in political functions of Drama. For the first stages of promoting the need for change, Constitutionalist chose drama. Drama needs an audience for its existence; a group of people who can gather and share. Constitutionalists were in favour of an integration policy and *Reza Shah* opted for de-politicisation of public actions and intentions.

When public protests started in the Constitutional era, public dissatisfaction became visible. When the reason for dissatisfaction is a common thing that has its roots in the legal power, public domain changes into a forbidden area: a space that one should be careful about. Integration policy also leaves room for the public expression of discontent. The Constitutional wave started with the common intention of expressing dissatisfaction. Although the button was pushed by a sugar merchant's punishment in the bazaar, we should not forget that the punishment happened in front of a discontented audience who deeply identified themselves with the poor merchant. Longing for catharsis, they all hit the streets. The British embassy in Tehran reported 14'000 protesters. This was again one of the first occasions in Iran that people gathered in public space for a reason other than royal ceremonies, religious mourning, official celebrations or sending troops to war.

The involuntary tendency to appear in public space or transforming inequality from a state of mind and individual territory to a public arena, or rather the space dominated by the official power, became suddenly perceptible. That is why even nowadays censorship in theatre is more severe and forbidden topics are more than mere literature.

Remember that the first Western dramas adopted in this era were based on Moliere comedies. One reason could be that comedy

suits the idea of public communities, especially when this community has members of different castes of society. Comedy challenges the public domain and red lines with laughter. Laughter brings chaos and rebellion; therefore, the legal power does not like it. So even attending comic performances is considered a revolutionary act. Furthermore, drama in any style is political by its nature. As Patrice Pavis says:

“Etymologically speaking, all theatre is political, as it represents protagonists within a town or group.”²⁹

As we have seen, *Reza Shah* started the Pahlavi dynasty with political legitimacy. After many ups and downs in the Constitution era, Iranian theatre experienced a certain kind of parole under *Reza Shah*'s domination due to his optimistic view and the political stability. Although diversity and critique had been limited due to the authoritarian nature of the state, technical improvements, a souvenir of modernization, had its positive effects on modern theatre.

During the Qajar era, modern theatre passed the borders of Iran and found its way to stages in private houses of Armenians and to the theatre halls of the royal family and the king – and, after a long struggle, also into the public theatre halls. The majority of people who had the chance to be exposed to this new phenomenon did not show any resistance against it. Its most persistent

opponents were the Ulama and the clergy. In particular, during the reign of *Naser al-Din Shah* this cultural mobility provoked intense anxiety among mullahs. However, modern theatre adjusted itself with the insights of local mobilizers into their rooted culture. During the Constitutional period, people and the theatre scene became united; in contrast, during the Pahlavi era, this kind of relationship did not happen.

Between 1921 – 1941, *Reza Khan* was transferring his political position to *Reza Shah*, and the Pahlavi dynasty was stabilising its position in Iranian history. Theatre was strongly affected by the centralization of the nation's cultural tradition, and at least ten theatre companies started their activities. Unfortunately, these various experiences demonstrated hardly any diversity at all: every staged play could have been categorised in two groups: either historical or moralistic.

Hassan Javadi, however, distinguishes three 'types' of plays in those years. First there were historical ones, second, romantic musical plays and finally, didactic social comedies. Being firmly categorised is also a way in which theatre adapts itself to the concept of the nation-state. Historical and moralistic plays did fit the state's expectation of theatre. On the other hand, structures of power seek to mobilise these two styles and immobilise any other form of modern theater.³⁰

Historical plays were written to revitalise the glorious era of ancient pre-Islam Iran. Historical plays helped the state to promote its nationalistic ideologies by reviving Iran's ancient glories. However, historical plays were not sufficient for focusing society's attention to Iran's glorious past; moral plays therefore played an important role in the consolidation of this ideology.

The state's tendency to distance society from Islam - *Reza Shah* believed that Islam and its traditions were barriers to modernisation³¹ - could have resulted in an identity crises. However, reviving the splendid history of Great Persia could overcome such barriers. Reza Shah wanted his nation to connect with its national identity and ancient empirical feelings; this would help people to re-identify themselves without any feeling of shame or humiliation. A proud nation can compare its honourable history with the West's contemporary state. Such a magnificent and glorious historical background ought to prepare them to accept whatever modernisation and Western culture would offer. *Reza Shah's* ideal was not only to transpose Western culture into Persia, but he firmly believed in cultural replacement and was not ashamed of using force or violence to achieve his goals. In his point of view, a proud nation is powerful enough to improve and would not resist any changes that are necessary for the nation's development. If national ambitions could be embedded in the nation's mind, any change in education, clothing and other social aspects of Iranian life ought to

be facilitated. Textbooks, press, radio, cinema, literature, music and theatre were means to instruct people to adopt that path.

The reign of *Reza Shah* (1921 - 41) is generally remembered, both, as a period of seminal reforms, in which all fields of political, social and cultural life underwent a fundamental change, and as an age of tyranny, during which the Shah's absolute, arbitrary, and at most times dictatorial style of government reduced constitution and parliament to merely rubber-stamping instruments. His modernisation policy, which was going to affect every region of the country and all strata of society, was accompanied by an intensive public propaganda campaign that employed all available means. Like every authoritarian regime, the state of *Reza Shah Pahlavi* was based on an extensive propaganda, either to convince the public of its legitimacy or to enforce a particular way of behaviour on its subjects. In a society that still was, to a considerable extent, illiterate, images played an important role in disseminating the official ideology. That is exactly where modern theatre finds governmental support and its semi-stable position in waves of cultural changes.

It is helpful to define "modern culture" in early Pahlavi Iran. Iranian reformers and intellectuals were aware of ideologies and technologies that were dominant in Europe at that time, and their concept of modernity was not so far removed from the European

one. The continuity of the reformers' efforts during the Constitution era, reflect their intent to democratise the state. In their point of view, Western culture and its modern products were essential and effective tools for the purpose. When Western modernity becomes available for most classes of society and not only for the royal family or aristocrats, adaptation to a new culture will become inevitable. *Reza Shah* opened the first modern institute of higher education in 1932: Tehran University, inviting European professors, lecturers and researchers to the country. Foreign councillors were active in establishing new cultural policies too. There were also foreign physical instructors, engineers, and physicians practicing in Iran. They all took part in shaping the concept of modern culture, but Iranians who were familiar with Western culture played the key role in the process.

The Pahlavi state demonstrated a high degree of pragmatism in implementing reforms. As mentioned before, *Reza Shah's* policy of cultural replacement led to the adaptation of Western innovations in an unconcerned way. Decisions were mostly heterogeneous and none of them followed a coherent long-term plan. This can be ascribed to several reasons: firstly, the state was confronted with several already existing initiatives that had been started privately, building on the great enthusiasm of individual modernisers. Concerted plans for cultural modernisation by the government could be thwarted by such projects, especially during the first decade of

Reza Shah's rule, when the young Pahlavi state had to address more urgent problems than cultural reform and therefore kept its involvement in this sector limited. Secondly, due to Iran's highly personalised power structure, a decision in favour of a specific reform or against it was very much dependent on personal antipathies of the officeholders.

Reza Shah and the circle of politicians in his retinue took the major decisions on Iran's future development. *Mokhber al-Saltaneh (Hedayat)* who was *Reza Shah's* prime minister for more than six years, and was by no means a hostile critic, wrote in his memoirs about the years beginning in 1929:

*"Under [Reza Shah] Pahlavi, no one had any independent power. Every business had to be reported to the Shah, and every order issued by him had to be carried out. Unless there is some degree of independence, responsibility would be meaningless... and no statesman would be left with a will of his own."*³²

There is general agreement that a group of elite politicians including 'Abdolhoseyn Teymurtash³³, 'Ali Akbar Davar³⁴, and Mohammad 'Ali Forughi³⁵ were the initial driving force behind the comprehensive reform agenda. These men unquestionably played a crucial role in the country's transformation towards a modern nation-state. Other members of the Iranian intelligentsia were not involved in state politics, but their artistic or literary productions had a great share in the cultural life of the 1920s and 1930s. The

members of the new bourgeois middle-class also had a decisive role in the process of cultural modernisation. Entertainment was an important part of their new life-style and theatre was chosen as a luxury and intellectual activity. When traditional theatre was banned in 1932, visiting cinemas and theatres replaced traditional participation in religious performances.

Reza Shah wanted to portray the country as a modernised state to the outside world and he did not tolerate any opposition. *Galunov*³⁶ reported that the main police department of Iran was very strict in enforcing government policy and applied censorship very diligently. The police opposed anything that it considered to be vulgar. For example, gramophone records had been released with the performance of two Persian plays concerning the *Andarun*³⁷, in particular, “The Wheat Flower” (*Gandom Gol - e Gandom*). They were very popular and widely distributed. The police banned further recordings of such plays finding the topic vulgar and discrediting Iranian art in the eyes of Europeans.

In the early 1930ies, in continuation of the growing attraction of Western life, *Reza Shah* banned “*Taziyeh*”, the Iranian traditional Passion play; he considered it vulgar and backward. Furthermore, the “*Taziyeh*” ritual was a cultural event under the supervision of the *Ulama* and religious leaders; they could thus use this opportunity for publicity to provoke anti-government and anti-

modernisation ideologies. This prohibition (*as mentioned above, Taziyeh was banned or prohibited*) was, of course, pitiful for the Iranian theatre tradition but was not as bad for Western-style theatre.

That was not the first attempt in the first Pahlavi for categorising drama in accordance with limited producers and themes. A few years before, in 1927, performing plays in the Armenian language, was also banned. In that same year, the government closed all parochial schools such as Armenian schools, with the excuse that a united nation should form a united identity obeying and following the king. Despite the ban on performances in Armenian, theatre life in the Armenian community remained strong³⁸. This ban was by no means a stop to theatre mobilisation, much rather, it helped Armenian groups to extend their domain and attract a wider range of audiences.

There is a clear change in the state's cultural involvement in terms of both quality and quantity, with a striking increase during the 1930ies. This second decade can be considered as the crucial period in the enforcement of reforms aiming at a deep transformation of the country's society. While *Stephanie Cronin* regards the years between 1925 and 1927 as the factual starting point of the strong Pahlavi state and thereby suggests a convincing periodisation of Iran's political history, we propose an alternative

periodisation for the cultural history, peaking in the second decade of *Reza Shah's* rule. During the 1920ies, the state had still been concerned with internal power struggles, military reorganisation, and the project of national unification under a strong central government. At that time, the first activities aiming at cultural change, such as the reform of men's attire, appear rather as a test run for the newly established administrative apparatus. From 1930 onwards, however, the state carried out more and more social and cultural reforms, created various institutions imperative for modernisation, and took advantage of the newly initiated bureaucratic institutionalisation to control the public and cultural sphere.³⁹

Despite censorship of the theatre under the Pahlavi regime, *Reza Shah* did much for his ideal theatre and he personally liked this visual medium, according to *Sayyed 'Ali Nasr*⁴⁰ (d. 1961), the founder of "*Komedi-ye Iran*" and one of the founding fathers of modern theatre in Iran.⁴¹ *Reza Shah* also allowed and even urged women to attend theatre and perform in plays. After his visit to Turkey, *Reza Shah* gave orders to construct an opera building in Tehran. Work started, but in 1941 the building was still unfinished. In 1939, modern theatre for the first time received official recognition as an important section of modern Iranian culture. With the encouragement of *Reza Shah*, the "*Honarestan-e Honar-e Pishegi-ye Tehran*" was created to ensure the training of actors and

directors. Theatre was considered to be the best means of educating people about social, child rearing, and hygienic matters. While the latter was no surprise, because those had been the objectives of all early twentieth century reformers and hence the themes of most of *Sayyed 'Ali Nasr's* plays, it was also something that the government wanted to promote. The "*Honarestan*" thus was the first drama school in Iran and its teaching programme was modelled after that of the conservatory in Paris. It continued to function until 1958 when the *Anahita Drama School* replaced it.

It seems clear that *Reza Shah* was convinced of creating a new platform for Iranian theatre. To this end, he invited the well-known Soviet-Armenian actor *Vahram Papazian* (*Figure No.9*) to teach modern theatre to Iranian theatre artists and to perform a few pieces.

Reza Shah chose the most acclaimed actor in the neighbouring country. It was in the same year that the Moscow press called *Papazian* one of the best modern tragedians and a French critic remarked that he had seen Parisian audiences moved to tears, declaring that *Papazian* was the best Othello he had seen. His fame in the role was such that he was a frequent guest artist abroad.

Peter Bitlisian mentions in an article "Othello and the Armenians..."⁴² that *Papazian* was invited by the Iranian government

to act in Teheran. *Papazian* staged several productions (with the benefits donated to the Iranian Red Cross) for a season with a company of well-known Iranian artists (including many Armenian actresses). He appeared as Hamlet, King Lear, and in non-Shakespearean parts, including the title role in Molière's "Don Juan", and that of Jasper McGregor in Saroyan's "My Heart's in the Highlands". Among the plays produced by the group, "Hamlet" received the greatest attention because it had never been on stage in Iran before.

The Iranian theatre scene became particularly vibrant and active during *Vahram Papazian* stay in Iran. The Red Lion and Sun Society of Iran invited him with the help of *Dr. Mirzaiyan*, an Armenian parliament member. As *Papazian* did not know the Persian language it was wise to choose a well-known play for performance; he chose "Othello" written by Shakespeare and "Masquerade" by *Mikhail Lermontov*. He mentions in his autobiography-retrospective "Regard" (1956-1957) that the first play was translated by *Naser al-molk* and the second one was a translation of *Saied Nafisi*.⁴³

By that time, it had been five years that *Naser al-Din* had passed away and his son gave *Papazian* a copy of his father's translation, printed in Paris. This also gave the Iranian theatre

groups the opportunity to use this translation, of course, after its first performance on stage.

It seems beneficial to clarify *Papazian's* claim on the identity of the translator of "Masquerade". Reading "Masquerade" written by *Saied Nafisi*, this claim raises questions. As we have mentioned, *Papazian* wrote in his autobiography that when he came to Iran, "Othello" by Shakespeare and "Masquerade" by Lermontov were chosen. Since *Papazian* came to Tehran in 1932 and the edition of "tonight we go to Masquerade" was published in 1930, either "Tonight we go to Masquerade" was something other than Lermontovs' "Masquerade", or *Papazian* had made a mistake.

Surprisingly, the French-speaking Othello did not have any bad effect on the success of the performance and it continued being performed on stage for six days in the "Palace Theater"(Figure No.10). It is good to know that before *Papazian*, Othello was performed by *Mischa Gostanian*⁴⁴ in 1930 and in Armenian. In *Papazian's* performance, *Loretta Hairapetian*⁴⁵ performed Desdemona. *Helen Nouri*, *Mohtasham*, *Moez Divan Fekri*, *Khan-baba Sadri* and *Ghodratollah Mansouri* were other actors. "Othello" and "Masquerade" were performed both in Armenian and Persian.

Robert Byron may have seen the *Papazian* performance. He writes a report on a theatre performance he attended on January 22, 1934:

*“To increase the tedium, there has been a performance of Othello in Armenian. Papazian, a Moscow star, who certainly upheld the Muscovite reputation for finished acting, took the chief part. The rest were local amateurs, and knowing no other models of our bygone costumes, had dressed themselves after the Europeans in the frescoes at Isfahan.”*⁴⁶

By the mid-1930ies, *Reza Shah's* dictatorial style caused dissatisfaction in Iran, particularly among religious and intellectual elites. Contrary to his strong intent of modernisation, *Reza Shah* believed in a traditional authoritarian state. A closer look at the period between 1930 and 1941 reveals a concentration of important changes around the mid 1930ies: the political climate became more restrictive, as reflected in the decree against collectivist ideas in 1931 or the “Gowhar Shad” incident in 1935⁴⁷. The ruling oligarchy was exchanged, exemplified in *Teymurtash's* dismissal in 1932 and the increasingly important role of the police (“Shahrbani”) in controlling the public sphere; also, the state’s general attitude became more and more xenophobic. These trends and events had an equally strong impact on cultural life.

Reza Shah, whose state policies during the first years of his reign supported modern theatre, suddenly found himself in a flow that he could no longer control. His idea of controlling and guiding cultural mobility on a desired path was not realistic. In fact, modernisation had penetrated in all aspects of life and thought of society. He tried to manipulate the truth to bring this free-flow

under his own authority. Theatre censorship was once again unleashed.

Due to strict censorship of political criticism, many plays were prohibited. Satire was not tolerated, unless it was aimed at the backward previous Qajar dynasty, and because each play had to be cleared by censors, drama found an outlet in the writing and performance of patriotic and historical dramas eulogizing the glories of the past. Because of the often political nature of performances, as of 1930, the *Reza Shah Pahlavi* censorship officers began demanding to see texts of plays in advance. The officers would check every line of the text to find any concept or phrase that may be offensive to:

1. Religious beliefs
2. Public policy
3. Morals
4. Monarchy

Subsequently, texts were double-checked by the security service and each page had to be stamped to demonstrate its clearance. One of the reasons that plays did not pass censorship was the fact that the personal opinion of the censoring agent played a major role in the decision to allow a performance. Usually three criteria were applied: (I) artistic value, (II) moral value, and (III) appropriateness, and the decisive comments were quite succinct. Even after permission had been received to perform a play, the

theatrical group needed to adhere to various rules. The state gradually expanded its control over cultural and public life. This development became apparent in the promulgation of a multitude of regulations, “nezam-namehs”⁴⁸. The Pahlavi government’s ambition to control the life of its subjects in nearly every respect was being officially revealed in various legal provisions. Reza Shah might have had a personal interest in such comprehensive control to secure his power. But another key factor for the radical increase in regulations was the general concern of many Iranian reformers that, if people would not act in line with the government’s precisely formulated instructions, the intended modernisation would fail and possibly even bring harm to society – or at least to Iran’s image as a progressive nation.

In a report related to the review of a "Hamlet" rehearsal, the required remedial conditions for issuing the permit were stated as follows:

1. The prince is too depressed and passive; this should not be the reflected image of a prince.
2. Three kings are being murdered readily during the play. This neglect of respect for the Holy authority contravenes the current benefits personified by his royal majesty.

3. Since the play contains beneficial moral messages it can be staged, but with modifications.

It is not clear from the few remaining documents whether *Papazian* himself made the required modifications or whether the Iranian group of performers, who had been familiar with the rules, were trying their best to fulfil those official requirements. Ultimately, the performance was given clearance. There could be a probability that the French speaking Hamlet used the privilege of speaking in a foreign language as a tool for freedom of expression.

Some of the modifications mentioned in another report, written by an unknown spy of the censorship office who attended the public performance in Tehran, are stated bellow:

1. In order to avoid any clash with the authorities, Horatio ended the "Mouse Trap" scene by advising Hamlet to repent all his sinful thoughts and respect the King who saved the country and Gertrude's honour from invaders.
2. To prevent any doubts on the performing group's extreme gratefulness to *Reza Shah* and his invitation, Hamlet was not able to kill his royal uncle. His sword did not inflict any harm to Claudius. After his attack, King Claudius left the stage gently and honourably with a royal smile.

Unfortunately, there was no specific report on Fortinbras; it is not clear what happened to this character in connection with the changes in Claudius's destiny.

This interaction converted the democratic functions of the play and forced theatre to act as an aid for the paradigm of kingship. For years afterwards, Iranians had no chance to watch "Hamlet" on stage. "Hamlet" was banned altogether because "it suggested ways to murder a king." In fact, the censorship agents were sceptical toward any Shakespeare play. "Othello" was not performed till 1948, when *Noushin*⁴⁹ performed it based on his own translation. On one occasion "The Merchant of Venice" was authorized for production only after adding a "connecting scene", written by the censorship agent himself. He believed the author had "forgotten to insert this scene."

With having in mind the powerful intentions of theatre activists in Iran trying to challenge every limitation, it is simplistic to account this ban as the only reason to pretermite the tragedy of "Hamlet". When Hamlet set foot on the grounds of Iran, he encountered two contact zones: he had to deal with the challenges of governmental regulations for theatre, and at the same time, he had to interact with the Iranian audience's perception of theatre.

Comparing Molière and his success in Iran with the reception of Shakespeare, we observe a few salient points: although theatre

found a wide range of audiences from different strata of society, most people did not yet appreciate the value of theatre and many considered it a joke⁵⁰ or merely an amusement. Therefore, comedy was one of the main preferences of the public and especially many French comedies were performed over and over again⁵¹. Slowly plays from other countries (Russia, the UK) also became part of the repertory, but these remained marginal as compared to the French plays.

From the first attempts of importing modern theatre it was expected to have moral messages and leave an educational impact. Comedy was a simple and easily understandable medium for transferring messages to audiences, even illiterate ones. There is no doubt that Shakespeare's comedies are far more complicated than Molière's. Therefore, the comparatively simple plots could have been a reason for Molière's success in Iran. Comedies also made fun of the existing conditions, and it was, therefore, safer to use them as a medium for freedom of speech. Furthermore, staging betrayal, adultery, murder, suicide, and rebellion against the monarchy, all artistically and effectively gathered in "Hamlet", did not seem morally appropriate.

The simplicity of Moliere plays along with its similarity to Iranian audience's life gave Moliere plays a big chance of success. *Christopher Brooker* clarifies this familiar plot:

“...Again and again, right back to Aristophanes, we see the characters in a comedy separated by, as it were, an unspoken dividing line. The characters below the line, like Molière’s fathers and their friends, represent the established order, an upper social level, the authority of men over women, fathers over their children. Those below the line, ... include servants, people of ‘inferior’ class, wives and the rising generation. The chief source of darkness in the story, opposed to life, is on the upper level. The road to liberation lies through the ‘inferior’ level.”⁵²

This social structure was very similar to what Iranians were experiencing in their every-day life situation in those days. When we come to Shakespeare, we almost invariably see a division into an ‘upper’ and a ‘lower’ world in social terms, and occasionally, it is the servants or other characters of the lower levels, as in “Much Ado about nothing”, who expose the vital truth and thus bringing about the triumph of love to the upper level.

With this train of thought, suddenly the benign and moral comedies of Moliere seem to become extremely riotous plays, crying for disassembling social order. With this reading of the text, the different implications of these plays before and after the Constitutional Revolution may seem natural to us: on the one hand, they are heralds of the upcoming revolution, and on other hand, their riotous power during the turbulent years after the Constitutional Revolution is cherished by Iranian audience.

Although many readers distinguished “Hamlet” as a moral and historical play, the persona of Hamlet did not fit into any of the limiting categories of state-sponsored plays. In the eyes of Pahlavi-Iranians Hamlet is a rebel against morality and they can hardly trace the roots of the play in history. The anti-monarch theme of the play led to the disbandment of the group that *Papazian* had formed during his stay in Iran. *Papazian* left Iran one year later, and in his autobiography, he claimed that the government had invited him to establish Iran’s “National Theatre”. *Noushin* and *Oskoui*⁵³ deny this claim strongly but one cannot deny *Papazian*’s educational effects on Iranian theatre activists and audiences.

Despite all difficulties during the *Reza Shah* period, there were at least 40 different locations in Tehran, in which some 20 different theatrical groups were performing. This indicates a high level of activity and public interest, which is also implied by the high number of ticket-sales-points in Tehran at that time. To respond to such public interest, many playwrights wrote new Iranian plays and translated existing European works.

However, most Iranian playwrights were not experienced in their craft. They were mostly familiar with Western plays and tried to re-write well-known pieces in an Iranian style. Since there was no theatre education, their plays were immature from a literary, artistic and theatrical point of view. Indeed, *Hoseyn Quli Mosta’an*⁵⁴, one of

the first critics and a well-known journalist, in an article written in 1935 listed the problems under which theatrical life in Iran suffered and needed to be overcome, before such plays would become a viable force for both educational and entertainment purposes. The problems he listed included, among others: (1) the need for sufficient funds; (2) knowledgeable playwrights with psychological insight; (3) trained and experienced directors; (4) competent actors; (5) properly equipped theatres; (6) public interest, as a result of the previous five items; (7) the foundation of theatrical clubs and troupes whose aim should not solely be financial; (8) special laws regulating the behaviour of actors.

Theatre groups established during these years were not actually professional, but because of their stable structure and the fixed members who moved from one disbanded group to another, they still ought to be recognised as the first professional and stable theatre groups of Iran. However, Iranian theatre has never become fully professional in its real meaning. Except for the few theatre companies, members of theatre groups were mostly teachers or employees who invested their spare-time in theatrical activities. Performers did not receive any remuneration or, even if they did, it was so minimal that it could hardly be counted as income.

Each theatrical group consisted of like-minded people, often friends, with a common interest. This interest was in most cases

rather political than artistic. Politics and theatre often went together in the early days as well as later. For this reason, *Reza Shah* exercised strong censorship with a dampening effect on theatrical life.

Between August 25 and September 17 1941, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union invaded Iran. The purpose of the invasion was to secure the oilfields at Abadan to ensure a supply route to the USSR in the struggle against Nazi Germany on the Eastern front. Because *Reza Shah* showed sympathy for Nazi Germany and the Axis forces, he had to abdicate and was exiled to South Africa. His son, *Mohammad Reza Pahlavi*, was enthroned as his successor, an event that gave birth to the second Pahlavi era.

The foreign troops in Iran needed food and transport facilities, which lead to food shortages for the general public. In addition, inflation increased by 450 percent, triggering bread riots in Tehran in 1942. People were dying of starvation in the streets. In 1945, when the invaders, except for the Soviet forces, left Iran, the country was still trying to heal the injuries of this economic and health crisis.

Professional and semi-amateur efforts for keeping the Iranian theatre alive were not able to withstand the World War II crisis in Iran. *Fekri* mentions that the English, during World War II, cut short most theatrical performances⁵⁵. Censorship and control did not

adhere to any specific rules and, according to *Sir Bullard*⁵⁶, the Allied Forces were free to ban any unofficial publication if any of the three allied countries (Russia, UK or USA) were against it.⁵⁷ It was only after their departure that theatre came alive again.

Notes:

1. The Red Lion and Sun Society of Iran was established in 1922 and admitted to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in 1923. In 1980, because of the association of the emblem with the Shah, the newly proclaimed Islamic Republic of Iran replaced the Red Lion and Sun with the Red Crescent, consistent with most other Muslim nations.
2. Mirza Saleh
3. Willem Floor, "The history of Theatre in Iran" (Mage 2005), 213
4. J. Perkins, "A Residence of Eight Years in Persia" (Andover, 1843), 208
5. Fath-Ali Shah Qajar; (1772 – 1834) was the second Qajar king of Iran. He reigned from 17 June 1797 until his death. His reign saw the forced and irrevocable ceding of Iran's integral northern territories (Caucasian territories), which had been part of its concept for centuries, comprising what is nowadays Georgia, Dagestan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia to the Russian Empire following the Russo-Persian Wars of (1804–13) and (1826–28)
6. Jules Thieury, "Documents pour servir à l'histoire des relations entre la France et la Perse", Evreux, 1866.
7. Abbas Mirza Nayebolsaltaneh, (Crown Prince Abbas Mirza), was born 1789, and died 1833. He was the crown prince of Iran (Persia) under the reign of Fath Ali Shah of Qajar. He was a younger son of Fath Ali Shah but, on account of his mother's royal birth, was destined by his father to succeed him. He developed a reputation as a military commander during the wars with Russia and the Ottoman Empire, as an early modernizer of Persia's armed forces and institutions; he died before his father. Abbas Mirza was an intelligent prince, who possessed some literary taste and valued simplicity in his life.
8. By the end of the 19th century, the Russian Empire's dominance became so pronounced that Tabriz, Qazvin, and a host of other cities were occupied by Russia, and the central government in Tehran was left with no power to even select its own ministers without the approval of the Anglo-Russian consulates. By this time, northern Iran was officially a sphere of influence of Imperial Russia. During the same time, many Russians settled in northern Iran.
9. Benjamin, Samuel Greene Wheeler. Persia and the Persians (London: J. Murray, 1887), 382
10. Takiyeh is a hall for performing "Taziye", the traditional Islamic passion play
11. Ervand Abrahamian, "Iran between two revolutions", (Princeton University Press, 1982), 58
12. Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzade (1812-1878), was a celebrated Iranian author, playwright, philosopher and founder of modern literary criticism who acquired fame primarily as the writer of European-inspired plays in the Azeri Turkish language. Akhundzade singlehandedly opened a new chapter in the development of

dramatic literature, and is also considered one of the founders of modern Iranian play-writing. He was also the founder of materialism and the atheist movement of Azerbaijan and one of forerunners of Modern Iranian Nationalism.

13. Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan, a Qajar statesman, scholar and author (1843-1896) was among the first students to enter the Dār al-Fonūn. He was the director of the “Press and Publications Bureau” from 1880 – 1881.
14. In Persian: vezarat-e Maaref
15. John David, David Davidian, was an Armenian-Iranian translator. Amir Kabir sent him to Austria to hire professional professors and teachers for Dar al-Fonun.
16. Ervand Abrahamian, “Iran Between Two Revolutions”, (Princeton 1982), 62.
17. Ervand Abrahamian, “The causes of constitutional revolution in Iran”, 403. (International Journal of Middle East Studies, vol. 10, no. 3, Aug. 1979), 381 – 414, Cambridge University Press.
18. Stephen Greenblatt, “Cultural mobility: A manifesto”, (Cambridge 2010) ,14.
19. Mirza Aqa Tabrizi, “Panj Namayeshnameh (five plays)”, (Tehran,1976),151.
20. Edward Granville Browne (1862 – 1926) was a British orientalist. He published numerous articles and books, mainly in the areas of history and literature. Browne published in areas, which few other Western scholars had explored. Many of his publications are related to Iran, either in the fields of history or Persian literature.
21. Willem Floor, “The history of Theatre in Iran” (Mage 2005), 219. Cited: Browne, “Literary History”, vol. 4, 459-62.
22. Stephen Greenblatt, “Cultural mobility: A manifesto”, (Cambridge 2010), 13
23. Shapor Ghasemi, “Pahlavi Dynasty.” Iranchamber.com. <http://www.iranchamber.com/history/pahlavi/pahlavi.php> (accessed Dec2, 2015)
24. Ervand Abrahamian, Distinguished Professor of Iranian and Middle Eastern history and politics
25. Ervand Abrahamian, “Iran Between Two Revolutions”, (Princeton 1982), 62.
26. Jamshid Malekpour, A filmmaker and director of theatre, he earned his MA in “theatre and cinema” from the City University of New York and PhD in “drama” from the Australian National University.
27. Jamshid Malekpour, “Adabiyat-e Namayeshi dar Iran” (Tehran, 1386) vol. 1, 17
28. Hamid Amjad, “Rising of the Iranian Theatre in 19th Century”, (Tehran, 1999)
29. Patrice Pavis, “Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis”, translated to English by Christine Shantz, (Toronto, 1998), 277.
30. Hassan Javadi, “Satire”, 267 - 68 (with short characterizations of each play).

31. Reza Shah was impressed by Kamal Ataturk's achievements in modernising Turkey. Initially, he had planned to declare the country a republic, as his contemporary Kamal Ataturk had done, but abandoned the idea in the face of clerical opposition. He banned clerical dress and ordered the unveiling of women in favour of Western dress codes.
32. Touraj Atabaki, "Men of Order", 30. Cited: Mokhber al-Saltaneh, *Khaterat va Khatarat*, 397.
33. Abdolhossein Teymūrtāsh (1883-1933) was an influential Iranian politician and statesman who served as the first Minister of Court of the Pahlavi Dynasty from 1925 to 1932, and is credited with playing a crucial role in laying the foundations of modern Iran in the 20th century.
34. Ali Akbar Davar,(1885-1937) in Tehran, was the founder of the modern judicial system of Iran. Akbar began his career in the judiciary in Iran, after having completed his studies at Dar al-Fonun. He then went on to obtain his law degree in Switzerland. He returned to Iran in 1921 and founded the "Radical party of Iran". He also founded the newspaper *Mard-e Azad* ("The Free Man") in which he published regular comments.
35. Mohammad 'Ali Foroughi (1877-1942) was a teacher, diplomat, writer, politician and Prime Minister of Iran. Foroughi is known to have been a freemason.
36. R.A. Galunov, was a Russian orientalist. He made many researches in the field of literature and traditional theatre in Iran. He published three books on *Zourkhaneh*, *Pahlavan Kachal* and *Kheymeh-Shabbazi* on 1929 in Leningrad. cited: Galunov, "Neskol'ko slov", 310.
37. ANDARŪN, or ANDARŪNĪ (inside), the private quarters of well-to-do houses in contrast to *bīrūnī*. the public rooms usually reserved for men. (Abbas Yarshater, "Encyclopedia Iranica", Vol. II, Fasc. 1, p. 11).
38. Misha Kostanian, founded a theatre group in 1931, known as the theatre group of Armenian Artists (*Goruh-e Te'yatr-e Honarpishegan-e deramatik-e Armani*). With this group, he performed plays such as "The Roman Emperor" and "Othello" in the Armenian Club. In 1932, Kostanian continued to perform plays and operettas in Persian and in Armenian, which had been allowed again as a performance language. Other Armenian theatrical groups also came into being that year and staged various performances. (*Andranik Huyan, te'atr-e Armaniyan dar Tehran*", 210)
39. Bianca Devos, Christoph Werner, "Culture and Cultural Politics Under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran", (Routledge, 2013), 6
40. Ali Nasr (1891-1961) was an Iranian dramatist and playwright and one of the founders of theatres in Iran. He was born in Kashan. When he was a young man, he went to Tehran and started to study French language and literature. Then he went to Europe and studied theatre. After coming back to Iran, he founded an intellectual group named "Iran comedy" in 1925. Many prominent

Iranian theatrical figures were part of this group and it became a very important factor in the development of modern Iranian drama. Nasr wrote many plays, also founding an acting school in Tehran in 1939, where many important dramatists and actors studied.

41. Ali Nasr, "Honar-e te'atr", 311
42. "The California Courier", June 23, 1960.
43. Saeed Nafisi (1895 - 1966) was an Iranian scholar, fiction writer and poet. He was a prolific writer in Persian. Nafisi was born in Tehran, where he conducted numerous research projects on Iranian culture, literature and poetry.
44. Mischa Gostanian: Misha Kostanian
45. Loreta Hairapedian Tabrizi (1911-1998) was one of the first Iranian-Armenian stage and film actress. Born in Tehran, Loreta Hairapedian Tabrizi was graduated from the Moscow State University.
46. Byron, Robert, "The Road to Oxiana", (London, 1973), 143.
47. The Goharshad Mosque rebellion or the Goharshad Mosque Massacre took place in 1935, when a backlash against the Westernising, secularist policies of Reza Shah erupted in the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad. Responding to a cleric, who denounced the Shah's heretical innovations, corruption and heavy consumer taxes, many bazaaris and villagers took refuge in the shrine, chanted slogans such as "The Shah is a new Yezid". For four full days, local police and army refused to violate the shrine and the standoff was ended when troops from Azerbaijan arrived and broke into the shrine, killing dozens and injuring hundreds, and marking a final rupture between Shia clergy and the Shah.
48. Nezamnameh articles
49. Abdolhossein Noushin (1906- 1971) was an Iranian playwright and director. He is known as the father of modern theatre in Iran. He studied theatre in France and was a member of the Tudeh, the Iranian Communist party. He passed away in exile.
50. Hossein javadi, "Peyramun", 209-11
51. Willem Floor, "The history of Theatre in Iran" (Mage 2005), 255.
52. Christopher Booker, "The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories", (A&C Black 2005), 123.
53. Mustafa Oskoui (1924-2005) was the first professional actor, director, arts critic and veteran activist of Iranian theatre who qualified as an actor in Tehran. At the Moscow State Institute of Performing Arts, Oskoui specialized in direction and art criticism.
54. Hoseyn Quli Mosta'an, "Namayesh dar Iran va 'elal-e Enhetat-e An," (Salnameh-ye Pars 1935), 128-143
55. Fekri, "Tarikhcheh II", 81
56. Sir Reader William Bullard (1885 -1976) was a British diplomat and author. He was the ambassador of Great Britain in Iran during World War II. Many believe that he played a major role in the abdication of Reza Shah.
57. Sir Reader William Bullard, "The Camels must go", (Faber & Faber, London)

Chapter 4: “I think nothing, my lord”

Among all of Shakespeare’s female characters, Ophelia is the most renounced in popular culture. Although she is the least criticized heroine, her character raises many questions. She is the most cited in world literature and illustrated internationally through visual arts. Ophelia is mostly considered a minor character but her touching presence on stage in five acts cannot be neglected. During decades, audiences’ hearts burst because of her grief and madness all around the world, and Iranian audiences are not an exception in this case.

From the Elizabethan era until 2012, the social status of women in England and all around the world went through so many changes. Ophelia’s feminine insanity made her a symbol of love through history. Admitting the fact that Ophelia’s representation on stage is affected by social changes, I would like to trace Ophelia’s theatrical mobility in Iran in line with the development of the Iranian women’s movements.

Many Iranian historians believe that Iranian women’s social movement first emerged after the Constitutional Revolution and

eased because of the democratic progress developing in the country. However, there is evidence that the women's movement toward modernisation and effective public attendance began parallel to the beginning of mobilising modernity into the country, which marks the time of theatrical mobility in Iran. Women were participating and in some cases even engaging in public protests. They also gathered in secret societies to support the revolution and activists.

In 1906 Cossack troops killed 22 protesters and injured 100; bazaars were closed and the Ulama went on strike, a large number of them taking sanctuary in the holy city Qom. Fifty merchants and members of several guilds closed their shops and businesses and entered the British Embassy in Tehran; the British agreed to protect them during the strike. Other tradespeople joined the strikers and in the summer of 1906 approximately 12,000 men were camping in tents, grouped together along the lines of their guilds, in the garden of the British embassy. A vast open-air school of political science was formed; people were giving speeches and many were getting introduced to the basic concepts of the constitutional movement and democracy.

It was at that crucial moment of Iranian history that an eversion of the Iranian tradition of gender segregation and the social function of genders took place. While men assembled in Andaruni¹, a place where, traditionally, women were not visible to men outside the

family, women came to Biruni, i.e. where men assembled, and even went several steps further, superseding them in the public domain. Men who were members of the committee of guild elders organized women's demonstrations outside the royal palace and the legation. Theatricality was ruling this eversion. Women were playing the role of the revolutionaries' agents and men delegated women into a theatrical role. The demonstration was a public performance of discontent and power. Suddenly, women found themselves in the centre of a public performance. Their existence became important and effective. In fact, their power was their visibility. In August 1906, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah agreed to allow the formation of a parliament and in the fall the first elections were held. Quickly after the first triumph women were, once again, relegated to invisibility.

Women found their second chance to break into the public domain when in November 28, 1911, Russia gave an ultimatum to Iran and set a 48-hour deadline to present a note in parliament. The ultimatum provoked 300 women to march into the public galleries with pistols hidden under their long veils, threatening to shoot any deputy willing to submit to the Russian ultimatum. Such angry demonstrators also attacked the city trams which were partly owned by Russia. A huge crowd, described by one eyewitness as the "largest up to that point in time in Iranian history" gathered outside the parliament shouting, "Independence or death"². Parliament duly rejected the Russian demands.

Before this incident, women were not allowed to assume such roles in society; these functions were specifically assigned to men, and the public domain was their territory. Fact of the matter is, that this sort of freedom was given to women only because they were supporting the Ulama and religious leaders. Only a few of these female activists had ambitions related to women's rights. These few women were from upper-class families whose men were also active in the constitutional movement. In this phase of the movement, leaders of the constitutional movement did not show any objection toward women's participation, because women were crucial characters for their dramatic scenario. They wanted to excite emotions of Iranian men and awaken their nationalistic and religious feelings for defending Iranian women's honour. Women performed as actresses in plays that were aimed at spurring the zeal of traditional Iranian men for protecting their "property" - in this case, their women.

The gap between the Ulama and female activists became visible when women began establishing associations and opening schools for girls. The Ulama issued a fatwa³ against girls' education and declared that girl-schools contravened Sharia. This fatwa triggered women's protests against retrogressive thoughts; they published letters against the fatwa in liberal newspapers.

Although some members of the movement had progressive ideas,

such as educating women and passing rules to support women's rights in the new parliament, at that stage, both, moderates and democrats preferred to stay united and women's rights had no priority on their agenda. However, it did not take long for the conflict between moderates and democrats to be voiced in debates over secularism, especially over minority rights, women's roles in society, and the role of the Shari'a in the judicial system.⁴

Although women's presence in society did not undergo significant changes, a slow and gradual movement was initiated. As mentioned in the previous chapter, elites transformed modern theatre in Iran to a tool for modernisation, education and social improvement of the population. Perhaps, Iranian women should have grabbed the chance of women's representation in modern theatre as a tool for implementing their intentions. Indeed, a very small group of women was aware of the capabilities of theatre and Western drama, but severe cultural obstacles were in their path. On the one hand, there was the lack of a sufficient number of people interested in forming a strong theatre group, and on the other hand, illiteracy, the cultural ban on women's presence in the public sphere and religion were important dissuasive factors.

Until 1925 only three percent of Iranian women were literate. Although there were a few Western plays translated into Farsi, most women were not able to read and therefore could not easily

memorise dialogues. Furthermore, the majority of women were not even interested in drama. Theatre to them was a strange incomprehensible phenomenon that they would rather avoid. A sense of being inadequate for forming an audience was instilled in their minds, let alone espousing the idea of performing on stage.

During the Qajar era, women were taught to be submissive and obedient; little girls were taught to sit still and be quiet, not to ask questions and obey the men of their family - even their younger brothers. This model of socialization had been a dominant trend. Strong gender segregation was implemented in both private and public spaces. As mentioned before, the architectural set-up prescribed segregation into interior and exterior sections. Most women were not allowed to enter the exterior without their men's (father, husband, brother or uncle) permission. Gender segregation was also applied to streets: in crowded streets women had to use a designated sidewalk on one side of the street and men the one on the other side. Women who needed to cross sides for a necessary task required a permit from a policeman and should then only do so under his supervision⁵. Ironically, women found their freedom through a religious performance, religious rituals and traditional theatre. "Taziye", the Iranian passion play was very popular those days. Spectators came from far away to join the mourning ceremony and attend such religious theatre performances; and a majority of such audience were women. They had the opportunity to enjoy

themselves, express their feelings in public and they were free to attend the show without gender restrictions. They did not have to explain their absence from Andaruni because the act of attending such a passion play was holy and divine.

*Eyn al-Saltaneh*⁶ a nephew of *Naser al-Din Shah*, wrote:

“...on day 7, I counted 3’500 women and 600 – 700 men present. Many groups came on day 10. Three hours before sunset.”

In March 1895, he remarked,

“I do not know how many women Tehran has. But all these mosques, bazaars and houses are full of women. Some of them go each day two or three times. Most of the spectators were women: in fact, the entire Ta’ziyeh performance is a spectacle of women.”

The whole ritual was like a women’s parade through the city. Although all roles, even the female ones, were performed by men, the female audiences were part of the performing group. Their mourning, cries, shouting their blessings and curses loudly, were a crucial part of the passion play. However, such minor roles were not satisfactory for some of the wealthier women, inspiring them to put up “Takiyehs” inside the harems. Audiences were limited to friends and family members. *Calmaid*⁷ states that these female passion plays (Figure No.11) were performed for the first time in the house of *Qamar al-Saltaneh*⁸, daughter of Fath’ali Shah. The stage was in the

open air, garden or main halls. The whole theatre group was made up of women and mostly old female rowzeh-khans⁹, female storytellers or entertainers, who performed as male and female characters. *Qamar al-Saltaneh* directed the staging of the plays inside her own quarters and, like the male directors of “Taziye”, conducted on stage and gave directions with a walking stick.

Because of strong and severe objections, supposedly inherent in Islamic beliefs, it was not possible for Moslem women to perform on stage. This restriction was so deep-rooted that even Armenian theatre groups were doubtful about having women perform on private stages. However, the taboo of presenting women on stage was broken by women’s own efforts: in a dialogue between the culture of a minority and that of a majority and the passion for modernisation, the impossible became ultimately possible.

Tabriz was a pioneer city in this case, a city with a large population of Armenian-Iranian citizens, entertaining a close relationship with Caucasian and Turkish societies. Tabriz is the first area, which Greenblatt calls a “contact zone” in the case of theatrical mobility in Iran. A large Muslim community was living in the Caucasus in those days. This community was modernised and, although Tbilisi, the capital city, had been separated from Iran a few years earlier, its population still held strong bonds with Iranians on the other side of the border. Western theatre was frequently on stage

in Tbilisi, and Caucasians, Muslims or Christians, were the actual performers. Some sources refer to Tabriz where the first modern play in Iran was performed in 1877 by a Turkish theatre troupe.

In 1879 *Mesrop Papazian*¹⁰ was the first Iranian-Armenian who directed and staged modern theatre in Iran, in Tabriz; he was the principal of an Armenian school. This first performance was based on one of Shakespeare's plays. *Papazian*, who had seen the "Merchant of Venice" in Russia, wrote a play based on that story called "Court of Justice" (*Dadgah-e Adl*), which was performed in Tabriz. Since women did not perform at that time, directors also preferred plays without female characters. At first, *Papazian's* daughter only helped the group backstage, but later her father asked her to perform in a piece.¹¹ Although there was no religious ban for non-Muslim actresses, even the Armenian community was surprised to watch a woman performing on stage, and the audiences, at that time, were still all men.

On December 27, 1888, it is reported that the Armenian community in Tabriz staged two or three plays every year in a hall specially designated to this purpose. The net proceeds were used for the Armenian school. In 1888, *Mr. Safrastian* and his wife Alma had come from Tbilisi with other Russian subjects to give a performance of *Othello*. This is the first documented female theatre performance in Iran mentioning one of the star actors, *Shushanik Tessian*, who

was a teacher at the Armenian girls' school.¹²

While surveying the female population of Iran during the reign of the Qajar dynasty, we can categorise them in four groups, according to their social caste: (I) women who belong to the royal family, mostly living in harems, (II) women who belong to upper-class and wealthy families, spending their time in *Andarunis*, (III) women who belong to the lower class of society and, finally (IV) foreign women who were the wives of foreigner advisers or ambassadors or merchants living in Iran¹³ (Figure No.12). The latter group had an important effect on easing the process of women's entrance to the world of modern theatre.

The employment of advisers in various fields was initiated during the Safavid era and thereafter; it formed a trend, which peaked at the time of the Qajars. Modernistic tendencies in Iran, influenced by the West's scientific and technical progress, on the one hand, plus the country's backwardness and underdevelopment coming to light, finally prompted government officials to commission advisers from developed countries to help implement necessary reforms and modernism in Iran.¹⁴ These merchants, military advisers and scholars mostly brought their families along. European women were the first to ignore traditional walls by attending theatre performances. Although they were not so much in contact with Iranian women, their physical presence in theatres added a new

touch to the traditionally all-male scene. Since Iranian women were confined to their homes, foreign women largely affected Iranian men rather than women.

Willem Floor states:

“In the evening of April 9, 1887, many Europeans and their ladies as well as some Iranians, amongst whom the chief painter (Mozayyen al-dowleh), came for a play at the house of Mr. Na’t. There was also music. Men, of course, played all roles.”¹⁵

Looking for additional income, particularly from the large community of women who did not have access to entertainment outside their homes, the segregation of audiences into male and female became a new trend. Plays were usually performed for two or three nights for men and one or two nights for women, with men still playing all the roles, regardless of gender. In 1880 the Armenian community built a school and next to it a theatre with a stage. The theatrical group was managed by the principal of the school and in 1881 a club of theatre lovers (Anjoman-e dustdaran-e te’yatr) was created. Its purpose was the education of the young, the artistic development of theatre, and pecuniary support for the school, hence, the advent of separate performances for Armenian women¹⁶.

Clearly, the Armenian community played a pioneering role in promoting the spread of modern theatre, *Eyn al-Saltaneh*, noted in his diary:

“In the Armenian teachers’ training college (mo’allem-khaneh) artists performed shows on 21 Jamadi al-aval (February 4, 1888)... Between each scene there was half an hour’s intermission so that people could relax. It was also a hotel. Everyone could have food and tea. I returned at 8 o’clock. There also were musicians. It was a comedy; the behaviour of the miser was very comical and funny. There were many European and Armenian women. Tonight it is in French and tomorrow they will perform in Armenian.”¹⁷

Every now and then, European actresses were invited to perform on stage. They were mostly from the Caucasus, Turkey or Russia. There is a note written by *Eyn al-Saltaneh* in November 1888, stating that:

“For some nights now there have been plays in the Armenian teachers’ training college (November 27, 1888). Two plays were in Armenian, which I did not understand at all, except the sister’s role. The other play was in Persian. It was a play by Dekker¹⁸. It was very funny and amusing. There was also a European woman in it, (she was) not so good, but not bad either.”¹⁹

In 1889 the Armenian Theatre Club was reinforced by the arrival of two Armenian actors from Tbilisi, *Mrs. Parantsem* and *Mr. Grigor Abrahamians*. They performed in Tehran with local Armenian amateurs. It was only one year later that Muslim actors started performing in theatres. *Naqqhash-bashi (Mozayan al-dowleh)* was sent to Europe to study painting, and given his own interest, he attended some courses in theatre acting too. Every once in a while,

he gathered an amateur group and they performed private plays only for the royal family or members of the court.

Eyn al-Saltaneh mentions a play he saw in 1890 in a private house:

*“It was funny.... At 7:30 the show was over; it was really a good laugh. Hasan Ali Akbar, who is one of our own clowns (Moqalledan), with his own group had become actuers. Naqqash-bashi has translated the piece. There were many people. There was no Armenian in the play; all were Moslems, and they did well. What was wrong was that it was too long and thus it ended late.”*²⁰

Once again, Armenian women in Tabriz became pioneers in the history of modern theatre in Iran. In 1892 the female teachers of a school in the Leylabad quarter staged a play for women only, which was the first time that women attended a performance by women. As of 1897, it became usual for women to play female roles. In that year, *Mrs. Babayan*, the wife of *Gabriel Babayan*, the principal of the Armenian school, performed in “*Scapin*”.²¹

A great improvement occurred in women’s theatrical activities when in 1902 two sisters from Tabriz, *Vartir* and *Haranush Faligian* came to Tehran and created the “Tehran Women’s Theater Group” (*goruh-e te’yatr-e banovan-e Tehran*). During 1902 and 1903 they staged several performances and they were also invited to play at Mozaffar al-Din Shah’s court. Their performance was a great

success and they were well rewarded. However, in 1903 the two sisters moved to Egypt²².

Cultural activities and theatre developed significantly during the constitutional movement and impressively so after 1909 when the constitution was re-established. Women became socially active and thus advancing their efforts toward modernisation and consequently cultural development. There is a record of a mass audience in the spring of 1910 in Atabak Park ²³ (Figure No.13). Five hundred women, including some Europeans, gathered to watch a play. The purpose was to raise funds for the women's movement, and 400 Tomans²⁴ were raised for building a school for female orphans, a women's clinic and adult education classes²⁵.

Female participation in theatre did not obtain official and stable status until October 1911 when "Te'atre Melli" (National Theatre) started its activities with an official permit. This was the first independent theatre in Iran and, because their sole goal was to perform theatre, they were not connected to any association²⁶. They adopted comedy plays as their main repertory but did also stage moral plays and historical tragedies. Plays from *Molière* and *Beaumarchais* were performed too.

Meanwhile Armenian women continued their activities. The women's club associated with the Hunchakian party²⁷ staged performances such as "Disaster of the Bloody Path" by *Grigor*

Yeghikian in 1911 in the Mas'udiyeh Palace²⁸ together with a comedy called "In the lawyer's court", translated by *Haratiun Galustian*. It was performed in Armenian, but there was a Persian translation available for the attendees. This shows that the number of Muslim women in the audience must have been notable.²⁹ Even in plays performed in Persian, it was a common tradition to give one or two papers of the plot explanation to the audience.

The Armenian community decided to establish an organisation for theatre performers: the "Organisation of Armenian actors and actresses". This proves the fact that Armenian women were considered professional performers in Armenian society. Actors and actresses performed a play in the Armenian language for Ahmad Shah and the crown prince in 1913¹⁹. There is no record available of the outcome of this play in front of the royal family. However, after this event women appeared more frequently in public performances, as if performing in the presence of the king gave them some sort of official endorsement.

In 1916, the general assembly of the "Welfare Club of Armenian Women of Tehran" decided to establish a kindergarten. Because they had no money, they staged several plays. They asked *Hovhannes Tomasian*, a leading performer, to help them. He staged the Azeri musical "by-the-yard Cloth Seller" using members of the Women's Club as actors. First, the musical was played at

Hasanabad³⁰, but later the Qajar court invited the performance to the royal harem. To make sure that the women who played male roles (with beards, moustaches, etc.) were, indeed, women, the court eunuchs frisked the actors. The operetta was performed several times for the royal harem. Later it was also performed at the Grand Hotel for the womenfolk of Tehran's nobles and notables. Ultimately, performances took place for women of less august Tehrani families³¹.

In November 1917, the "Comedy Company of Iran" staged the performance of four plays for women to benefit the victims of the drought and famine in Tehran. The "Comedy Company of Iran" also staged the play "All you do, you do it to yourself" with the participation of a foreign actress, who performed the song and dance sections that were part of the play. By that time women audiences were accepted but employing a foreign actress was required because there was no Iranian woman who could sing or dance professionally on stage. Women did not have the chance to learn acting methods and even actresses were still struggling with illiteracy.

When a famous Turkish Moslem director and actor travelled to Iran in June 1914, Iranian women came one step closer to the stage. *Othman Beg Bektashzadeh* was accompanied by two actresses from a theatre in Istanbul. That was the first time, Iranians saw Muslim women on stage³². Despite continuous improvements there was still

a long way in front of Iranian women. Although there is no record of any objection toward the above-mentioned Turkish group, there are other records of strong hateful reactions toward women on stage.

In December 1909, the “Welfare Company of Iranian Ladies” (Sherkat-e kheyriyyeh-ye Khavtin-e irani) organised a performance to benefit the creation of a school for women. However, it ceased to exist due to the opposition to women acting on stage together with men. Opponents were stronger in smaller cities than Tehran or Tabriz. *Abdol-Majid Khan Farsad*, a director in Rasht (a central city along Caspian Sea), also included an actress (*Suna Khanom qafqazi*) in his performance and was declared to be an “infidel” and ultimately shunned in Rasht for this audacity.³³

Women were asked to leave their children at home when attending theatre performances; only children aged 10 and above were allowed to attend. While women attended some of the theatrical performances they would do so completely veiled. As most actresses were non-Muslim and non-Iranian, it may have been that some measure of liberty as to their veiling was accepted, as is implied in a letter to the editor of the “Shafaq-e Sorkh” newspaper.

While most people attended theatre performances for leisure and amusement, these performances certainly contained a moral message that the elites found necessary for their audiences to take back home. Since most theatrical events were intended to support a

worthy social activity such as building or equipping a school, a hospital, an orphanage, a reading room or library, or publishing a newspaper or financing destitute people, it should have attracted a vast range of audience.

Given their simplicity and entertaining nature, comedies seemed to be the favourite option to attract more audiences and sell tickets. Iranian directors selected Molière plays as their first choice; other reasons for performing Molière are discussed in the first chapter. It was not easy to translate humour; therefore, the Farsi version of Molière's plays is merely a free adaptation, which helped directors to attract Iranian audiences' sympathy easily. Merchants, royals and middle-class members who attended theatre performances had the chance to watch themselves on stage. For an audience who was not used to modern theatre, a contemporary comedy with a simple plot functioned better. Audiences could take moral messages from such comedies, with part of such audiences being women. Women's rights and their social situation was not only an undesirable, but also forbidden topic. Gender oppression was so common at different levels of society that any critical comment would face strong objection. However, secret women's associations and cultural transformations in the ensuing years had positive impacts on women's presence in Iranian modern theatre.

Two days after conducting a coup against the Qajar monarchy, *Reza Khan*, the leader of the coup, announced a declaration in nine articles, starting with “I order: ...”. This short proem perfectly defines the method of governance at the time of Reza Shah.

“... Article six - Doors of all bars, theatres, cinemas, photograph shops and gambling salons should stay closed and any drunken person who gets arrested will be trailed in military court.”

This interdiction did not last for a long time and soon theatre doors opened to its patrons and their activities were resumed. This enthusiasm came from the hopeful thoughts of most intellectuals and elites; they believed that Reza Shah would be able to improve the cultural and social situation or, at least, he could restore order to the country. Pahlavi’s promises for modernisation and democracy gave hope to women’s rights activists as well.

Indeed, Reza Shah’s state policies changed women’s social situation significantly. His ambition for modernising Iran and forming a nation-state led to reforms in educating women, building schools for girls, accepting women to universities, decreasing the power of the clergy by secularising courts, devolving civil registration to governmental organisations, prohibiting gender segregation in public spaces, preparing the society to accept women unveiled and employing women in governmental careers. These changes were of considerable benefit to the Iranian women’s movement. However, his

forceful attitude and his need for an obedient and united nation accepting his orders without any criticism, also impacted women's social development negatively. Ultimately, cultural development as such was affected.

In the beginning of Reza Shah's monarchy, the women's movement was still actively trying to improve women's situation. Beside charitable activities for empowering lower class women, they usually staged theatre performances to achieve two goals simultaneously: educating women with progressive messages and supporting women's empowerment.

"The Patriotic Women's Society" (1922–1933), was chaired by *Muhtaram Iskandari*, the wife of *Sulayman Iskandari*³⁴, and headmistress of one of the country's few girls' schools. This society campaigned for laws to protect women, held literacy courses, published a journal, and put on plays to raise public consciousness. According to the British military attaché, the Socialist party in Tehran recruited nearly 2'500 members, most of whom were "educated persons".

This association organised one of the biggest theatrical events for women at that time. With the help of *Mirzadeh Eshghi*³⁵, the "Patriotic Women's Society" staged a play named "Adam and Eve" in Atabak park. Its main theme was women's liberation. 500 women attended the event; among them were also European ones. Overall,

they earned 400 Toman, which was devoted to adult education for women. However, opposition from the Tehran clergy resulted in the play being banned.

A group of younger communist members of the “Patriotic Women’s Society” who were not satisfied with what they called the conservative manner of society, believing in more radical actions, branched out to establish the “Women’s Awakening Organization” (1923-1926). During their three years of activities, one of their main actions was performing theatre in girls’ schools.

In 1930, the first Iranian female director, *Madam Varto Teriyan*, known as *Madam LaLa*, directed “Thousand and a one Nights” for the “Patriotic Women’s Association”. Although she was the director of the piece, *Arto Terian* and Sanaati, well-known directors at the time, were mentioned as directors on the promotional posters. This secrecy illustrates to what extent women were accepted within the modern theatre scene in those days. It is probable that a woman’s name as director would not sell the same number of tickets as man’s name, keeping in mind the fact that a male name would prevent any upheaval in Iranian society. *Varto Terian* was born in Tabriz and continued her studies in the Armenian school of Tehran. When she was thirteen, her parents sent her to Switzerland to study theatre. At the beginning of World War I, she came back to Iran and met *Arto Terian*, and they married few years later. This couple

started their professional theatre activities in the Armenian school of Tehran. At a particular occasion, *Varto* read a poem on the stage of the Barbad community³⁶. She claims to have been the only woman in Iran who entered the professional stage through such an act. Afterwards, she and her husband were invited to act in several plays or direct plays for charity events. She owes her fame to directing “Jafar Khan az Farang Amadeh” (Jafar Khan is back from abroad) that attracted many audiences.

Another women’s association with considerable effect on women’s presence in Iranian modern theatre is “Jam’iyat-e Ma’aref-pazhuhan-e Nesvan”. This association was founded by Mrs. *Sari Emami* in 1923 as part of the “Farhang Club”. This women’s club performed “Marriage or the sale of Girls” (*Arusi ya dokhtarfurushi*) in the salon of Olus Beig on 15 March 1925. All troupe members were women belonging to the theatre association in the Northern province of Gilan (the state with common borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan). The “Farhang Club” was the second theatrical society that allowed women to perform in its plays. Although the theatre group was an amateur cast, it gained a huge success. Some actors were *Fatemeh Nashuri*, *Parirokh Vahdat* and *Banu Khojastegi*. The decision to allow actresses to play female roles was the logical consequence of the club’s objective to uplift Iranian women from their downtrodden position. This is why the club had a special women’s branch, as noted above, which continued to function till

1931, when the “Farhang Club” ceased to exist.

The group was a pioneer in projecting women’s social difficulties as the main theme of their plays. This particular play focused on the difficult situation of women and girls in the Northern province(s) of Iran, who were not allowed to choose their mates. Unfortunately, this kind of play was performed for women only, and in private settings, from where the central message of the play would not reach any men, who were responsible for such patriarchal rules.

Madam Pari Aqabeyof and “Jamiyate Rahe Nou” established two other theatre groups in 1916, which did not last for a long time. Madam Aqabeyof joined other theatre groups. She had a great influence in promoting dance and opera singing among Iranian intellectuals. Her skills in ballet and opera gave the chance to Iranian theatre directors to perform dance and operetta on stage.

Mrs. Sa’u Aqabeyof was the most famous actress and singer of this era; her collaborations included European actresses such as Ms. Marie, Ms. Victoria, and Ms. Maniya. Although these actresses were considered professional and famous among Iranians, they were not necessarily as famous in their homelands. Furthermore, their skills and proficiency was not of the same level. *Mrs. Sa’u Aqabeyof* or *Aqababiyan*, who, because of her lead role in Shahrzad’s opera, was also known as *Pari*, was born in 1900 in Tehran to an Armenian family. She went to Europe to study voice and music at the

conservatory of Charlottenburg (Germany). At the outbreak of World War I, she left for Moscow to complete her studies in voice, ballet and theatre at the imperial conservatory of Moscow, and later also in Paris and Rome. On her return to Iran she became a member of an Armenian theatrical group, where she did the vocal parts. After her own theatre group was disbanded, she started performing for other directors.

One of the most successful theatre groups active during Reza Shah's reign, "Komedi-ye Iran", also had a significant effect on women's performance and representation on stage. "Komedi-ye Iran" was a holdover from the Qajar period having started in 1917. In 1924 it had also performed for *Reza Khan*, who was, at that time, Minister of War and one year later the new Shah of Iran. In 1925 the group ceased its activities due to *Ali Nasr's* travels to Europe, but on his return in 1926, "the Komedi-ye Iran" was back in business again. The new set of actors included *Hoseyn Kheyrikhah*, *Ali Asghar Garmsiri*, *Sadeq Bahrami* and the first Moslem women, *Moluk-e Hoseyni* and *Shekufeh*. *Sara Khatoon* also joined the acting group later.

Ali Asghar Garmsiri who was, at first, a student at a municipal theatre school, and later a teacher at an acting school, and an active actor of "Komedi-ye Iran", as notes this revival in an interview:

"In 1926, the founders of "Komedi-ye Iran" made an

announcement for hiring new members for their theatre. Since they were all in their forties and fifties, and felt the urge to find younger members who would continue their work... We were seven to ten young men who joined the troupe and Mrs. Hoseini was among us too, she was the first Iranian Moslem woman on stage. Her real name was Molouk Bahman Soltani. She changed her surname to Hosseini after marrying one of her colleagues. She is known in our History of Theatre by that surname. A black-a-vised woman whose name was "Shekufeh" was accompanying her. To hide their Muslim religion, their real names were never mentioned in the announcements of the plays. Still, people were not ready to watch a Muslim woman in theatre costumes on stage."³⁷

In fact, this was considered a vice, and the personal sacrifices these actresses had to make, were considerable. Most actresses never mentioned their family names therefore they were mentioned by their nicknames. Some changed their family names to their husband's family name or a fictitious one³⁸. In most cases their family did not want their names to become dishonored since they believed their daughter performing on stage was against their family honor. *Molouk Hosseini* tried to hide her acting carrier for a long time. When the secret was revealed, furious neighbours broke into her house and she had to escape through the roof in the middle of night.

Ali Nasr himself is known as the founder of moral theatre in Iran. For Reza Shah's cultural policies and political ambitions toward a nation-state, moral theatre was a crucial promotional and

educational medium. Ali Nasr's knowledge in directing modern theatre was mostly limited to theatres that he had seen at the "Comedie Francaise". He had tried to imitate French style as much as his group's skills allow and adapted French plays as closely as possible to Iranian culture.

Although *Ali Nasr* and his theatre company officially brought Muslim women on stage, he did not go as far as representing Iranian women in his adaptations. He was strongly connected to the government and had a personal relationship with Reza Shah. He had no intent to trespass any state-approved cultural borders. The contemporary situation and ambitions of Iranian women were not reflected in the plays performed by "Komedi-ye Iran".

Reza Shah considered democracy and independent political action a hindrance to rapid modernisation. He interpreted the popularity of his reform programme as a mandate for despotism. To ensure his absolute power, *Reza Shah* closed independent newspapers, stripped the deputies of their parliamentary immunity and, even more importantly, destroyed the political parties. The reformers' party was banned altogether, while the revival party, which had faithfully supported *Reza Shah*, was replaced first by the "New Iran Party" (Hizb-i Iran-i Nou) and later by the progressive party. However, it was soon outlawed on the suspicion that it harboured dangerous "Republican sentiments."

Gradually, women's activists' situation became precarious with *Reza Shah's* power stabilisation. The king did not permit any independent (social or political) movements and women's associations were not an exception. He forced activists to abandon their free organisations and follow his desired model instead. Any association and organisation should dissolve and join a governmental association. Ignoring this rule was equal to closure. The "Farhang Club" in Rasht was banned and two women among its members were sent to a women's prison in Tehran. The "Women's Awakening Organization" was also banned and some members had to live in hiding for years afterward. Similarly, the Socialist party was dissolved when *Sulayman Iskandari* was forced into retirement and the party's clubs were burned down by organised mobs. Finally, in 1932, *Reza Shah* banned the last independent women's organization, the "Patriotic Women's Society of Iran". The police watched as a fanatical crowd stoned the "Patriotic Women's Society" office and burned the society's journals.

In Enzeli, the police encouraged a religious mob to attack the Socialist theatre because, in a performance of *Tartuffe*, an actress had appeared on stage.

While the government was forcing cultural mobility by banning any traditional manners, it was misusing people's anti-modernistic beliefs for controlling any independent movement. In this case,

women's appearance on stage, an important show-off for advertising modernised Iran, functioned as a threat for the theatre itself. *Reza Shah* did not think of culture as a coherent phenomenon; his intention was to transform elected segments of the Persian culture and eliminating or ignoring undesired phenomena. With this approach, any cultural activity was condemned to superficiality. What happened to theatre and women's position in its transformation, was an accurate reflection of this ill-advised policy.

In 1934, *Reza Shah* initiated the development of a government-controlled women's organisation called "Kanon-e Banovan" (The Ladies Center), headed by his daughter Ashraf Pahlavi³⁹. This organisation began a series of welfare activities designed to both depoliticise the women's movement and create an image of women's involvement and participation. Activist women had to make a choice, either they had to cooperate with *Reza Shah's* non-democratic authoritarian system to achieve some basic goals or join movements against dictatorship. The latter group itself was divided in two sections: one was the fundamentalist religious group and the other one consisted of Pro-Communist activists. Pro-Communist activists were already weakened by the state's suppression, and imprisoning members of this new organisation was successful in restraining women's movements under state policies.

The theatre groups that were dependent on political and social associations were mostly amateurs and restricted their activities to providing financial aid or ideological support. After the disintegration of the core of the Iranian theatre scene, there was no motivation for theatrical efforts. Amateur actresses went back to their every-day lives and the speed of theatrical mobility decreased rapidly.

Reza Shah's modernisation did not intend to give women the chance of choosing their social role. "Kanoon-e Banovan" did not decline traditional roles of a woman as mother and wife, but tried to reproduce them with a modern reading. A mother and wife, as desired by nationalistic men, was a woman who was familiar with etiquette, dressed properly and managed her husband's home in a thrifty way. Indeed, women should fit the image of the modern woman as defined by *Reza Shah's* standards. All media should have served the purpose of projecting such an image. Among them, *Reza Shah* found theatre the most effective and at the same time riskiest medium. Women should either be presented as an ancient Iranian role model in historical plays or a "modern" woman whose highest aim is helping the nation's movement toward modernisation. There was no free space for any other kind of woman to stand on stage.

In early 1930, *Reza Shah* restricted public mourning observances to one day; he banned street commemorations for

Muharram, “the Day of Sacrifice”, and “the Feast of Zahra”, the famous festive Bonfire Day. By putting a ban on “Taziyeh”, the religious theatrical ritual that was so much favoured among traditional Iranian women, Reza Shah aimed at speeding up theatrical mobility, but his despotic approach achieved the contrary. The connection of women from the lower-classes of society with any theatrical event was cut out and they even became resistant to Western theatre because of their anger about the ban of holy rituals, such as “Taziyeh”.

Not only his cultural mobility programme was doubtful, but even his shaky policy was often circumvented by the responsible deputies in the country. Lacking a firm cultural policy, the authorities in different parts of the country applied their personal views, as described by the following example:

In October 1925, a theatrical group of the new Republic of Azerbaijan asked for permission to come to Iran. This group was led by actress *Leyla Khanom*. For this reason, the police department refused a visa: suddenly, it was considered improper and against religious law for a female to perform a concert in public, unless it was for a female public. This was obviously a personal decision made by the issuing authorities.

Despite all these limitations and narrow-minded categorisations, the women’s development movement in Iran’s modern theatre did

not stop. Women used any chance to foster this transformation.

The government invested a great deal of money and resources in the expansion of schools for girls. Indeed, Reza Shah's major contribution was the expansion of educational opportunities for women, including higher education. This was enough to generate support for this administration among the proponents of women's rights, who had always viewed education as the main route to emancipation.

Women also found a chance to study theatre at school: In 1935, *Ali Daryabeigi* opened the first official Iranian theatre school under the name of "Theatre courses of Municipality". *Ali Daryabeigi* had studied Cinema and Theatre in Germany and opened this acting school in a building that was still under construction at the time. The building was designed to become an opera house. The school had 25 female and male students, but was closed three years later, when *Ali Nasr* opened the acting school "Honarestan-e Honarpishegi" under the government's auspices. Nasr modelled this school on the French "Conservatoire d'Art Dramatique". Graduated students would receive a high-school diploma. Most young actors between 1942-1953 had been students of this acting school. It remained the only theatre school in the country until 1956 when Tehran University started short courses in theatre arts. However, society did not accept the fact that women would study theatre

together with male colleagues. *Esmat Safavi*, a female student of the acting school was forced to leave her Muslim family and took refuge in the house of some Armenian friends.

In 1936, *Reza Shah* forcefully ordered women to unveil, a decree that had serious negative effects on the movement. On one hand, the Ulama used the decree as proof that the women's movement had no other aim than "making women naked" and "showing their bodies in public", acts which were contradictory to Islamic ethics. On the other hand, the state's determination in issuing the decree and implementing it vigorously, despite widespread opposition by public and religious leaders, convinced many early "feminists" to support the decree as a "progressive" measure, necessary for confronting clerical misogynistic approaches to women's concerns. The success of the state in winning the support of women activists and some intellectuals resulted in further alienating the clergy and a larger segment of secular intellectuals and activists from *Reza Shah's* modernisation programme.

During the constitutional movement, women from all classes of society gathered in a public theatrical event, regardless of their actual role in their personal lives, and pushed cultural mobility further ahead. In such a forced modernisation programme, women were not able to choose any roles themselves, they had no other chance than playing the one and only role that their dictator

director assigned for them. On the other hand, judicial law was still based on Shari'a and its traditions; therefore, they were under pressure from the "sub-directors" in their everyday life: husbands, brothers, and fathers. This then divided the women in two groups: women from the intelligentsia or government-related families who were encouraged or forced to perform in society and women from traditional and religious families who were pushed back even further behind the position they had achieved before, i.e. being sent back to Andarunis.

Reza Shah issued an order to the owners of public places such as restaurants, theatres and hotels to prevent veiled women from entering. This resulted in the decline of female patrons among theatre audiences and consequently stifled any modern feminine presence on stage. By eliminating women from public space, men became the dominant voice of the cultural sphere, thus showing less tolerance for watching the other gender as a major character on stage.

Those traditional women who were finding the chance to entertain themselves with modern theatre found their honour and personal choice trampled and became more fundamentalist. Since many of the Ulama were against theatre and, specifically its effects on cultural development, they opened their arms to their followers and benefitted from this gap.

In such an atmosphere and cultural situation, it does not sound strange that amorous and self-sacrificing girl like Ophelia does not find any place in plots of Iranian plays. Ophelia fitted into none of the desired list of those two groups.

The women's movement was vying for modernisation and *Reza Shah* had a passion for modernisation. Although he considered women's issues in his development plans, his policy in forcing changes had negative effects on the women's movement. Unveiling became such a major concern of society that women's issues and presence became a very sensitive topic. Playwrights and directors preferred to prevent any conflict with either group. This period of history marks the entry of many female playwrights into Iran's modern theatre scene, who would have rather put issues such as marriage, education and labour on stage, which would leave less interpretational elbow-room.

The British consul tried to place it within the larger picture. Next to their daily bread, what affects people most widely is what touches the code of social habit that, in Islam, is endorsed by religion. Among Muslims, the Iranians are not a fanatical people. The unveiling of women inaugurated in the preceding year attacks the people's social conservatism as much as their religious prejudice. Above all, like conscription, it symbolises the steady penetration into their daily lives of an influence that brings with it more outside

interference, more taxation. But one can easily exaggerate the popular effect of unveiling; it is a revolution for the well-to-do of the towns, but lower down the scale, where women perform outdoor manual labour, its effects, both on habits and on the family budget, diminish until among the tribal folk of all degrees they are comparatively slight. Hence, resistance among the greater part of the people has been passive and, where existing, has manifested itself in reluctance of the older generation to go out in the streets. It is one thing to forbid women to veil; it is another thing to make them mingle freely with men.

Indeed, during the *Reza Shah* era, the nation-state ideology was prescribing a united nation; violence and dictatorial behaviour of the state, especially toward women, caused a crevasse between nation and state. This bipolar structure continued during the second Pahlavi era but did not stop the boom of modern theatre.

World War II marks another changing point in Iranian women's situation. After *Reza Shah's* abdication in 1941, the new king, with whom the Allied Forces had replaced *Reza Shah*, faced a weakened government and the (detrimental) effects of the Allied Forces' invasion. This situation gave an opportunity to women's organisations along with other political organisations to reconvene. New organisations were added to the short list of women's rights associations: "Tashkilaat-e Zanaan- e Iran" (The Organisation of

Iranian Women), “Hezb-e Zanaan” (Women’s Party), and “Jamiat-e Zanaan” (Women’s League). These groups expressed concerns regarding women’s education and literacy, legal inequalities and suffrage.

“Educated and progressive Persian women of today cannot consider themselves isolated from the rest of the society. Women must go forward and struggle for their own rights.”⁴⁰

After *Reza Shah*’s forced exile to South Africa, *Mohammad Reza Shah* decided to release many political prisoners and give some freedom to opposition groups. Some former Socialist party members and sympathizers formed Tudeh⁴¹, the Iranian Communist party, in 29 September 1941. Since then, the Tudeh party played a significant role in the political scene of Iran and strongly influenced social movements. In two years, their activity for the female community started by shaping two organisations: “The Women’s Organisation” for party members and “The Women’s Society” for party sympathisers. Later, in 1949, these two merged to form the “Democratic Society of Women” (Jāme‘a-ye demokrāt-e zanān). Veteran members of the “Patriotic Women’s Society”, consisting of relatives of Tudeh party leaders, successful and pioneer women, writers and even the favourite theatre actress *Loretta Haropetian*, were among its board members. *Loretta* was *Noushin*’s wife and a leading actress in *Noushin*’s theater company. *Noushin* himself was a key figure both in the Tudeh party and in Iranian modern theatre.

It was not a surprise to find most well-known artists among Tudeh members. Tudeh attracted much of the salaried middle class and intelligentsia, and most of the educated professionals; lawyers, doctors, surgeons, engineers, architects, musicians, artists, sculptors, and university professors were either a member or sympathiser of the party. These educated women and men had progressive dreams for the country. One of their main gathering places was, at first, the “Ferdowsi” theatre and, after its closure, the “Sa’adi” theatre. In that epoch of time, members of the Tudeh party such as *Noushin*, assumed the role of cultural mobilisers.

Noushin was the founder of these two theatres; his group had adopted a more modern and updated style of acting in their performances. *He* introduced new international theatre figures to Iran’s modern theatre scene, such as Anton Chekhov, Maxim Gorky and Maurice Maeterlinck. *Noushin* preferred to translate most plays himself; unlike other translators, he used a simple daily language in both translating and staging foreign plays. He was the first one who did not change the original names of characters to Iranian ones, and did not make a sketchy adaptation of the text with the aim of simplifying it and making it understandable for Iranian audiences. This had a great impact in introducing Western culture to Iranian audiences; audiences of the “Ferdowsi” and “Saadi” theatres had the chance to watch at least a biased sketch of European culture on stage since he mostly chose naturalistic and realistic plays.

However, his style of theatre was close to that of 19th century theatre, and it was old-fashioned both in text and performance. His taste in selecting plays reflected the cultural and political agendas of Tudeh policies.

Tudeh's position reinforced the general conviction that the state had the moral responsibility to provide citizens with the basic necessities. Its popular slogan was: "Work for All, Education for All, Health for All." It introduced into politics the idea that women should have the same political rights as men – especially the right to vote.

The "Democratic Society" published a feminist journal, *Bīdārī-e mā* (Our awakening), edited by *Homā Hūšmand*. It linked social inequalities with gender, and campaigned on such issues as women's education, mobilisation of women for political activities, prostitution, female exploitation in factories, day-care-centres, workshops to train women and issuing women's journals. In 1944 the society succeeded in placing a women's suffrage bill before parliament but the bill was defeated because of clerical opposition who considered the women's place to be at home and their duties limited to motherhood. Its apparent control by the male leadership may help to explain its silence on such gender-specific issues as marriage, polygamy and divorce. Unlike women's organisations during the first Pahlavi era, these societies did not engage in

theatrical activities themselves. There were theatre groups who were politically connected to these organisations and who would promote those ideologies through their performances.

Tudeh policy makers could not avoid the influence of Reza Shah's implementation of national honour. For the sake of secularising society their cultural policy reinforced the national identity of Iran and focused on pre-Islamic Iran's importance also. It celebrated the equinoxes, praised ancient Iran, and waxed eloquent about Persian literature – especially the *Shahnameh*⁴². *Noushin*, was one of the very first to reinterpret the epic as a radical text, denouncing monarchs and instead praising folk rebels such as Kaveh the Blacksmith⁴³. Similarly, Tudeh glorified the Constitutional Revolution as a democratic and patriotic movement led by the progressive intelligentsia. It located itself in the long narrative of the constitutional movement.

It was the Tudeh party who raised the cry for nationalising the British-owned oil industry through a performative speech by a female party member⁴⁴. On May Day in 1946, the British consul in *Khorramshahr* noted in alarm that a female speaker had not only demanded a comprehensive labour law with equal pay for equal work, but had also called for the total nationalisation of the oil industry, accusing the British oil company of exploiting the “jewel of Iran” and of spending more on dog food than on wages for its

Iranian workers. This was the first but not the last call for oil nationalisation in Iran. Although this unknown woman was addressing a workers' community, the Women's Organisation of the Tudeh party focused its activities on students, teachers, and other modern-educated women.⁴⁵

Affected by World War II and other communist movements, left-wing activists in Iran tended to divide the female community into two groups with different rights and needs, i.e. demanding the right to sufficient food, to hygiene and health services, to the prevention of labour exploitation and, of course, the basic needs of human-beings, to rural and working-class women. The other group, made up of bourgeois women, were to be granted the right of sexual freedom, equality in marriage and family rights. In line with this classification, Tudeh's claim for women's rights focused on improving rights of the first group, while the second group was not on their priority list. This is an ironical contradiction, since women activists were members of the second group themselves, assuming the right to deprive other women of their gender-related rights⁴⁶. As theatre audiences consisted mostly of middle class men and women, focusing on women's rights of the same social strata did not have any priority in their gender policy. Although *Loretta* was an active and influential member of both organisations, i.e. theatre and party, and later managed the group on behalf of the imprisoned *Noushin*, one can hardly find a trace of women's rights concerns in the

“Saadi” theatre productions.

It was during *Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi* era that More than at any other time in the history of modern theatre in Iran, parties, ideologies and politics influenced theatre. Although theatre was paving its way through modernism, the definition of modernism in relation to women was defined by traditional concepts. Good mothers would raise good children and these children could improve Iran’s situation. Therefore, women should become educated, get out of their homes, and actively join political organisations - for the sole purpose of becoming better mothers. Iranian male-dominated families let their girls get out of the home, marry at an older age, become educated and even find a small career, pursue political activities and have the right to vote; all this with the precondition of remaining a good mother, a good wife and a good daughter. An axiom based solely on traditional values.

The preponderance of this traditional definition of the modern woman can be found in theatre productions too. *Noushin* translated and performed three Shakespeare plays with his theatre group at the “Farhang” theatre, the “Ferdowsi” theatre hall and “Sa’adi” theater: “Othello”, “The Merchant of Venice” and “Much Ado about Nothing”, of which the two latter plays were not successful. Neither audiences nor critics enjoyed watching a non-ideological play performed by a committed theatre group. He was familiar with the

French language and the Boulevard theatre in France, where most performances could satisfy political and non-political audiences. Transferring the same policy to his theatre in Iran did not yield the desired result.

It seems that *Noushin* was attracted to some of the anti-capitalist ideas of “The Merchant of Venice” play. But in the meantime, this play was also performed at the Tehran theatre, a place for comic drama. Tehran theatre was an institution of the royal court and meant to be a tribune to its cultural intentions; this common choice of opposing ideas either shows that the traditional interest of the leftist party was applicable to most pillars of society in a way that even a government-sponsored theatre has similar intentions. Alternatively, it could be due to the fact that *Noushin* tried to target new groups of audiences with the aim of promoting the communist ideology. *Noushin* was informed that “The Merchant of Venice” was performed in the Soviet Union and the leaders of Soviet communist party have awarded a special reception to this Shakespeare play.

Shakespeare plays had the potential of being culturally translated into both, the traditional court’s and the contemporary communist ideologies. The analysis of remaining documents shows that “Hamlet” was an exception, in that it would not serve either’s ideology. During this period, the need for heroism was a basic issue in society. People who adopted left-wing policies were seeking a

contemporary hero, and others were dreaming of their glorious past. Hamlet himself could hardly qualify as such a hero; for the same reason, a mad, weakened Ophelia is not a proper character for women who were encouraged to become social warriors. Historical plays continued their life on Iranian stages and the choice of contemporary plays, that could be staged successfully, became limited. Plays would not necessarily need to display victorious heroes, but at least, their heroes should demonstrate their motivation and struggle. The Tudeh party, on the other hand, was mostly looking for plays addressing social issues or the discrepancy between royal or upper class society and the lower strata of society. One should remember that the unofficial ban on performing “Hamlet” still applied during the Reza Shah era. Later, the censorship committee of the second Pahlavi era was also very sensitive and severe on any monarchy-related topics.

Molière was more popular because he reflected middle-class society and criticised the ruling capitalists as full of moral vices; nevertheless, there was always the hope for change and immortal characters would face punishment at the end of the play. Even Tudeh sympathisers favoured the traditional point of view, reflected in the plays staged at the “Farhang” theatre. This aspect of Molière’s plays made them a consistently suitable choice for pieces that could be staged in Iran without political risks. Molière and Eugène Labiche belonged to a period of Iranian theatre history, in which intellectuals

believed that theatre plays without catharsis and criticism had no value or social function.

The unsuccessful assassination attempt on *Mohammad Reza Shah* on 4 February 1949, gave an excuse to ban the Tudeh party, although the would-be assassin was not a Tudeh party-member, but rather a religious fundamentalist. *Noushin* was arrested with other Tudeh leaders, which led to the shutdown of the “Ferdowsi” theatre. *Noushin* was sentenced to three years of jail, but he managed to escape two years later and lived a clandestine life for about a year, ultimately spending the rest of his life in exile in the Soviet Union. Twenty months after his imprisonment, his former actors’ group opened the “Sa’adi” theatre under the management of his wife *Loretta*. Their opening play was “Lady Windermere's Fan” by Oscar Wilde (Figure No.14). Although *Loretta* was announced as the director and leader of the group, it was *Noushin* who had selected the plays and even from prison he kept sending very detailed instructions and even the “mises-en-scene” to his actors. His presence was so dominant that one could barely find any policy changes in the new productions, except for an increase in the number of actresses joining the group.

On 28 April 1951, the Shah appointed Mohammad Mosaddeq⁴⁷ as Prime Minister after the parliament had nominated *Mosaddeq* by a vote of 79 : 12. The Shah was aware of *Mosaddeq's* rising

popularity and political power, after a period of assassinations and political unrest by the National Front (Iran). He was against the foreign domination of Iran's natural resources; the most notable policy of his government was the nationalisation of the Iranian oil industry. *Mosaddeq* tried to change the conditions of Iran's deal with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). The company refused to co-operate and consequently the parliament voted for the nationalisation of the company's assets and the expulsion of their representatives from the country. This, in turn, sparked the overthrow of Mohammad *Mosaddeq*, executed by the U.S. CIA and orchestrated by the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)⁴⁸. In Iran, this coup d'état is known as the "28 Mordad Coup", replacing *Mosaddeq* with General Fazlollah Zahedi⁴⁹ and strengthening the rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

The last performance *Noushin's* group staged was "Montserrat" by *Emmanuel Roblès*, thus exemplifying resistance to dictatorship. In the evening of the coup d'état a gang of hoodlums, recruited and paid by the same groups who supported the CIA or MI6⁵⁰ intervention, ransacked the "Sa'adi" theatre⁵¹, burning down the theatre hall and putting an end to the *Noushin* group's theatrical activities. Employees and performers barely managed to escape; some of them were imprisoned and many fled abroad.

The period after the CIA-engineered coup d'état was the time of

restoration of the King's power, reflected by strict surveillance of citizens, political control and suppression in political, social and cultural scenes in a much more aggressive way. The young Shah was not ashamed to demonstrate the authoritarian nature of his monarchy by eliminating any oppositional political parties and organisations. As mentioned before, most of the women's organisations were related to a political party or ideology and were, therefore, banned too. The only active women's organisations were the state-sponsored ones. All independent activities by women became politically controlled and de-politicised.

In 1959, fourteen women's organisations were brought under the umbrella of the "Federation of Women's Organisations", a federation later transformed into a new and more centralised organisation: "Shoraa-ye Ali-ye Jamiat-e Zanaan-e Iran", i.e. "The High Council of Iranian Women". In 1966, the latter was again replaced by a new organization called "Saazemaan-e Zanaan-e Iran", (The Women's Organisation of Iran), which lasted until the end of the Pahlavi regime in 1978. The organisation developed branches in major cities with numerous smaller health and charity offices under its supervision. In the three decades of the 1950ies, 60ies, and 70ies, all public women's activities were supervised by these government-controlled organisations. The organisations were incorporated into the government bureaucracy and were basically involved in charity, health, and educational activities. They did not consider theatre as a

fund-raising source, as the women did not need to use theatre as a moral and cultural excuse for attending social activities.

According to Eliz Sanasarian⁵², this was the “co-optation and legitimation” period of the women’s movement; henceforth, the women’s rights movement entered an institutionalised and legitimate sphere of activity in which demands were still submitted to the authorities, but in this instance, the requested changes were in accordance with what could be obtained. In other words, women’s organisations would not submit demands that could not or would not be met and their activities were quite compatible with the government’s stand.

After the coup d’état of 1953 the very important phenomenon in theatre of Iran was the advent of “Radio Drama”. The state favoured this theatrical phenomenon because it could be fully controlled. Theatre actors and actresses who had lost their jobs or were not satisfied with the so-called “Lalehzar” theatre found employment with the governmental radio institution. Although this was an effective step in popularising theatre and drama among citizens and rural communities all over the country, this state-oriented form of art surely limited the dramatic and democratic aspect of modern theatre. In fact, the theatrical experience of the post-coup generation was formed by state-controlled radio dramas⁵³.

Theatre halls in Lalehzar stayed active. It was not a surprise,

since those theatre groups strictly tried to stay away from politics, as *Ali Asghar Garmsiri*, a member of the Tehran theatre declared:

*“We didn’t have to do anything with the coup d’état. Political affairs went through their own path and we went through a separate one. The state didn’t bother us and we didn’t bother them too. The only group who were engaged in politics beside theatre was Noushin’s group and unfortunately its result was his imprisoning.”*⁵⁴

Tehran theatre and other “Lalehzar” theatre halls had eager audiences for Vaudeville theatre. These audiences surely did not hail from the intelligentsia who appraised this comic and musical theatre as worthless and profligate. The “Lalehzar” theatre became a trend among non-political theatre groups, especially after 1953 when the “Sa’adi” theatre was shut down. *Zhaleh Uluvv*, a member of *Noushin’s* group, mentioned in an interview:

*“When Noushin left, “Lalehzar” was transformed to that of a cabaret.”*⁵⁵

This cabaret atmosphere had the most negative impact on female representation in Iranian modern theatre. After the coup, dancers replaced the actors.⁵⁶ Female dancers were a must-have of any “Lalehzar” theatre. In these accounts, the presence of dancing bodies on theatre stages signified the “decline of “Lalehzar” and its degeneration as a space for actual theatre”⁵⁷ as well as political art.

Such female figures did not improve women's position in Iranian modern theatre, but rather led to their downfall. The existence of such dancers clearly was an answer to men's appeals.

The quick and surprising import of such sexual figures on stage caused resistance from the part of women. In the lower-classes of society, Islam was more powerful among the female community and its roles; it prohibited dancing altogether. Women from the intelligentsia were against representing women as sexual objects, and non-religious middle-class women did not dare to attend such theatre performances, because male domination and sexual harassment was very nettlesome during such performances. Even if a woman might have been interested in such performances, she would not have been permitted by her guardian, usually a father, brother or husband. Audiences of such theatres were men with a traditional and merely sexual approach toward women. It is obvious that they were not a conducive receiver for any play related to women's rights. Furthermore, other theatres became more cautious in staging women since they were afraid of being marked with the stigmata of "Lalehzar" theatre. The future resistance of many Iranian families in supporting their girls to enter the theatre scene professionally is also a consequence of this theatrical development.

Said Sultanpur, a Marxist director and playwright, notes in his critical book "A way of Art, a Type of Thinking" on theatre after the

coup d'état:

“With this sudden loss, theatre, as part of a historical process, broke down, and the theatrical culture that had been taking roots lost its values. Concurrently, “unrestrained” theatres grew with the direct support they received from the government. Theatre became a venue for “recreation” and was filled with “dance and singing”, comedy, and acrobatics. The true meaning of theatre faded under this “degeneration”, as desired by the political communities of the time. In this situation, theatre became a constituent of colourful varieties surrounded by Turkish dancers, engaged by the “high” policy makers. The audience not only did not receive any education but also lost their remaining good manners.”

The stage-prohibition the coup d'état had caused for some writers and theatre professionals had a positive effect on translations. Many Shakespeare's plays, but also thrillers (detective fiction) were translated. Some of Shakespeare's plays, such as “Hamlet”, were translated by *Behazin* in prison. Chekhov was not vastly well known and not yet a favourite. Also, for a short time, performing classic plays became popular⁵⁸. Performances of iconic plays and classics were presented as if a European performance were simply dubbed, without any interpretational and or cultural context. Although “Hamlet” was not performed in this non-contextual version at that time, we should not expect any Iranian interpretation – even if it had been done. The post-coup strangulation of the cultural scene led to technical improvement and

changes in modern theatre rather than content development.

Armenians were very active during these years but their performances were performed in their own private clubs and in the Armenian language. An Armenian intellectual, named *Shahin Sarkissian*, was a very influential theatre critic who published his reviews in the French language magazine “Journal de Tehran” in the late 1940s. Since he was not a political writer, he gathered theatre lovers who were not using theatre for their political aims. He formed a very closed and private group. He taught the Stanislavsky method of acting although, as a francophone, he preferred to imitate the French theatre culture. Later, during the 1960ies, French theatre gradually dominated Iranian theatre, especially when Marlow became the head of the ministry of culture⁵⁹.

During the 1950ies, theatre faced a long period of obsolescence. Despite the demise of theatres connected to banned political parties, three major factors were in charge of stopping the theatrical mobility in Iran. Censorship had always been a barrier for modern theatre in Iran. The authoritarian nature of Mohammad Reza Shah’s monarchy resonated widely after the coup d’état and imposed strict regulations on theatre productions. Even the “Lalehzar” theatre was not exempt from such rules and “Pish Pardeh-Khani”, a short comic sketch with a theme of social criticism regularly performed on the proscenium before the play started, was also abolished. In it, an

actor would perform a rhythmic piece with a mainly critical connotation, but even such minimally critical ideas were not tolerated.

The oil business flourished, and the state had sufficient funds for improving the quality of urban life. Meanwhile the monarch used the opportunity to promote its propaganda to all Iranians. This is how radio and television found their way into Iranian homes. From 1963 till 1977 a dramatic growth of mass media occurred. The number of radio sets increased from 2 million to 4 million, television sets from 120'000 to 1'700'000. ⁶⁰

Cafes and cabarets also became another source of amusement. Cafe owners hired cheap actors to perform short comic pieces for free and men could enjoy watching mostly erotic dances in cabarets, to which, parts of the lower and even middle class population were attracted. This audience seemed to consider theatre as complicated and expensive and contributed to the boom in the numbers of cafes and cabarets after the 1950ies.

During this period, cinema was dominated by "Film-Farsi"⁶¹ productions. This genre included thrillers, melodrama, singing, dance and unrealistic heroes. Cinema was cheaper and audiences were able to attend whenever and as often as they wanted. This was especially applicable to female spectators, because they could enjoy watching a romantic, touching movie during the day without their

husband's observation. Furthermore, the men of the family could preview the film and let other members of the family watch if, and only if, they found it proper.

The "Iran–America Society" was founded in the 1950ies in Tehran to promote understanding between the people of Iran and the people of the United States of America. This society transformed itself into the centre of modern theatre in Iran. It mostly attracted alternative theatre groups and freelance actors and actresses. A group of young Iranians, who finished their studies in theatre in North America and Western Europe, came back to Iran and initiated the third theatrical mobility of Iran⁶². *Arbi Ovanesian*, *Shahroo Kheradmand* and *Hamid Samandarian* were among those who gave a new boost to modern theatre in Iran.

On 9 January 1963, the Shah announced a six-point reform programme, advertising it as a revolutionary step towards modernisation, and since it was bloodless, he named it "White Revolution". These six points included: (1) land reform, (2) divestment of some state-owned factories to finance the land reform, (3) enfranchisement of women, (4) nationalisation of forests and pastures, (5) formation of a literacy corps, and (6) institution of profit sharing schemes for industry workers. One of his political aims was trying to weaken the landlords and traditional powers of the society and attract peasants and working-class constituencies to

achieve more social legitimation. Almost two weeks after the proclamation of women's enfranchisement, demonstrations broke out in the bazar and in the Southern neighbourhoods of Tehran. In response to these reactions, women also protested and went on strike. Once more in the history of Iran, women accepted a theatrical role in a dramatic and political development in the public sphere. It seems that women felt a necessity to represent themselves in the social scene only because of a political or social responsibility. This may be an answer to their passivity and indifference toward artistic representation of women. Finally, a referendum was held and voters endorsed the six-point reform programme⁶³.

The "White Revolution" in Iran represented a new attempt to introduce reform from above and preserve traditional power-patterns. Women gained the right to vote and for being elected to office. They would be allowed to work in judiciary functions too. Family-protection laws limited men's domination within the family framework, and gave the right to women to request divorce, restricted polygamy for men, and finally the right of child-custody for women. The literacy corps had a significant effect on the quality of women's lives in rural areas. One can see a great improvement in the statistics of women's education and employment. Yet the primary beneficiaries of all these achievements were urban middle-class women: the changes in the living conditions of the masses of working-class and peasant women were sluggish. The root of this

differential effect was the complex structure of Iran's social strata.

From 1963 to 1979 women's rights activists formed two different groups. One group was following state regulations and thus obtaining government support and that of two official state-initiated parties. The members of this group mostly hailed from families who were related to the court or governmental organisations. The second group was formed by members of the opposition; this group was split into two sections with very different and even contradictory ideologies. Surprisingly, these two found some overlap in their concerns. Anti-government women reflected their organisation's objectives in their gatherings and social actions. These actions were merely political and social; theatre did not play an important role in their projects. A few independent individuals and feminists expressed their belief in poetry and literature in a very symbolic way. Although women were active in the theatre scene as directors, playwrights and actresses, they did not try to represent any female concerns on theatre stages. There was a long list of democratic concerns and women's issues, ironically so, at the bottom of their list of priorities.

Mohammad Reza Shah's last and third marriage introduced a new role model to that segment of Iranian women, which was influenced by the royal family. The king and his queen appeared in public, at social events and ceremonies. This is not only due to a

progressive policy of women's roles in the society, but rather to the fact that the queen, *Farah Diba*, was herself an educated modern woman. She was an architecture graduate from France and she came from a family that had connections with the court but was not of royal background. The life experience she brought with herself from Europe and particularly Switzerland had a great effect on the cultural development in Iran. Using her authority as the second person of the country she became one of the most influential and effective faces in the cultural and art scene of Iran – even across the country's borders.

Organisations related to education, fine arts administration, book translation and publishing, but also the “Pahlavi Foundation”, were among the most important political cultural foundations before *Farah*. On account of the presence of *Farah* throughout the 1960ies and 1970ies, more than 17 cultural and artistic associations and organisations, 14 healthcare and therapeutic centres, and 8 educational and university centres were founded, some of which she had personally supervised, such as the “Tehran Philharmonic Association” in 1964, the “Iran Culture Foundation” in 1965, a children's and teens' intellectual training hub in 1966, the “Iran National Cultural Relations Association” in 1967, the “Iran National Folklore Organisation” and “Roodaki Hall” in 1968, the “City Theatre Hall” in 1973, and the “Imperial Philosophy Association” in 1974. Establishing festivals and ceremonies, such as the “Shiraz Art

Festival”, “Toos Festival”, and ballet, opera, and film festivals were on the rise⁶⁴.

In 1966, *Farah Diba* had introduced the idea of an arts festival to showcase the 2'500 years of Iran's rich culture in music and performative arts for both local and global audiences. In a speech in 1967 she mentioned her motivation to design an international festival that would “nurture the arts, pay tribute to the nation's traditional arts and raise cultural standards in Iran” and furthermore to “ensure wider appreciation of the work of Iranian artists, introduce foreign artists to Iran, and acquaint the Iranian public with the latest creative developments of other countries”⁶⁵. The National Iranian TV (NITV) was responsible for shaping and executing the concept. The “Shiraz Festival of Arts” officially opened on 11 September 1967.

Since then, the “Shiraz Festival of Arts” became, “without doubt the most important performing arts event in the world...”⁶⁶. This story of cross-cultural exchange is one among many rarely reported narratives without which the international history of contemporary and electronic arts cannot be fully told. It was through this magical event that most Iranians first encountered the traditional arts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, Indian raga music, Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, Qawwali (Sufi devotional music), the music of Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Korea and Vietnam, Balinese Gamelan,

Japanese Nôh, the drums of Rwanda, traditional dances of Bhutan, Senegal, Uganda, and Brazil... This encounter was not limited to Iranian audiences but also foreign participants had the privilege, for the first time, to exchange their artistic experiences at such a diverse and global event. The result was eye-opening, expansive, magical, and transformative. The 12th “Shiraz Festival of Arts” was scheduled to open on September 3, 1978, at the end of Ramadan. By then, the country, suffering from a severe economic crisis that was induced and increasingly fuelled by the politics of oil, was in the grip of a popular uprising that was to culminate in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In the summer of 1978 people were on the streets, tensions were high, government workers were on strike, massive demonstrations were organised by a coalition of activists from the left, right and centre, marching under the banner of religion, which engineered and unified the otherwise pluralistic and initially secular protest movement by billing itself as a democratic liberating force. On August 19, religious zealots set the cinema Rex in the southern city of Abadan on fire, burning more than four hundred innocent moviegoers to death. The momentum was unstoppable. Given the turbulent and threatening conditions, the festival organisers decided to cancel the 12th event.⁶⁷

The festival had given new life to Iranian dramatic arts and rituals that had been forced into oblivion during the first Pahlavi era. Storytelling, “Ta’ziyeh”, “Shabih-khani” and “Ruhowzi” were

introduced by the most professional and famous traditional groups. Iranian audiences had a novel adventure in watching live dance and musical theatre during the festival since Iran only had a history of folklore dance. With its huge financial support of innovations in theatre, many avant-garde theatre groups showed interest in attending the festival such as *Jerzy Grotowski*, *Peter Brook* and *Tadeusz Kantor*. In 1971, *Peter Brook* performed “Orghast” in Persepolis with Iranian actors and actresses. Later, these performers became the pioneers of avant-garde theatre in Iran. Some of those who appeared at the festival in theatre were: *Bijan Mofid*, *Davoud Rashidi*, *Peter Schumann*, *Parviz Sayyad*, *Andrei Şerban*, *Robert Wilson*, *Shūji Terayama*, *Andre Gregory*, *Ali Nassirian*, *Víctor García*, *Joseph Chaikin*, and *Esmā'il Khalaj*. In this field, traditional plays such as “Ta'ziyeh” (passion plays) from Iran, Kathakali from India, and Noh from Japan, as well as R. Serumaga with the National Theatre of Uganda, Duro Lapidó & the National Theatre of Nigeria, and Pabuji Ki Phad from India were presented, amongst many others. The festival gave space to a new generation of playwrights, directors, set designers and actors. Through the festival, Iranian plays found a chance to travel abroad and resonate globally. *Arby Ovanessian* was among those artists who were also among the founders of the theatre workshop “kargah-e Namayesh”.

“Kargah-e namayesh” was an inspiring cultural mobility contact zone. The theatre workshop was a small theatre hall devoted to

avant-garde and experimental theatre. Before its formation, the movement of modern theatre was blocked in the dead-end alley of old-fashioned artists and money-makers. *Arbi Ovannessian* started his theatrical experiences and rehearsals with a small group of *Shahin Sarkissian's* students in a place that they called "theatre workshop". Later, theatre activists who did not fit into the state-sponsored theatres or "Lalehzar" theatre were attracted to the workshop space. These people brought in their vast and diverse performative experience originating from their professional studies and personal artistic achievements. *Arbi Ovannessian* himself brought his experience and knowledge of theatre gained in Europe to the stagnant scene of Iranian theatre. His Armenian background also enriches his philosophy in art and its representation on stage. Although *Arbi* mentioned Shakespeare and his great value in theatre history several times in his interviews, they never performed "Hamlet" or any other Shakespeare play on stage. Oral history, being the largest resource available, states that in the beginning they chose innovative and un-known Persian playwrights for cooperation, and directors tried to give a chance to playwrights who were rejected by the dominant wave of theatre in Iran:

"Na'albandian did not have a visual image of theatre, because he had never seen a live performance and he had been introduced to theatre through radio drama. His mind was virgin in that sense, and this was important for me. Unlike Saedi, Radi and Beizayi or Nasirian, he did not want to perform Iranian drama in the context

of the European theatre style. His language was as rich as Shakespeare's and gradually, I based my productions on his texts."⁶⁸

However, "Hamlet" was smuggled across Iranian borders with the help of foreign intermediators. In 1971, for the first time after 39 years, an interpretation of "Hamlet" was staged at the fifth annual "Shiraz Festival of Arts" under the name of "Becket, Hamlet, King Lear". The director was Mustafa Dali, a French-Algerian, who was also teaching theatre at Tehran University's faculty of dramatic art. Unfortunately, I could not find any reviews of this performance. The records show that the performing actors were Iranian and it was merely staged during the festival. Mustafa Dali was fluent in Farsi and through his connection with the Université Paris Lumières he managed to send some talented theatre students to France to develop their knowledge and skills by attending relevant courses.

In 1973, Atelier 212 from Yugoslavia performed Slobodanka Alexic's "Hamlet in the Cellar" (1973) at the "Shiraz Art Festival". "Hamlet in the Cellar" was produced in 1971 and within only three years it participated in ten international festivals, as far apart as Iran, Mexico and France. They also performed in New York on 8 September 1971⁶⁹. It seems that even these productions were unable to break the evil spell of "Hamlet" in Iran and there is no further record regarding these "Hamlet" performances. From 1967 - 77, the "Shiraz Festival of Arts" presented more than fifty traditional

as well as contemporary and experimental plays from Iran, India, Japan, Eastern and Western Europe, Africa, U.S., and Latin America, and accommodated many independent “ancillary” productions, including popular Iranian theatre.

A widening gap between the rise of women’s education, combined with rapid social mobilization, and the tightening of channels of political participation led to increasing discontent among educated women of the middle and lower-middle classes who, like their male counterparts, aspired for freedom of expression and participation in autonomous associations and political organisations. When the Pahlavi regime in its last few years, and under external pressure, began to accord more freedom of expression, and the revolutionary coalition found an unprecedented opportunity for mass mobilisation, many women joined the demonstrations and strikes, which were mobilised during the later stages of the revolution in the fall and winter of 1978/79.

What the Shah did not expect was that the “White Revolution” led to new social tensions that helped create many of the problems the Shah had been trying to avoid. As *Ervand Abrahamian* pointed out, the “White Revolution” had been designed to pre-empt a “Red Revolution”. Instead, it paved the way for an “Islamic Revolution”.

The most important and relevant consequence of the “White Revolution” and the reforms it brought, was the rising popularity of

Ruhollah Khomeini. With the growing perception of government corruption, and the implementation of reforms through the “White Revolution”, *Khomeini* grew to be an outspoken political enemy of the Shah. The “White Revolution” was the catalyst for *Khomeini*’s change in thought. Once *Khomeini*, as a respected member of the clergy, started to openly oppose the Shah and call for his overthrow, people of all different professions and economic status began to see him as a figure to rally behind. In short, the revolution took place neither because of overdevelopment nor because of underdevelopment (of the political system) but because of uneven developments⁷⁰.

The Iranian revolution of 1979 was a turning point in women’s situation in the social and political scene and consequently in the arts and cultural sphere. During the protests, women from all social classes of society and with different beliefs, religious, fundamentalist or secular, attended the street demonstrations. For some women, it was the first time to voice their anger, wishes, hatred or even love in the public domain. Women’s participation in street battles was not less than that of men, and many of the martyrs were female. This time, their performance on this vast public stage was not temporary. Even after the revolution, women assumed responsibilities in revolutionary organisations.

When the days of excitement and triumph finished, women were

not aware of what was happening backstage: two years after the triumph, *Imam Khomeini* asked the new minister of the judiciary to reconsider the family protection law and eliminate all rules which were against Shari'a. Many intellectual women either did not believe this news, or blamed it on fundamentalists surrounding the Imam. In the meantime, a group of women's rights activists were getting ready for a big rally on 8th March 1979. They invited international feminist activists, such as Kate Millet⁷¹, to attend the event and discuss further cooperation. Those days changed to days of struggle against compulsory veiling between women's rights activists and proponents of the new Islamic state's edict. One night before the parade, *Imam Khomeini* imposed compulsory veiling in governmental offices. The parade changed to a 5-day protest in the streets. Veiled and unveiled women were among protesters but they were harassed and offended by fundamentalists. Protesters did not want more progressive rights but they were begging for retaining the rights they had achieved through previous years of struggle.

The quiddity of women organisations in the 1970ies and 1980ies resembled that of the women associations in the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950ies. Women organisations were dependent on political parties and due to the differences and contradictions of these parties, it was hard to gather them into one united group, regardless of their political views, but only based on their women's rights concerns. Besides, women's rights concerns had no priority

and were considered unimportant from the view of male leaders.

Meanwhile, the cultural scene was experiencing the liberty of speech. Theatres were mostly followed by discussions of the play's content and socio-political views between the performing group members and the audience. However, this form of criticism was only the beginning of promoting "committed and revolutionary art". For nearly one year, dramatists reflected the truth of society on stage and political performances reflected a trend toward using a direct language. This openness lasted for a short time only. "Lalehzar" theatres were closed; a group of religious demonstrators invaded "Kargah-e Namayesh" and its activities were suspended. Many theatre activists were either imprisoned or had no other choice than emigration.

In June 1980, the president ordered women to maintain the Islamic code of Hijab in all governmental spaces. As all private theatres were either closed or suspended, the only active scene was the city theatre, which was a governmental place. What did compulsory veiling mean on a theatre stage? This was one of the major worries of Iranian actresses. In 1984, veiling became legally compulsory for all Muslim and non-Muslim women and Islamic regulations had to be observed in all public spaces. Since then, there has never been an official handbook or circular published to specify how and in what frame Islamic regulations should be

maintained on stage. Of course, these regulations should be met both in terms of the visual aspects of a play and its content.

Imam Khomeini declared his point of view on the veiling issues in an interview with *Oriana Fallaci*⁷²:

“Fallaci: ... This chador that they made me put on, to come to you, and which you insist all women must wear. Tell me, why do you force them to hide themselves, all bundled up under these uncomfortable and absurd garments, making it hard to work and move about? And yet, even here, women have demonstrated that they are equal to men. They fought just like the men, were imprisoned and tortured. They, too, helped to make the revolution.

Khomeini: The women who contributed to the revolution were, and are, women with the Islamic dress, not elegant women all made up like you, who go around all uncovered, dragging behind them a tail of men. The coquettes who put on makeup and go into the street showing off their necks, their hair, their shapes, did not fight against the Shah. They never did anything good, not those. They do not know how to be useful, neither socially, nor politically, nor professionally. And this is so because, by uncovering themselves, they distract men, and upset them. They distract and upset even other women.”⁷³.

Although these restrictions had its limiting effects on theatre and women’s representation, it provided a chance to women from traditional and religious families to enter the fascinating world of theatre. Theatre in Iran is completely under the control of

government. The government provides budgets to dramatic art centres representing the performing arts. The Islamic nature of the government assures a safe territory for religious women. When Islamic regulations are dominating the art scene there is no more space for an “evil” nature of theatre. On the other hand, the state prefers injecting religious women into the system.

The problem caused by veiling was not only related to the limitations it brought in the acting style and body representations and figures, but also the fear and uncertainty it brings for performers and directors due to the indecisive definition of veiling regulations. Since any violation of the Islamic rules would lead to the complete ban of the play, this uncertainty and self-incrimination gave birth to an internal barrier for theatre artists: self-censorship. In fear of not passing the red lines of regulations, artists became unnecessarily ultra-cautious. The first and easiest solution to avoid undesired complications with the state was to avoid presenting female characters on stage or rather representing them as a shadowy unimportant existence.

In Iranian post-revolution productions, Ophelia’s image on stage is mostly “relying on the familiar images of the white dress, loose hair (this surely can’t happen according to veiling regulations), and wild flowers to convey a polite feminine distraction, highly suitable for pictorial reproduction, and appropriate for Samuel Johnson’s

description of Ophelia as young, beautiful, harmless, and pious.⁷⁴ Perhaps restrictions did not give any other choice to directors and actresses. Performing the “romantic Ophelia” that Elaine Showalter describes as a “young girl passionately and visibly driven to picturesque madness” was not possible if the actress intended to observe Islamic regulations. Being visibly sexually passionate is not only considered immoral for a believer but a woman certainly should not express it in public. On the other hand, a visibly mad girl could break any barrier, even Hijab rules, which would still make it impossible for an actress to perform a true and believable Ophelia on stage.

In a reaction toward maintaining Islamic regulations in a play’s content, theatre dramatists and artists used a more symbolic and metaphoric textual approach and body language. This trend made theatre more sophisticated and lost its common audience. Gradually, attending theatre performances became limited to the educated strata of society. Performing iconic and classic plays was another solution to pass censorship barriers. That may be the reason for the significant increase of such performances on stage. More than any other period in modern theatre history of Iran, “Hamlet” has been interpreted and performed in the post-revolution era. However, this interpretation does not offer a new interpretation of Ophelia.

“Of all the characters in “Hamlet”, Bridget Lyons had claimed, “Ophelia is most persistently presented in terms of symbolic meanings.”⁷⁵ This may be so, if the reader has the key to decode the symbolic codes. By “reader”, here I mean three extraneous receivers of the text: translator, director and audience. Comparing eight available Persian translations of “Hamlet”, a shocking truth shows its face: the very first receiver did not receive the codes at all.

Ophelia’s flowers suggest the discordant double images of female sexuality as both innocent blossoming and whorish contamination; she is the “green girl” of pastoral lyrics, the virginal “Rose of May” and the sexually explicit madwoman who, in giving away her wild flowers and herbs, is symbolically deflowering herself. The “weedy trophies” and phallic “long purples” which she wears to her death intimate an improper and discordant sexuality that Gertrude’s lovely elegy cannot quite obscure.”⁷⁶ The problem is that those flowers do not carry any symbolic meaning in the Iranian culture of the receiver. In most case studies, the director used this act of deflowering as a sign of Ophelia’s distraction. In Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, the stage direction calling for a woman entering with dishevelled hair indicates that she might either be mad or the victim of a rape; the disorderly hair, her offense against decorum, suggests sensuality in each case. Iranian actresses who perform Ophelia on stage cannot use their hair for delivering such a message.

The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) introduced a new stereotype of woman to theatre scene. A motherly figure who is waiting in pain and patience for her hero men (husband, son, father) while trying to sacrifice herself and protect family values. Since then, this sort of obedient female figure never left the Iranian theatre scene. Most theatre productions represented female characters within the framework of the family, as if women do not have any identity outside this framework. Although Ophelia can be read as an obedient figure, her reaction to his father's death and her suicidal act is not a desired morality to be promoted on stage.

As mentioned before, "The Arts Festival of Shiraz" was abruptly terminated by the emergence of the Iranian Revolution. By 1983, another "Festival for Arts" was designed to celebrate the victory of the Revolution annually in February. Since then, the "Fadjr Theatre Festival" became the most important theatrical event. This international event is the major chance for Iranian theatre productions to be seen (abroad??) and also the rare chance of attending international performances held by various European, Asian, African and even American countries. In 1996, the municipality of Tehran granted a budget for a small "Theatre Festival for Women". The festival lasted for 8 years. In 2007, *Shirin Bozorgmehr*, the head of a jury of the "Sixth Women Theatre Festival" announced in the closing statement of jury:

“This is not what we expected from women directors and playwrights. All plays are showing the dark side of society; mad women, street women, women murdering, women who murder their mates, self-immolation, polygamy, betrayal...”

In 2012, *Reza Gouran* staged an interpretation of “Hamlet” that tried to avoid such female representation. *Gouran’s* reading of “Hamlet” focuses on Ophelia as the main character. The whole play happens in a kind of dreamy atmosphere with oriental touch. There is no trace of the “Ghost”, and the playwright, *Mohammad Charmshir*, tells parts of Ophelia’s story through Ophelia (herself), Hamlet, Hamlet’s double, Claudius, Gertrude and Polonius. Since the play is based on Ophelia’s point of view, we only see the scenes of play that happen before her suicide. In this play, Ophelia is not an innocent victim of love, she is rather a strong lovelorn girl who tries to encourage Hamlet to take charge of his life. This is a bitter Hamlet, plagued by insomnia, spending his time in a lunatic situation with his double personae (Figure No.15). His feelings are projected in his double, performed by an actress, and his own appearance is indifferent toward whatever happens in Elsinore. When Ophelia loses hope of any action by Hamlet, she decides to take the control of Elsinore in her hand and acts as she expected Hamlet to act in such a situation. She starts cleaning Elsinore from all evil souls and traces of inhumanity. She tries to get revenge from every inhabitant of Elsinore and ultimately is the one who kills her father brutally.

Carol Neely believes that “as a Feminist critic” she must tell Ophelia’s story. What is Ophelia’s story in this reading of the “Hamlet” tragedy? *Gouran* and *Charmshir*’s approach is to read Ophelia’s story as the female subtext of the tragedy, the repressed story of Hamlet. Still, Ophelia does not have her own story but she represents Hamlet and acts as his active version. In fact, *Gouran*’s Hamlet character is embodied in three figures on stage: an indifferent and bitter Hamlet who blames everyone but does not want to get involved in the filth, a passive Hamlet performed by his feminine double who is the feminine and shameful part of his nature, and through Ophelia who is his masculine double embodied in a female figure. Therefore, in contradiction to the director’s intention for representing Ophelia on stage, Ophelia is still a big 0, the zero who can host a masculine identity representing its feminine nature.

Kate Millet mentions in her book “Going to Iran” that, in such a power structure, women are never their own agents; they are commodities silenced by the freedom of men to sexually possess them. The tacit or outward acquiescence of women, in turn, works to define their selves in terms of men.

Despite the director and playwright’s intentions, the play is incapable of representing a female hero. The dominant male voice in the creator’s cultural history impacts their theatrical experience and

adaptation. In fact, as Elaine Showalter mentions, their Ophelia “reflects the ideological character of their time, erupting as debates between dominant and feminist views in periods of gender crises and redefinition.”⁷⁷

There is a significant improvement in the quantity aspect of women’s participation in theatrical activities. More than 70% of students who graduate from theatre related majors are female. These young “Ophelias” seem motivated and courageous to tell their story, to reflect the utopian character of their time and embody the contemporary modern Iranian woman in that charmed character. These are women who dominate the public sphere and are not afraid of projecting their passionate love on stage. The theatre scene is expecting the birth of an Ophelia with whom Iranian women can identify.

Notes:

1. In the traditional Persian residential architecture, the *Andaruni* is, in contrast to the *Biruni*, a part of the house/home in which the private quarters are established. This is specifically the space where the women of the house are free to move about without being seen by an outsider (*na mahram*). The only men allowed in the *Andaruni* are those directly related to the “master of the house” (his sons) and the “master” himself, which may include boys under the age of puberty, and guests allowed in under special circumstances.
2. M. Firuz, “A short History of the Women’s movement in Iran,” *Razm Mahaneh*, 1 (1 August 1948), 45-46
3. A fatwā in the Islamic faith is the term for the legal opinion or learned interpretation that the Sheikhu Islam, a qualified jurist or mufti, can give on issues pertaining to the Islamic law.
4. Ervand Abrahamian, “A History of Modern Iran” (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 58.
5. Eliz Sanasarian, “*The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini*” (Praeger, 1982), 3.
6. Eyn al-Saltaneh (1871-1944) was a grand child of Mohammad Shah Qajar. He published 64 years of his life.
7. J. Calmard, *Les rituels chi'ite et le pouvoir. L'imposition du Chiïsme safavide: ...*”
8. *Mahe-Taban Khanum (Qamar al-Saltaneh) was the daughter of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar, she was known for her benefactor activities.*
9. Rowzeh-Khani is a mourning ritual; a singer performs sad poems for the grieving audience.
10. Archimandrite Mesrop Papazyan. Her Daughter’s name was Ashchen.
11. Willem Floor, “*The History of Theater in Iran*” (Mage 2005) 239-40.
12. Willem Floor, “*The History of Theater in Iran*” (Mage 2005), 240.
13. Foreign Counsellors lived in Iran, from their initial entrance/appearance in the Safavid era up to the reign of (King) Mohammad Shah of the Qajar Dynasty.
14. Willem Floor, “*The History of Theater in Iran*” (Mage 2005), 216.
15. Willem Floor, “*The History of Theater in Iran*” (Mage 2005), 215.
16. Willem Floor, “*The History of Theater in Iran*” (Mage 2005), 216.
17. Qahraman Mirza Saloor-Eyn al-Saltaneh, “*Rooznameh Vaqayeh*

- Ettefaqiyyeh”, Vol.2, (Tehran) 152.
18. Perhaps he meant a theatre piece written by Thomas Dekker (1572 – 1632) who was an English Elizabethan dramatist and pamphleteer, a versatile and prolific writer, whose career spanned several decades and brought him into contact with many of the period's most famous dramatists. Perhaps Eyn al-Saltaneh miss-spelled the name in his written memories.
 19. Qahraman Mirza Saloor-Eyn al-Saltaneh, “Rooznameh Vaqayeh Ettefaqiyyeh”, Vol.2, (Tehran) 182.
 20. Qahraman Mirza Saloor-Eyn al-Saltaneh, “Rooznameh Vaqayeh Ettefaqiyyeh”, Vol.2, (Tehran) 271.
 21. Willem Floor, “The History of Theater in Iran” (Mage 2005), 219.
 22. Willem Floor, “The History of Theater in Iran” (Mage 2005), 218-219.
 23. Atabak Park was a private garden belonged to the prime minster of Iran with the same Name: Atabak. Part of the Garden is still remained and is the venue of Russian Embassy in down town Tehran.
 24. The Iranian toman, pronounced [toman]; is a superunit of the official currency of Iran, the rial.
 25. Willem Floor, “The History of Theater in Iran” (Mage 2005), 231. sited: “A play by the Anjuman of Ladies of Iran, Iran-e Now, April 25” (1910, Nr. 187), 3.
 26. Willem Floor, “The History of Theater in Iran” (Mage 2005), 226.
 27. The Social Democrat Hunchakian Party (SDHP), is the second oldest Armenian political party, founded in 1887 by a group of college students in Geneva, Switzerland. It was the first socialist party to operate in the Ottoman Empire and in Persia.
 28. This building was constructed by Naser Al-Din Shah's son, Masoud Mirza (Zal Al-Soltan), in 1878 and therefore is called Masoudieh Building. It was a private palace but later has been used for the ministry of culture and education.
- These days it is a museum and its venue is also used for performances.
29. Jamshid Malekpour, “Adabiyat-e Namayeshi dar Iran” (Tehran, 1386) vol. 2, 49.
 30. The first Armenian school for girls was built in Hasanabad square in Tehran (1858), A theatre hall was built attached to the school.
 31. Andranik Hovayan, “Te’atr-e Armaniyan dar Tehran- Faslnameh Theatre”, (Tehran 1378), 200-01.
 32. Masoud Kuhestani-Nezhad, “Gozideh-ye Asnad Namayesh dar Iran”, (Tehran 1381), vol. 1, part. 1, 52-57.
 33. Willem Floor, “The history of Theater in Iran” (Mage 2005), 245.
 34. Sulayman Mirza Iskandari was one of the best Iranian translators in Qajar era. He later established the first democratic socialism party of

- Iran with his two other friends. He is the founder of Socialism in Iran.
35. Sayed Mohammad Reza Kordestani (1893-1924) was an Iranian political writer and poet, with pen name of Mirzadeh Eshghi. he published newspapers in which he fiercely attacked the political system of Iran. He is remembered for writing six plays; his Noruz nameh is particularly famous. Two unknown gunmen murdered Eshghi in his house in Tehran.
 36. Barbad Community was established in Lalehzar in Tehran on 1926. It was a place for teaching playing Iranian musical instruments.
 37. Peymaneh Salehi Fashami, "The Oral History of Theatre in Iran", (Tehran, 2015), 25.
 38. Married women in Iran are not obliged or allowed to change their family name after their marriage. This change of Surname can only happen unofficially and not in their documents.
 39. Princess Ašraf Pahlavī: prior to this new role, she had been actively engaged in behind the scene political manoeuvres from the beginning of her brother's reign in 1941 to the coup d'état of 1953. But with the Shah's tightening grip on political affairs, the princess found a new niche for herself in women's rights activities as well as in the United Nations. She chaired Persia's delegation to the UN General Assembly, Persia's Human Rights Commission, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and Persia's delegation to the 1975 International Women's Year Conference in Mexico. She also provided vital support to a group of upper and middle-class women who fostered and shaped the state's gender policy as embodied in the WOI (Pahlavi 1980, pp. XV, 14, 43, 135-36, 153).
Badr al-Mulūk Bāmdād, *"From darkness into light: women's emancipation in Iran"*,(Exposition Press, 1977), I, 103-5
 40. The Tudeh Party of Iran is an Iranian communist party. Formed in 1941, with Suleyman Mohsen Eskandari as its head.
 41. The Shahnameh, "The Book of Kings", is a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between c. 977 and 1010 CE and is the national epic of Greater Iran. Consisting of some 50,000 couplets (2-line verses). It tells mainly the mythical and to some extent the historical past of the Persian Empire from the creation of the world until the Islamic conquest of Persia in the 7th century.
 42. Kaveh the Blacksmith is a mythical figure in the Iranian mythology who leads a popular uprising against a ruthless foreign ruler, Zahāk (Aži Dahāk). His story is narrated in Shahnameh. Kāveh was, according to ancient legends, a blacksmith who launched a national uprising against the evil foreign tyrant Zahāk, after losing two of his children to serpents of Zahāk. Kāveh expelled the foreigners and re-established the rule of Iranians.

43. The crisis began on “May Day” when a rally of 80’000 people in Abadan repeated the 1929 demands, adding pay for Friday, the Muslim day of rest, and the strict implementation of the country’s recently passed Labor Law. One woman speaker denounced the company for spending more on dog food than on wages and demanded the takeover of the oil industry: “Oh brothers, the production of oil in our land is like jewels. We must try to get these jewels back. If we don’t we are worthless.”
44. Ervand Abrahamian, “The coup” (The New Press 2013), 19. cited: British Council in Khoramshahr, “Report on Tudeh Activities against AIOC,” FO 371/ Persia 1946/ 34-52714.
45. Ervand Abrahamian, “Iran Between Two Revolutions”, (Princeton 1982), 335. Cited: “The Communist Danger Threatens Women,” Tehran Mosavar, 26 March 1952.
46. Moahammad Mosaddegh, (16 June 1882 – 5 March 1967), was an Iranian politician. He was the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran from 1951 until 1953, when his government was overthrown in a coup d’état orchestrated by the American Central Intelligence Agency and the British Secret Intelligence Service.
47. In August 2013, 60 years after the coup, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) admitted that it was involved in both its planning and its execution, including the bribing of Iranian politicians, security and high-ranking army officials, as well as pro-coup propaganda. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435/>
48. Fazlollah Zahedi, (1897-1963) was an Iranian general and statesman who replaced Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq following a coup d’état, in which he played a major role.
49. They were paid to do that although they pretend to be common people who were against Mosaddeq and believed that he was corrupting the country with his selfish political policy. For years their violence performance was used by the political leaders as a documentation of coup d’état to prove the asron was triggered and committed by the populace.
50. Ervand Abrahamian, “The Coup” (The New Press 2013), 193.
51. Eliz Sanasarian is a professor of political science at the University of Southern California. She is best known for her expertise and books on ethnic politics and feminism, particularly regarding the Middle East and Iran.
52. Ramin Jahanbegloo, “Iran and The Problem of Modernity”, (Goftar, 2000), 191.
53. Peymaneh Salehi Fashami, “The Oral History of Theater in Iran”, (Tehran 2015) ,40-41.
54. Khosrow Parvizi, “Didar-i Hafteh”, Sitareh’i sinama,” (16 tir 1336/ July 1957), 8-9.

55. Hiva Guran, *Kushish-ha-yi nafarjam*, 187
56. Ida Meftahi, "Gender and dance in modern Iran: Biopolitics on stage" (Routledge 2016), 63.
57. Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Iran and The Problem of Modernity", (Goftar, 2000), 191.
58. Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Iran and The Problem of Modernity", (Goftar, 2000), 192.
59. Ervand Abrahamian, "Iran Between Two Revolutions", (Princeton 1982), 428.
60. Film-Farsi (Persian movie) is a cinematic term used in Iranian cinema criticism. This genre is mostly produced before the Iranian revolution of 1979. It was created by Iranian film critic, Houshang Kavousi. It was coined to describe low-quality films mostly a mixture of the Bollywood and Hollywood cinema. A thriller or melodrama with poor plot, mostly arranged with dance and singing, and introducing unrealistic heroes.
61. The number of students registered at foreign universities, especially in North America and Western Europe, increased from under 18'000 to over 80'000. Thus, during these fourteen years, the educational system grew more than threefold. (Ervand Abrahamian, "Iran Between Two Revolutions", (Princeton 1982), 431)
62. Ervand Abrahamian, "Iran Between Two Revolutions", (Princeton 1982), 424.
63. Ervand Abrahamian, "The Coup" (The New Press 2013)
64. Excerpts from an address by Empress Farah Pahlavi at the inaugural festival. Festival catalogue 1967.
65. One of many such accolades by foreign critics over the life of the festival, excerpted from an article by Professor Enrico Fulchignoni, Director of UNESCO's International Committee for Cinema and Television, first published in "Il Tempo" at the close of the 9th festival in 1975, translated in *Tamasha* No. 246 (1976): 74.
66. Mahasti Afshar, "Festival of Arts Shiraz-Persepolis OR You better believe in as many as six impossible things before breakfast"
67. Excerpts from Arbi Ovanessian's speech at the occasion of his book vernissage.
68. http://www.lamama.org/archives/year_lists/1971page.htm
69. Ervand Abrahamian, "Iran Between Two Revolutions", (Princeton 1982), 427.
70. Katherine Murray "Kate" Millett (born 1934) is an American feminist writer, educator, artist, and activist. She attended Oxford University and was the first American woman to be awarded a postgraduate degree with first-class honors by St. Hilda's. She has been described as "a seminal influence on second-wave feminism", and is best known for her 1970 book *Sexual Politics*.

71. Oriana Fallaci (1929 – 2006) was an Italian journalist, author, and political interviewer. A partisan during World War II, she had a long and successful journalistic career. Fallaci became famous worldwide for her coverage of war and revolution, and her interviews with many world leaders during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Her book *Interview with History* contains an interview with the Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. She later stated, "He considers women simply as graceful ornaments, incapable of thinking like a man, and then strives to give them complete equality of rights and duties." During her 1979 interview with Ayatollah Khomeini, she was required to wear a chador. During the interview, in response to an answer by Ayatollah Khomeini, she removed her Chador and attacked the obligation of women to wear it.
72. Orianna Fallaci, "An interview with Khomeini, *The New York Times*", (7 October 1979)
73. Elaine Showalter, "*Shakespearean criticism: Hamlet*" (vol. 59)
74. Bridget Lyons, "*The iconography of Ophelia*" (*English Literary History*, 44, 1977), 61.
75. Margery Garber, "*Coming of Age in Shakespeare*" (London, 1981), 155-7.
76. Elaine Showalter, "*Shakespearean criticism: Hamlet*" (vol. 59).

Chapter 5: Effects of agency “Speak the Speech”

Hamlet’s theatre-in-theatre and its functions for lucidity and freedom of speech.

It is approximately 100 years that Shakespeare plays opened their path through Iranian theatre stages. During these years, the country experienced different governmental systems: from Authoritarianism during the *Reza Shah* monarchy and Dictatorship during the *Mohammad-Reza Shah* era to nowadays’ totalitarianism applied by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Shakespeare plays crossed national and linguistic boundaries; came along with linguistic translations and tried to adapt to a totally different culture. Each system applied its own political ideology that surely affected the cultural sphere. Any cultural activity was forced to fit in these ideological policies, and part of the cultural mobility process was facing these adjustments on its journey through to its destination.

Shakespeare plays are portraits of governments and the consequences of their domination. There are rulers who have to deal with coups, foreign armies threatening corrupt governments, people

in the system who form rebellions and irresponsible monarchs who bring their system to an end. Anarchy is an ever-present threat and change is inevitable. This is one of the reasons that Shakespeare's plays are among the most politically appropriate on contemporary stages.

Shakespeare plays give the theatre producers an opportunity to reveal their opinion on a political system. With adapting the play to nowadays' situation and reminding audiences, and among them politicians, of the consequences of such corrupt systems, the director finds a chance to reveal his anxiety through theatre. Performing such classical plays in places with tyrannical governments gives a chance to the artist to stay safe while being critical. As Dennis Kennedy mentions:

"...This oppositional use of Shakespeare has received an intriguing variation more recently, when the plays were used in post-war Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as dissident texts. If new plays and films, critical of a repressive regime, are regularly censored, producers are sometimes tempted to make the classics into coded messages about the present: Shakespeare thus became a secret agent under deep cover."¹

Hamlet, in particular, is picturing an elective monarchy in Denmark; however, Claudius was crowned quickly after murdering the belated King and Hamlet is automatically acknowledged as the successor of the king. We can see neither any approval of the inheritance of the crown, nor a sign of an elective decision for the

kingdom during the play. When King Claudius and Hamlet, are both killed, young Fortinbras, the Norwegian Prince, replaces them as king. All political power in Denmark is concentrated on the throne. The struggle for power and domination leads to murder, surveillance, betrayal of love, and inner corruption of the dominating power. People who are the target of this power are not seen in the plot, the peasantry and people outside the royal court do not have any voice in the play. This is not a great surprise when even royal Hamlet does not dare to accuse the king face to face, and hides himself behind a group of actors.

Hamlet was the rightful heir to the throne and Claudius a usurper', and 'usurpation is one of the main factors in the plot'. This is the same with *Reza Shah* who put an end to the Qajar Dynasty and usurped the monarchy. As mentioned before, the only public "Hamlet" performance of his time was staged by a foreign group and other "Hamlet" performances were privately staged among the small and amateur society of Armenian theatre lovers. The authoritarian regime imposed its ideologies on theatre. After *Reza Shah's* forced abdication by the Allies in 1941, *Mohammad Reza*, his son, replaced him on the throne. Until then, and for many years, the main power struggle in Iran was over the throne and the legitimacy of the state.

Mohammad Reza Shah tried to establish a democratic monarchy, but this intention vanished in the coming years. After the coup against *Mohammad Mosaddeq* in 1953, martial law and strict

censorship were imposed, and Persian dramatists focused their attention, by necessity, on artistic aspects of drama and production techniques. That year marks a period of decline in the Persian theatre. Even though many theatres and theatre groups were established in the two decades after the abdication, few critically significant plays were written; at first, because of political confusion and then because of censorship. And yet, due to economic growth and a stable political situation, theatre productions were stimulated. Such circumstances gave Iranian playwrights and audiences the opportunity to become more acquainted with Western theatre. There were fewer interests in performing plays with obviously political topics, and even criticism was hidden under several layers of symbolism. Of course, there were restricted groups of audiences who were able to decode those semiotic aspects of the play. “Hamlet” was by no means of interest to Iranian directors; the play was still considered a threat, portraying the fall of a monarch, and the inner corruption of Ellsinore could resemble the Pahlavi monarchy in the perception of Iranian audiences:

“If to the liberal West Hamlet is an expression of the individual spirit, to a censor in a more repressive land it is a threat. In Eastern Europe the play frequently received frank political readings at odds with the standard romantic interpretations [of Britain, America and pre-divided Germany etc]”²

The SAVAK³ was obviously concerned about such political

readings. In fact, they were particularly skeptical toward Shakespeare plays. Such concerns even sacrificed foreign movie adaptations:

“...They were against issuing a license for the film version of Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar”, the film, SAVAK suggested, taught the dangerous lesson of regicide.”⁴

However, as Greenblatt mentions, cultural mobility is sometimes done through the hands of the state despite its resistance. The “Art Festival of Shiraz” was a cultural event which mobilised theatre by the resistance to power. Many international groups were invited to Iran for the festival; under the supervision of Farah Pahlavi, the queen, there was the pretence of having an open and democratic country, providing a chance for performing very few critical, and even banned, plays. *Shakespeare* officially came back to Iran, again with foreign theatre groups. After 39 years, “Becket, Hamlet, King Lear” directed by *Mustafa Dali*, was performed in 1971. Two years later, *Slobodanka Alexic’s* “Hamlet in the Cellar”, a successful performance by Atelier 212 from Yugoslavia, performed in 1973 at the “Shiraz Art Festival”. There are records of other Shakespeare plays performances, such as *Andrei Serban’s* La MaMa production of *Shakespeare’s* comedy, “As You Like It” In 1977.

Because of the diversity of arts events and the quantity of theatre groups, the surveillance on quality and content was not

careful and done warily. Therefore, most political and religious standards were not met by the groups. This was a chance for freedom of speech among Iranian theatre groups, but in the meantime, it gave an excuse to conservatives (political or religious) to forbid modern theatre experiments. One year before the last edition of the “Shiraz Arts Festival” (1976) a theatre named “Pig, Child, Fire”(Figure No.16) was performed in an empty shop in a street in Shiraz. Performing a rape scene in the middle of the production brought up a quick and violent chaos among the audience, and the Balkan actors and actresses ran out of the crowd with the help of some people. This event brought out strict resistance and criticism among religious leaders and even theatre activists. SAVAK wrote a report to the king and asked for more surveillance and care. A few days later, the British ambassador in Tehran asked the Shah about the occurrence; the king briefly answered: “It was only a performance.”⁵

The king was sure that the festival’s fans, artists, and organisers represented a minority of the general population in Iran and he was not wrong. *Mohammad Reza Shah* only attended the festival once. Hamlet never found the chance to address the monarch. A few remaining documents show that none of the Iranian professional groups, young or veteran, ever tried to perform “Hamlet”. It seems logical that if a dissident group of theatre were given a chance for a bit of freedom, they would have preferred to choose a play among

the long list of Iranian forbidden plays. Especially in the context of the “Shiraz Arts Festival”, they would grab the chance to showcase the domestic stage to international professionals. During the second Pahlavi era, “Hamlet” did not find any chance to exploit the political potentials of theatre. “Hamlet” stayed unknown for the majority of Iranian theatregoers, except for the ones who watched “Gamlet”, a 1964 Russian film based on a translation by Boris Pasternak and directed by *Grigori Kozintsev*, with a score by *Dmitri Shostakovich*. The movie was dubbed and the NITV broadcasted it few years after its production. After its popularity many Armenian boys in Iran were named Hamlet.

The director of the Globe Shakespeare Festival, Tom Bird, says this resonance is echoed across the region.

"There's a feeling in the former Soviet Union that Shakespeare was never censored. So he becomes in a lot of these places not just a writer but almost a freedom fighter, almost a saint."

"If you go in to the countryside in Armenia you meet people with the name Shakespeare - their first names are Shakespeare."

"The most famous footballer in Armenia is Henrikh Mkhitaryan and his middle name is Hamlet. And no, Hamlet isn't Armenian for Hamish; it's Hamlet, the Dane. It's incredible it's seeped in to everything."⁶

The play is also dominated by revenge actions. The concept of revenge relates to very basic concerns about the relationship between the individual and the state, about justice and the legality of violent action⁷. Hamlet never tried to bring the murder case to the

court of law. He cannot trust any state-related judicial system. It is obvious that one person had the only and last word of order in Denmark and he is the criminal King Claudius. The one who can even affect the Church's canon in the special case of Ophelia. The Church forbids the burial of deliberate and wilful suicides in consecrated ground. Nothing can stop the dominant power, not even the ever-dominating word of God. When the system is incapable of bringing justice, individuals may seek it for themselves. Such legalised violence is, of course, a threat to the public order and the monarch. A monarch, very specifically, does not desire such an action; even planting such an idea in the mind of an audience is a risk.

Members of the Pahlavi government were aware of the political corruption in the country. Protesters occupied the streets, Intellectuals were feeding the revolutionary groups and the whole country was on the brink of revolution. State-surveillance intrudes on individual lives; there were several Hamlets demonstrating in the streets and crying for revenge. In such a situation, and in a dictatorship situation, there is no place for a Hamlet who publicly reveals that 'Denmark is a prison'.

The deeply reflective quality that is embodied by Hamlet's character finds its analogue in the capacity of theatre to reflect upon its own representational strategies. Hamlet illustrates this very often throughout the play, sometimes by presenting himself as an actor:

‘they are actions that a man might play’. Nowhere does Shakespeare demonstrate more clearly that art, specifically drama, facilitates and objectifies the capacity of human consciousness to reflect upon itself, than in the play-within-the-play, the vehicle through which Claudius’ perfidy is revealed. Despite the vexed relationship between thought and action, Hamlet is in no doubt about the political and emotional impact of theatre, which can disclose the King’s guilt and lay bare that which has been concealed. ⁸

Hamlet uses theatre for lucidity. Shakespeare has other plays that include play-within-a-play. His other plays of this style, which were written before “Hamlet”, are “Love’s Labour’s Lost” and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”. Neither of them is a tragedy. In this case, Hamlet is more similar to “The Spanish Tragedy” of around 1583, another play within a play whose popularity could have inspired Shakespeare. *Mirza Aqa Tabrizi*, one of the first Iranian playwrights, wrote the piece “Shah-Quli Mirza” with a plot similar to that of “Hamlet’s” plot: in the play masses or the lower classes come to the stage. *Mirza Aqa* prepares the play for a theatre-in-theatre. *Iraj Mirza*, a character of the play, arranges a “performance” to get rid of his acquisitive uncle-*Shah-Quli Mirza*. In the play, the uncle misbehaves in his treatment of the peasantry. This leads to their (the audience’s) revolt and the interesting point is that the uproar of the revolt even drowns the performers of the play-within-play, thereby ending the play in the commotion of the riots.⁹

Mirza Aqa Tabrizi clearly shows the tragic situation of the country in this theatre piece. But in a totalitarian system, does theatre-in-theatre give any possibility to “speak the speech”? Is the stage a safe zone to express condemnable opinions that the director disavows? Can theatre function as a tool in the hands of an artist to demonstrate his/her personal responsibility under dictatorship?

After the triumph of the Iranian revolution on 11th of February 1979, theatre experienced an utterly free atmosphere. Surprisingly, the Iranian revolution of 1978/9 did not stop the vehicle of theatre immediately. Instead, for more than one year the revolutionary excitement and the strong popular will of change brought life and diversity to the Iranian theatre scene. Dramatists and directors with sympathies for different political parties used the liberal atmosphere to express their ideologies on stage. People rushed to theatre halls, and late evening debates after each performance were popular.

It was during this period that modern and experimental theatre approached normal people in public and even unusual resorts: “theatrocracy” was again in action. This freedom of expression was victimised in the subsequent months. The Islamic revolutionists took social and political control into their hands and under the leadership of Imam Khomeini an Islamic republic was established. Suppression was shrouded with a legal cover under the name of Islamic and religious reforms and censorship was imposed on all artistic productions.

The Cultural Revolution happened in 1980; universities were forced to close for three years. On April 18, 1980, after Friday prayers, Imam Khomeini gave a speech harshly attacking the universities:

“We are not afraid of economic sanctions or military intervention. What we are afraid of is Western universities and the training of our youth in the interests of West or East.”

The government taking over the campuses faced resistance from students, which, in turn, warranted state-enforced violence. During these years, professors and employees of academia were submitted to ideological investigation and some were jailed or fired. Course syllabuses were reviewed and adjusted to Islamic Shari'a and the principles of the Islamic revolution. Cultural revolutionary headquarters and later the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council banned many books and cleared the basic lessons as much as possible from Western philosophy. Many students never received permission to attend university again and some became soldiers in the war between Iraq and Iran or were simply washed away in “the wave of life”. Activists were sentenced to jail; some were executed and some theatre artists were among them. Several playwrights, performers, directors and theatre owners chose a life in exile.

The war imposed on Iran by Iraq in 1980 was the last pressure dressing on the wounded body of Iranian theatre. The Islamic government imposed severe control through various official and

unofficial agencies. However, the belief of Iranian politicians and governors on the beneficial aspects of theatre did not change; theatre was still used as a powerful propaganda vehicle to promote the ideology of conservatives. The ministry of culture dictated specific topics, such as honouring martyrs, Jihad for God, poverty, drug addiction and anti-drug policies, and the corrupting influence of Western the lifestyle. The theatre artists who remained were divided into two groups: they either decided to suffer rather than “to do wrong”, as Socrates believed, or they became a warrior of the revolution with the excuse of being just a cog in the works.

On the whole, the 1980s should be considered a transitional period in Persian drama. Two factors contributed to heightening the changes in this genre beyond those of other literary forms. Firstly, the socio-political content of plays was transformed, owing to alterations in the political system and, more importantly, a fundamental transformation in the general values and social attitudes of the Persian people. Secondly, in the staging of plays, official attitudes on issues like dress restrictions for both men and women and the interaction between male and female performers dictated changes in playwriting itself. At the same time, more conventional storytelling techniques replaced the experimental forms of the 1960s and 1970s and helped to attract general audiences and keep theatre alive. Experimentation remains important in Persian theatre, however. Some Iranian theatre artists

in exile tried to remain active. The most renowned among them is *Qulam-hossein Sā'edī*¹⁰, who published several plays in exile until his death in Paris in 1985. He wrote an adaptation of “Othello”; “Othello dar sarzamīn-e ‘ajāyeb” (Othello in Wonderland), published in France. It is a farce on an imaginary production of “Othello” in Iran, in which case the government had intended to transform the play into a propaganda tool.

In this play, director and performers are forced to characterise *Othello* as an Islamist rebel and *Iago* as an anti-revolutionist character. During the whole rehearsal, there was an armed gunman watching them. Actresses were forced to be covered from head to toe and Othello was not to speak affectionately to Desdemona. Although the play is not the best in its quality, the context comically reveals the sad truth of theatre backstage in Iran in those days. We shall try to find our Hamlet, and find out what happened to him in this historical continuum. Our aim is to find out what is the reaction of “Hamlet” directors in terms of their personal responsibility under a totalitarian regime. Hannah Arendt believes that whoever takes upon himself political responsibility will always come to the point where he/she says with Hamlet:

“The time is out of joint: O cursed spite

That ever I was born to set it right!”¹¹

Hamlet came to a world, which was there before him, and he feels the responsibility to renew the world. This is not what Iranian

theatre directors, playwrights and performers, etc. were considered to do. I would like to find out, though, how they did react toward their personal responsibility. Were they used by the system, as cogs and wheels that kept the administration running? Or did they try to use their artistic options to make a difference in this movement? If we accept that an artist does not have a political responsibility, what happens to his/her personal responsibility, as a civilian who has the power of art in his/her hand?

In the transformation of the Iranian revolution into the Islamic revolution, the state was going through the process of becoming a totalitarian government. During the Pahlavi dynasty, the country was ruled by a modern dictatorship where one party seizes the state apparatus at the expense of all other parties and hence, of all organised opposition¹². During the last year of the Pahlavi government, when revolutionary activities were under way, the state decided to intervene with its citizens' private lives and non-political activities. As Hannah Arendt clarifies, this is the difference between a totalitarian government and a dictatorship. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, all public manifestations, cultural, artistic, or learned/academic, and all organisations, welfare and social services, even sports and entertainment, were "coordinated."¹³ All such coordination efforts are openly acknowledged in Iran.

The Islamic Revolution of 1978/9 stopped all cultural activities of the Shah's regime, including theatre, and started purifying

cultural programmes with more Islamic standards. Imam Khomeini (1902 - 1989), the leader of the Islamic Revolution, repeatedly made references to the arts in his speeches:

“Those kinds of arts and artists are acceptable that tell the story of the poor and of poverty and fight with the capitalists who rape people's property. Art must challenge the modern capitalism and the bloodsucker communism and it must show both, the social problems and the political, military and economic crisis,”

With this manifest, there clearly was little elbowroom to stage the story of a kingdom for years. Still, “Hamlet” was one of the rare Shakespeare plays that received permission to be staged during the Iran-Iraq war. But in the meantime, it was perceived as having the potential of a classic piece that could be coded with less risk. Surprisingly, Shakespeare (and his plays) did not seem to be of any interest till 1987, one year before the cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq war. The production is mentioned as “Hamlet”, written by Shakespeare, under the co-direction of *Asgar Quds* and *Hamid Liqvani* (Figure No.18). *Asgar Quds* had written some ideological scenarios and plays, and received two prizes for his artistic devotion to the values of the imposed war. That same year, another production named “Hamlet in the cultural center” (Hamlet dar Farhangsara), directed by *Ebrahim Ebrahimi* was performed at the Niyavaran cultural center. The first Shakespeare production after the revolution was “Hamlet”, portraying a corrupt and treasonous kingdom which is ultimately eliminated. This might then have been the reason why

the play had received the official permission. It is beneficial to mention the regulations issued by the Dramatic Arts Center (DAC), the theatre supervisory arm of government, for obtaining a performance permit.

The jury for “Surveillance and Assessment”, in charge of the governments censor board, had to be informed by the producers about any piece they intended to perform from the very beginning of the procedure. At first, the text of the play would have to be sent to the Dramatic Arts Centre. The following fundamental points were to be considered by the playwright:

1. The context should not be anti-Islamic or against any other official religion of the country.
2. The context should not promote atheism.
3. It must not provoke erotic or sexual actions or contain indecent words.
4. It must satisfy the artistic judgment of the censor board.

For the performance:

5. There must be no physical contact between men and women.
6. The body and the hair of the actresses must be concealed and no tight dresses are allowed.
7. There should be no dance or pop music, although some

movements are allowed

8. It must satisfy the artistic judgment of the censor board.

The Iran-Iraq war ended in the summer of 1988. Post-war theatre reflected the states' propaganda about the war rather than the social traumata and economic consequences of the gruelling eight long years of war.

All state-sponsored productions fit into the category of "Holy Defence Theatre"; these theatres were a means to celebrate Iranian soldiers' courage and holy sacrifices during the eight years of war. Iranian religious authorities always demonstrated a disapproving attitude towards Western-style theatre. Devout audiences became a threat for performances. A play with a theme on war was even under more surveillance because the war between Iran and Iraq was defined as a Holy Defence. This holiness makes the topic sensitive and one should approach it with respect and docility.

In 1995, members of the Basij¹⁴ Volunteer Force stormed a performance of *Alireza Naderi's* play "Murmurs behind the front line" (Pech Pechehayeh Poshte Khate Nabard) at the Mowlavi theatre Hall¹⁵. The dramatisation, showing soldiers' doubts and fears during the Iran-Iraq war, did not comply with the narrative favoured by the conservative forces.

The years between 1989 and 1997 are known as “Construction Years”. During these years, poverty, strength, hard-work and nationalistic themes were the favoured topics. A look at the list of post-war performances shows that suddenly Iranian directors showed a tendency toward performing canon plays such as *Shakespeare*, *Chekhov*, *Arthur Miller* and *Brecht*. Iranian artists became familiar with dramaturgy, which turned into their saving angle. Classic plays were adapted and appropriated to reflect the real challenges of audiences’ everyday life. “Hamlet; Seasonal Salad” (Figure No.17) is a production of post-war and constructing era. *Akbar Radi*¹⁶ wrote this adaptation one year before the revolution, but it took thirteen years till the play obtained a chance to be performed in 1990, directed by *Hadi Marzban*. “Hamlet; Seasonal Salad” puts Hamlet in a surreal scene. The scene is a small sample of Iranian intellectual and bourgeois society. Hamlet is a philosopher who is married to Sarvenaz, a girl whose family is pretending to have connections with the royal family while being a member of the intellectual society. The play starts with the couple’s arrival at home after a long honeymoon; Sarvenaz promises to introduce Hamlet to her grandfather but instead, other members of the family visit them, and each one is trying to attract Hamlet as his/her own supporter. At the end, the family court sentences Hamlet to death because he could or would not pledge loyalty to any of them. It seems, that because the play is mocking bourgeois society, which was considered counterrevolutionary by the relevant

authorities, and apparently portrays the emptiness of intellectuals, it managed to obtain the benevolent consideration of the censor board.

The desire and struggle for reform from the mid 1990ies, including the work of political activists, journalists, and women's media, demanding change in the legal system, led to the 1997 election of *Mohammad Khatami* as President (1997 - 2005). His campaign was based on a reform of the government toward a democratic society and improvement of social rights. Intellectuals and artists expected change and reform within the cultural scene. *Khatami* was a former minister of "Culture and Islamic Guidance" for ten years and was known for his open-minded views on arts; he is also known as a philosopher. *Khatami's* semi-liberal attitude led to several interpellations of his ministry in parliament.

Mohammad Khatami's first term in office is known as the "golden age of theatre" in Iran, and one should keep in mind that compared to post-revolutionary circumstances, even "gold-plated" was as valuable as pure gold. Famous names that had been kept off stage for years were invited to the theatre scene. Many potential young writers and directors benefited from this open atmosphere, and showed their talents on stage. Audiences had the chance to choose among more diverse styles and genres of theatre. A look at the list of official performances clearly shows that there is a huge improvement in the quantity of theatre productions. Plays were

overbooked and there were long lines in front of ticket boxes. Audiences were finally happy to see a true reflection of their society on stage.

According to *Amirreza Koohestani*¹⁷:

“This Khatami period was a very creative era. And directors like myself, Hamid Poorazari, Reza Servati and Hassan Madjoni, among others, we all started directing plays during that time. Things were much easier and we had much more freedom of speech.”

Foreign theatre companies were invited to Iran in the context of the “International Fajr Theatre Festival”, providing an opportunity for artistic dialogue between global theatre representations and Iranian theatre artists and students. As a result, many Iranian artists have concluded that the only way to make theatre pay, is by appealing to the international market. This is a dysfunctional development, says Koohestani - not least because, having only recently been reconnected with world theatre after years of isolation, Iranian artists are ill equipped to second-guess international tastes. "So you end up with not-what-Europe-wants and not-what-Iranian-audiences-want. You lose both your audiences."

A production of “Hamlet” by *Majid Djafari* in 2002 is one of the first experimental adaptations of “Hamlet” in Iran (Figure NO.19) that probably had international targets. *Djafari* performed three Hamlet characters on stage. Two actresses and an actor were

expressively performing as the character of Hamlet on a steel scaffolding stage. Horatio was omitted and the Hamlets were each other's reliable friends. *Djafari* deconstructs the whole original plot structure of Hamlet and re-shapes it in a collage. In an interview, he reveals his reasons for adapting "Hamlet" in such a post-modern way:

Q: You brought three Hamlets on stage, did you mean to distinguish the three dimensions of his character or not?

A: Any happening on the stage never has a specific and constant reason. Separating Hamlet's character into three personifications, was only one of the reasons, another reason was giving a proper rhythm to the play. We can either perform a classic Hamlet or a contemporary one that is adjusted to its time-being.

Q: Why did you choose two women and one man?

A: I am sure if I had chosen two men and a woman another journalist would ask the same question. If Hamlet were not performed by a woman, Mahtab Keramati, we could not see the same reactions from Ophelia, Mitra Hajjar, on stage.

Q: What did urge you to perform "Hamlet" right now?

A: This play brings up questions that can belong to any time and anyone. "Where am I coming from and what was the reason/where would I go finally?" This question was always

meaningful but it never had a specific answer, and each time it was answered was appropriate for its time-being. So, there is always a possibility for it to be performed.”¹⁸

Majid Djafari was the manager of city theatre hall during the war and during the subsequent thirteen years. Since his graduation in 1979, he had always been part of the DAC managing team. His “Hamlet” is performed in a general atmosphere of political openness in the Iranian theatre scene. However, his approach toward the play and its capacities for freedom of speech is by no means adjusted to his time being. He talks about his ideal theatre in another interview:

“Q: In last year’s “international Fadjr Theatre Festival”, you performed “Hamlet” and “Antigone”. These two are both considered political dramas. Is your tendency toward political theatre related to the dominating political atmosphere of society?”

A: First, I should say that I do not perform political theatre in its usual meaning. I believe that artists should not be a member of a political party or have sympathy with any political ideology... in my point of view, Hamlet’s theme is not political at all and it is more than anything philosophical.

Q: My proof case for considering Hamlet as political is that Hamlet rebels against the illegal domination of Claudius as part of the dominating system. Antigone is the same and they both have a political atmosphere.

A: I don’t see such an act in Hamlet. Hamlet does not rebel and he is just asking himself that: in my current situation, shall I react or

*not? In fact, this passive reaction is against political action.*¹⁹

Majid Djafari does not only resist making any connection between his play and political action, but also tries to prove himself and Shakespeare as “innocent of any political intentions”. He also devalues any artistic production with political motivations. Here it is useful to look at how the state cogs function in the system of Iranian theatre. As Hannah Arendt notes:

*“Even in a strictly bureaucratic organization, with its fixed hierarchical order, it would make much more sense to look upon the functioning of the “cogs” and wheels in terms of overall support for a common enterprise than in our usual terms of obedience to superiors. If I obey the laws of the land, I actually support its constitution, as becomes glaringly obvious in the case of revolutionists and rebels who disobey because they withdraw this tacit consent.”*²⁰

What if enough theatre directors act only “irresponsible” toward the dictatorship and use the weapon of being unsupportive? The above interview reveals the truth of Iranian theatre society; the popular belief is: not only I should be responsible but also other theatre artists should act supportive. We, as a group of artist functioning as cogs and wheels of the system, should continue our supportive function by not stopping the wheel, because if the wheels stops theatre would be in danger. Therefore, we should even analyse Shakespeare plays with the intention to deny its political content.

Djafari believes that Hamlet is questioning himself

philosophically. In other words, Hamlet has an inner dialogue, which, as Arendt reminds us, we usually call thinking²¹ since Socrates and Plato,

“The dividing line between those who want to think and therefore, have to judge by themselves, and those who do not, strikes across all social and cultural or educational differences... Those who cherish values and hold fast to moral norms and standards are not reliable: we know that moral norms and standards can be changed overnight...much more reliable will be the doubters and skeptics...because they are used to examine things and make up their own minds.”²²

Hamlet at once sees that the crime is not a mere matter between himself and Claudius, but that it has engendered a bad condition of affairs in the state and that it is imperative for him to set himself to the task of reparation:

“That ever I was born to set it right!”

Perhaps, the playwright and director of the next case study tried to think and decide in person. “Qajar Coffee”²³ is an appropriation of “Hamlet” written by *Mohammad Charmshir*²⁴ and directed by *Atila Pesyani*. The play is assimilated to some kind of Iranian indigenous theatre, “Ro-houzi”. “*Shahzadeh Bayram Mirza*” (Prince Bayram-Mirza) decided to perform an old piece he had read before for his mother the queen and his uncle the king. He believes that his uncle killed his father, the king, with poisonous coffee. Therefore, he names his piece “Qajar Coffee” (Qahveh Qajari). He asks the

servants of the house, who live underground in the kitchen, to perform this piece in the main hall of the castle. The servants accept and they start a rehearsal. In fact, what we watch during the performance is their rehearsal for the actual theatre-in-theatre upstairs. Contrary to the original “Hamlet” where we are not the intended audience for the play-within-a-play, in this play where the characters of play are the audience, while we, the present audience of “another time” are watching them as the target audience of the play-within-a-play.

He chose the traditional Iranian character as his role: *Siyah*, and with the help of irony, music and improvisation the actors disavow their critics in the social and political situation. In the 21st century, in order to avoid any clash with the authorities, plays were filled with mainly pseudo-historical subject matter but included elements of contemporary criticism by *Siyah*; a hero who double-deals his master, favours the loving couples, plays dumb and at the end shows the audience the moral. *Atila Pesyani* cleverly uses this crazy-funny character as a tool for criticising the ones who live upstairs, those who are leading the totalitarian system. He properly adapts the piece to a historical epoch of history that does not trigger any sensitivity of the censor board.

During his two terms in office, *Khatami* was able to introduce some reforms to the Iranian political system; however, all in all, he is widely considered to have lost the power struggle with his

opponents. The root cause for his failures is often attributed to the limited powers of the President in the Iranian political system. As President, *Khatami* had little or no authority over many key state institutions such as the judiciary, the state radio and television, the armed forces, including the police, the military, etc. “Qajar Coffee” mentions this lack of authority under the cover of Fars comedy.

Following the *Khatami* presidency, *Mahmud Ahmadinejad* was elected President in 2005. The newly revitalized theatre industry faced a sudden change in cultural policies due to the worsening of civil rights and the economic situation, but also the hard-line politics of fear imposed during *Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's* presidency, it was not unexpected that the theatre scene would suffer again under various restrictions. Certain plays were blacklisted as forbidden plays. Commercial theatre became the fashion in order to sell more tickets and attract vast audiences.

If *Ahmadinejad's* first term was a great shock for theatre artists, what happened with the next election was an electric shock, and resulted in shutting down any intellectual and liberal activity in the Iranian theatre scene.

The frustrating situation of society during four years of *Ahmadinejad's* government provided sufficient encouragement for members of the middle-class to protest against his re-election. This uprising was the result of a democratic action. An unexpectedly

large number of voters participated in the 2009 presidential elections. Many silent members of the theatre society also found the motivation and courage to engage themselves in the political scene and use their popularity in advertising campaigns; more than 800 movie, theatre and TV stars had signed a statement in support of *Mousavi*.

Surprisingly, the official results announced *Ahmadinejad* as the winner, though *Mousavi* and his campaign believed the results were fraudulent. Disappointed *Mousavi* supporters assembled in the streets without any preliminary organisational efforts, resulting in the "biggest unrest since the 1979 revolution" – and it happened in the streets of Tehran.

In following days, the protests widened and several massive demonstrations were held throughout the country. Although the Iranian government prohibited any form of gathering of opposition-supporters, cut the phone lines and significantly limited Internet access and also censored any form of media agreeing with the opposition, hundreds of thousands of Iranians chanted this motto: Where is my vote?. Protests were supposed to continue peacefully; however in less than a week the state confronted protestors by increasingly violent attitude. Clashes broke out between police and people protesting peacefully in the streets. Seventy-two women and men and even some youths were shot dead during the peaceful protest.

Initially, the election abruptly flipped a large majority of the already numbed, frustrated Iranians into a euphoric, outspoken mood, as there was a sudden realisation of the opportunity to bring about change, as small as it might be, through the most civil, nonviolent mechanism of voting. As such, the nation erupted with the most vibrant election campaigns in its history.

The ensuing protests and unrests are known as the Iranian Green Movement. Green was used as the symbol of *Mir Hossein Mousavi's* campaign and it remained a symbol of protest in the aftermath. The government arrested many of the protesters and at least 72 were killed. There were some theatre artists among the arrested ones and three theatre students were among the “freedom martyrs”, as the opposition called them. Artist's names were added to the blacklist and a deadly silence and social denial dominated the theatre scene.

President Ahmadinezhad wrote a note In the Catalogue of the 25th “Fadjr Theatre Festival”:

"The art of theatre should represent the best and most beautiful definitions of human truth-seeking and worthiness."

It was definitely hard and nearly impossible for theatre at that time to seek the truth and show beauty while naked violence was dominating everyday life and the opposition was forced to deny the election fraud. Perhaps this resulted in a general denial in post-election productions. Very few theatre productions tried to

immortalise those collective memories through the use of classic texts and symbolism in theatre. Among these, Hamlet was considered the best metaphor to “speak the speech”.

Many directors and actors became stage-banned (or face-banned); a term used for actors or famous faces whose picture should not be shown in any media due to their resistance to the government moralities.

Despite active collaboration of Iranian movie and theatre activists in the “Green Movement”, there was no artistic expression staged in the public Iranian theatre scenes. Of course, this was to be expected due to the monopoly of the governmental system with regard to producing and performing theatre. Only two years later, *Mohammad Aqebati* directed a short “Hamlet” adaptation: “Hamlet the Prince of Grief”. (Figure No.20)

Using household objects and children’s toys to play out a domestic and political history of betrayal and death, Shakespeare’s tragic hero comes to terms with his violent fate through the obsessive retelling of the moments that preceded the tragedy.

“Prince of Grief” is a stylized, eccentric riff on “Hamlet” rather than a condensed version of the play. There is significant humour in the production, written by *Mohammad Charmshir* and directed by *Mohammad Aghebati*. Except for Hamlet, personified by Mr. *Hashemi*, who remains seated at a table throughout the

performance, save at the end, when the characters are symbolised by small plastic toys plucked from a suitcase as the primary prop; Hamlet supplies them with individual voices.

Gertrude is a tiny elephant, which pours the poison into her husband's ear with the help of her long curved trunk. This is one point where the story intersects directly (more or less) with the original. But for the most part, there is little continuity between the contemporary story being told and Shakespeare's grand tragedy.

With dark, expressive eyes and a rich, versatile voice, Hamlet is a compelling presence, ably suggesting a man haunted by the agonising tale he must recount. The ancient Persian tradition of story telling is well used by the director to reveal a tragic story. It begins with the Hamlet figure escaping from his studies by driving out to the countryside with some friends (enter a little toy truck) for a day of relaxation. On a bill-board, the hero catches sight of a portentous phrase: "To be or not to be." Still, on they drive.

Cell-phone interruptions derail the fun, and soon the protagonist is forced to confront the dark knowledge that his mother has conspired with his uncle (plastic dinosaur) to kill his father (plastic lion). Much brooding unhappiness ensues, including an encounter with his father's ghost, grappling with some angels; Ophelia, at least, is allowed to go to her rest in a human-like form: she is presented as a Barbie-type doll with luxuriously long tresses.

This passive melancholic prince Hamlet is “rolling” his territory, his suitcase around. Hamlet resembles a member of the young Iranian generation in exile. They are sitting behind their working desks and computers, trying to reveal their grief for their country and the lost legacy of freedom far away. While this Hamlet is not physically integrated in life, various things are happening back in his homeland; he is only connected to his tragic life through illusions. This approach toward the corruption of his land is childish. In fact, he was initially prevented from growing up. Hamlet never encounters the dinosaur (king) and the elephant in a real world; he is already self-banished from his homeland. Receiving all the news on his cell-phone he does not even dare to talk to his uncle when Ophelia (the Barbie doll) asks him to.

Hamlet is visualising his own tragedy in a childish way to himself. The uncle king is so much out of reach that he prefers to get verbal revenge from elephant Gertrude or duck Polonius. His voice cannot and will not reach the authorities.

At the end, a green light beams into Hamlet’s back; he turns around, stands up and hears a shot. Just when you expect him to fall to the ground, he turns toward us, looks in our eye and sits down. He is a living corpse. Hamlet is not capable of returning to Elsinore. The body of his memories is shot and his ghostly existence in Elsinore did not leave any space for his real existence.

The victory of the Islamic revolution was followed by enthusiastic efforts aimed at transforming this very Western art which, prior to the revolution had only been accessible to a small group of overindulged intellectuals, into a fully Persian form of art, based on the new revolutionary culture and beliefs of society. There is no doubt that every major social event, particularly cultural and political revolutions are followed by their own specific culture, literature and art. After the initial onset of the Islamic Revolution, more Farsi translations and adaptations have been made of “Hamlet” than of any other Shakespeare work. Hamlet's nature is of such fluidity that it enables him to conform to diverse circumstances. Iranian directors found the translation of “Hamlet” something that could break them out of their depression. They saw the echoes of times in “Hamlet”: revolution and death, turmoil and confusion.

Iranian theatre encountered a new experimental environment during the last decades to modernise its structure and its artistic expression. It seems that Iranian directors mostly tried to focus on classic and neo-classic plays and adapt them to local culture. However, armed with the acting system of Stanislavski, they mostly explored psychological motivations of Hamlet and one can rarely find a trace of their agency in “Hamlet” productions. However, in a society overwhelmed with political effects it is impossible for art to ignore the nation’s ambition for freedom of speech. There have been

few “derivative works” of “Hamlet”, which recast the story from the point of view of other characters, or transpose the story into a new setting or act as sequels or prequels to “Hamlet”.

The process of theatre’s cultural mobility to Iran made a progressive dialogue possible. This discourse opened a new space in which theatre can act as an effective social phenomenon. Modern theatre has been our Fortinbras who brought hope for modernisation and possibilities for cultural exchange. However, there are still dreams to come true.

What dreams may come? The long journey of modern theatre and, in particular “Hamlet”, is not yet finished; this cultural mobility is an everlasting transition, because the discourse is always alive and every cultural progress or suppression affects it dynamically.

Notes:

1. Dennis Kennedy, "foreign Shakespeare" (Cambridge, 1993), 3-4.
2. Dennis Kennedy, "foreign Shakespeare" (Cambridge, 1993), 4.
3. SAVAK, Sāzemān-e Ettelā'āt va Amniyat-e Keshvar, (Organization of Intelligence and National Security), was the secret police, domestic security and intelligence service established by Iran's Mohammad Reza Shah with the help of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (the CIA) and Israeli Mossad. SAVAK operated from 1957 to 1979, when the prime minister *Shapour Bakhtiar* ordered its dissolution during the outbreak of Iranian Revolution.
4. Abbas Milani, "Eminent Persians" (Syracuse 2008), vol.1, 216.
5. Houshang Nahavandi, "Mohammad Reza Pahlavi the Last Shah" (Los Angeles 2013), 390
6. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17770170>
7. Hannah Lavery, "Hamlet and Elizabethan England".open.edu, <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative-writing/literature/hamlet-and-elizabethan-england> (accessed 15 June 2015).
8. Dymrna Callaghan, "Hamlet: Language and writing" (Bloomsbury 2015), 148-49
9. Kamran Sepehran, "Aesthetics of politics and Mirza Aqa Tabrizi" *Sociological Journal of Art and Literature*, Autumn and Winter 2009, 210.
10. *Qulam-hosseini Sā'edī* , (1936 in Tabriz – 1985 in Paris) was a prolific Iranian writer. He has published over forty books, representing his talents in the fiction genres of drama (under the pen name Gowhar Murad) the novel, the screenplay, and the short story in addition to the non-fiction genres of cultural criticism, travel literature and ethnography. After the 1979 revolution and his subsequent exile, he maintained an important figure in the scene of Persian literature despite the Iranian diaspora of which he unwillingly became a part. His death in Paris, due to depression and related alcoholism, was a loss shock to Iranian intellectuals.
11. Hannah Arnet. Ed. Jerome Kohn, "personal responsibility under dictatorship" (Schocken books 2003), 27-8
12. Hannah Arendt. Ed. Jerome Kohn, "personal responsibility under dictatorship" (Schocken books 2003),33
13. Hannah Arendt. Ed. Jerome Kohn, "personal responsibility under dictatorship" (Schocken books 2003),33
14. Basidji or Mobilisation Resistance Force, is one of the five forces of the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution. A paramilitary volunteer militia established in Iran in 1979 by order

of Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Iranian Revolution, the organization originally consisted of civilian volunteers who were urged by Khomeini to fight in the Iran–Iraq War.

15. Today the force consists of young Iranians who volunteer, often in exchange for official benefits. Basij serve as an auxiliary force engaged in activities such as internal security, law enforcement auxiliary, providing social services, organizing public religious ceremonies, policing morals, and suppression of dissident gatherings.
16. Mowlavi Theatre Hall is one of the state-owned theatre Halls in Tehran. The theatre belongs to Tehran University and since its establishment has been dedicated to university students theatre and experimental performances.
17. Akbar Radi, Abar Radi was an Iranian playwright. He was born on October 2, 1939 in the city of Rasht, completed his studies at the University of Tehran in social sciences. His plays portrays the conditions surrounding the lives of intellectuals. He is known as Iranian Ibsen.
18. Amirreza Koohestani born in 1978, Shiraz is an acknowledged Iranian playwright and director. His theatre productions toured In several countries and festivals.
19. Jafari, Majid. Interview by Mahin Sadri. November 2002, Iran newspaper.
20. Jafari, Majid. Interview by Behzad Mortazavi, 27 September 2002
21. Iranian newspaper
22. Hannah Arendt. Ed. Jerome Kohn, “personal responsibility under dictatorship” (Schocken books 2003), 47
23. Hannah Arendt. Ed. Jerome Kohn, “personal responsibility under dictatorship” (Schocken books 2003), 45
24. Hannah Arendt. Ed. Jerome Kohn, “personal responsibility under dictatorship” (Schocken books 2003), 45
25. Qajar Coffee or Qahveh Qajari is a deadly poisoned potion and one of the favorite tools of murder used by Qajar royalty.
26. Among Iranian playwrights and dramaturgs, Mohammad Charmishir is the most devoted one to adapting Shakespeare plays.

Chapter 6: Conclusion - “To Be or Not to Be”

The research is set to shed light on the cultural mobility of “Hamlet” in Iran. The road that “Hamlet” took in transforming from a classic English text to an appropriated Iranian stage production is in the centre of this research’s focus. Although “Hamlet” is a 16th century text, from its first travel to Iran, Iranian intellectuals and theatre artists approached it as a modern text. This modern approach is not equivalent to contemporising the play, as it was as a post-World-War II movement in Europe. It is relevant to including drama as a vehicle of social modernisation and cultural mobilisation.) During the first Pahlavi era and on the verge of the state’s and intellectuals’ efforts to modernise the state in Iran, a new term found its place in Iranian policy: The Nation-State. To stabilise the country and bring modernisation into action, the state intended to promote nationalism. This promotion and modernisation needed a mediator and theatre seemed the best and most effective one in that case. Inviting an Armenian-Russian group to perform the very first public performance of “Hamlet” made Reza Shah the official mobiliser of Modern Theatre. However, this was a “distorted mobility” due to the autocratic nature of the Pahlavi dynasty. The censorship agents of the Pahlavi government found “Hamlet’s”

power-representation threatening to the monarch and, as a result, “Hamlet” ended up on the list of forbidden plays. Despite the strict ban, Iranian-Armenian theatre groups had the chance to keep their contact with “Hamlet”. As a minority, they formed a private “contact zone” - a safe zone, as it were, in which many state-rules did not need to be applied.

Armenians and Iranian students traveling abroad were the first mobilisers of modern theatre to Iran. The first encounter of Iranians with “Hamlet” was through their travelogues or translations. This textual encounter had a great effect on how “Hamlet” was received, and subsequently on how the play was adapted for performing on Iranian stages. The availability of the text and the weight of its moral content were decisive factors for choosing a play. The translator, as a first recipient, transports the text with the help of his/her cultural, social, political and linguistic knowledge. Despite the role of Armenian intellectuals in this transformation, there is a religious aspect of this great play of Shakespeare that was not even recognised.

In the case of Iranian “Hamlet” adaptations, religious differences have had a distinguishing impact on “Hamlet” productions in Iran. For centuries, Islam has been the official religion of Iran (Persia). Therefore, Islamic believes are historically weaved into Persian culture and affect every cultural production. Analysing the effect of religion is a complicated but beneficial task. Religion has always been a tool for domination and control of any

ruling power. From the Safavid monarchy to the Islamic Republic of Iran, religion has been a decisive factor and the very first filter for any imported phenomenon. Things either pass this filter or shall be forbidden; in other words, religion is the first filter for applying censorship. This means that plays should be respectful to the Islamic rules (Sharia) in their concept, ideology, and performativity aspects. While keeping an eye on Iranian theatre adaptations of “Hamlet”, the absence of one important and plot-affecting character is surprising: the Ghost.

Since the Ghost hearkens back the Purgatory believes of Catholicism, it is helpful to investigate this absence in the context of the destination’s religion. The definition of Purgatory for Catholic directors and audiences is different than with Muslim directors and audiences. Although the state imposes limitations on promoting non-Islamic believes, in this case, there is no blame on governmental censorship. In fact, The very first recipient- translator of the text did not have the necessary keys to decode the words and phrases relating to the belief of Purgatory. In mobilising “Hamlet” from Britain to Iran, the concept of Purgatory was not able to pass the border and is kept behind state boundaries. How then, is the Ghost- this important plot catalyst- represented in Iranian adaptations of “Hamlet”? Archival documents show that while theatrical appropriations preferred to omit the Ghost at all, movie productions found a realistic solution to represent it. In two post-revolution Iranian movie adaptations of “Hamlet”, the Ghost is being

revitalised through ritual ceremonies (Gowati) or dreams. In either way, the Ghost is no longer the voice of an honest character who asks for remembrance and motivates Hamlet to become the avenger. Our Hamlets are not heroes but they are lost and confused characters without a voice in their Elsinore. This picture is very near to the contemporary position of the new generation in the political sphere of Iran.

What about the other half of Iranian society? Do Iranian women find a possibility to have a voice through Ophelia's story in the Iranian appropriations of the character? It is the appropriator who makes decisions on the text he/she received. This decision is, of course, bound to his/her artistic, cultural, political or gender-related knowledge and concerns. The Iranian revolution that changed into the Islamic Revolution in subsequent years had severe and life-changing effects on the gender policies of the government, female appearance on stage and even ideological context of text.

Despite the limiting rules and anti-feministic atmosphere of society, the population of women who are engaged in the theatre scene of Iran increased significantly after the revolution and specifically during the last years. Therefore, there could be an expectation to have Ophelia and her story in the focus of Iranian directors. However, patriarchal echo of Shakespeare's original text added to the government definition of the perfect Muslim woman is a barrier to this focus. The theatre scene is yet waiting for a contemporary and identifiable Ophelia to give enthusiastic Iranian

women a voice on stage.

After the revolution and specifically after the Islamic Revolution, “Hamlet” is among the most performed and translated plays. What are the potentials of Hamlet that led to such an increased interest? How does Hamlet adjust to the post-revolutionary ideologies? Did Iranian directors find “Hamlet” and the characters’ facilities for expressing the truth, an appropriate medium for freedom of speech? What is the role of agency in art in the time of totalitarianism and what are the various potentials of “Hamlet” in that case?

During the years of the Cultural Revolution (1980-87) in Iran, an inventory term was imposed to the critic of theatre and cinema: “valued art” and its contrary “anti-valued art”. Fortunately, Shakespeare plays were labelled “valued”, otherwise there would have been a severe problem for getting any permit to perform classic Shakespeare, let alone a contemporary adaptation. In two public meetings (July 20 and January 19, 1993), Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, expressed his point of view on Shakespeare (reflected on his tweeter account):

“I have read most of works by Shakespeare and enjoyed them. Plays by Shakespeare are historical stories that he has formed beautifully and they see most of his works in accordance with ‘values’. Shakespeare plays, such as ‘The Merchant of Venice’ or ‘Othello’ are all in accordance with values, but Western values.”

Are there differences between Iranian directors' values and the state values? It seems that "Hamlet" with its theatre-in-theatre concept and characters' madness, can use the capacity of agency in Iranian theatre artists to make their own choices and influence their society. However, in the absence a perceived need for assuming personal responsibility, theatre artists found it safer to function as a cog that facilitates the movement of totalitarian mechanics.

Another character that did not manage to pass the borders of Iran during this cultural mobility is Fortinbras. In most productions, Fortinbras had been cut out entirely. Fortinbras is part of "Hamlet's" political concept and with its omission, Hamlet and his doubts about justice and truth will end with his death. Without hope for a "saviour", i.e. a Fortinbras to come, it is not a great surprise that theatre artists prefer to stay on the safe side and keep a healthy distance from a multi-layered contemporary adaptation of the text reflecting the everyday life of Iranian Hamlets. The Iranian Hamlet is still struggling to answer: "To Be or not To Be?"

Appendix



Figure 1: An Iranian Naqqali performance (Story telling)



Figure2: Iranian Moqalleds play in Kheymeh Shab Bazi theatre.

Courtesy of Antoin Sevruguin



**Figure 3: Siyavash (Hamlet) in a scene of Tardid movie,
Director: Varuzh Karim Masihi.**

Courtesy of Mohammad Foqani



Figure 4: A Gowati Ritual in Baluchistan

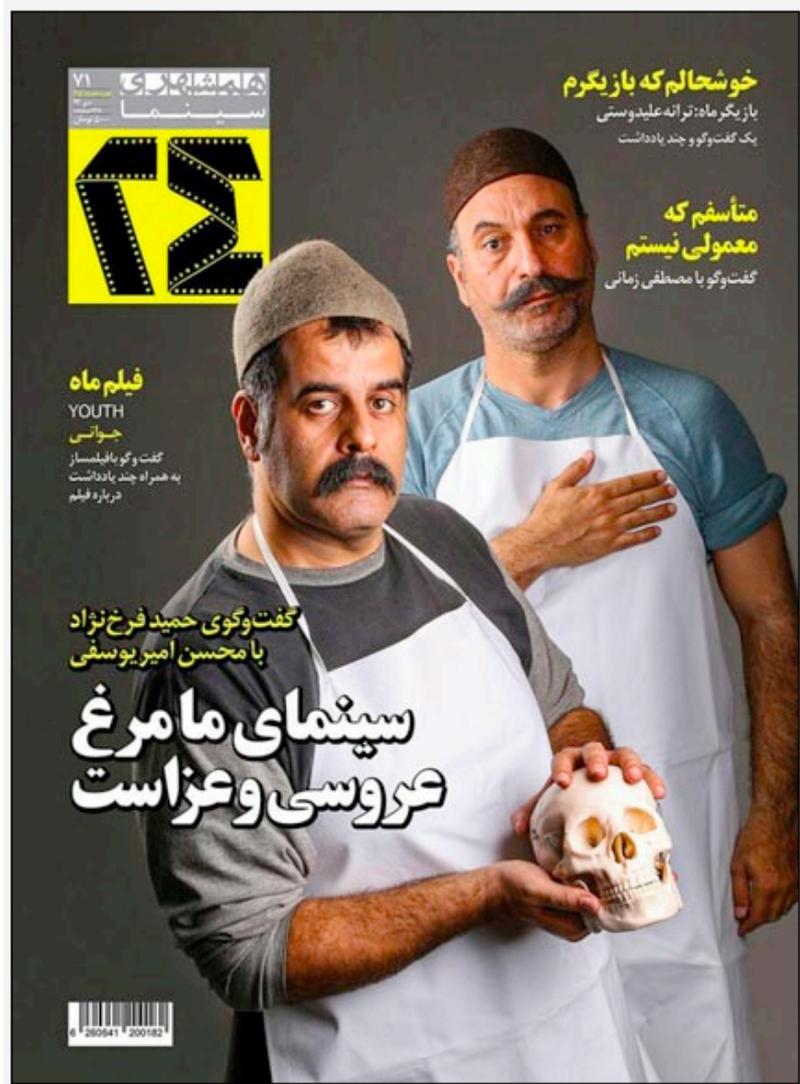


Figure 5- the director and Actor of “Fire Keeper” Movie with Yoricks Skull on the Cover of a Film Magazine.

Courtesy of Hamshahri-24 Film Magazine



Figure 6: The scene of Chase in “Fire keeper” movie; Sohrab (Hamlet) Running away from his horse riding Father

Courtesy of Abdollah Abdinasab



Figure 7: Map of Persia- Qajar Era

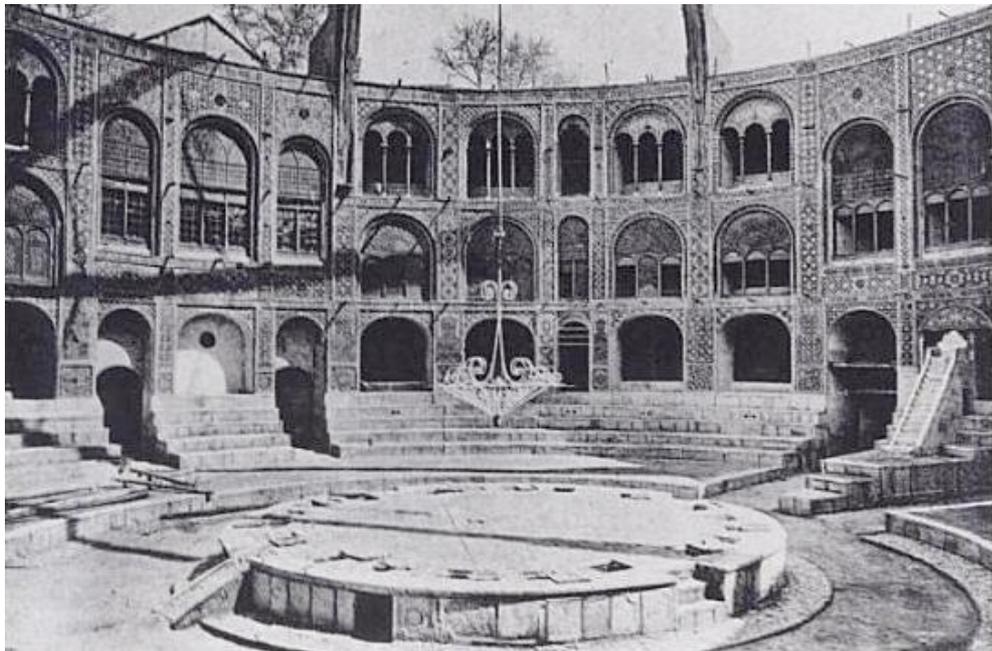


Figure 8: Takiyeh-Dowlat



Figure 9: Young Actor Vahram Papazian poses with Yoricks Skull.



Figure 10: "Palace Cinema and Hotel"-Pahlavi Era



Figure 11: Actresses of a Female Passion-Play (Taziye Zananeh)- Qajar Era



**Figure 12: A Group photo of missionaries with their wives-
Tehran.**



Figure 13: Atabak Palace and Park



Figure 14: Still photo of Sa'di theatre performers in a scene of "Lady Windermere's Fan" play.

Courtesy of Safineh Nooh Website



Figure 15: A picture of “Hamlet” directed by Reza Gouran-2012.

Left to right: Hamlet, Hamlet’s Female Double, Ophelia

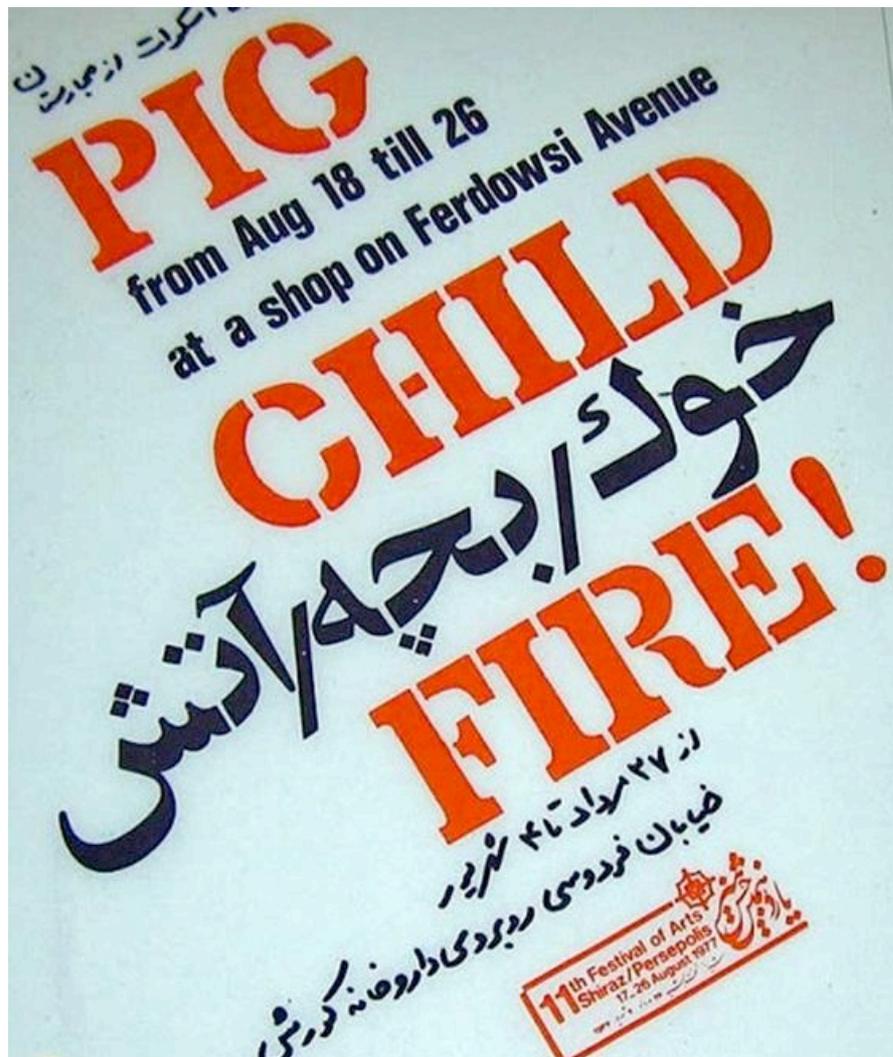


Figure 16: Poster of “Pig/Child/Fire” Published for Shiraz festival of Arts-1977.



Figure 17: Poster Of “Hamlet” directed by Asgar quds and Hamid liqvani- November 1987.

Courtesy of Tehran City theatre Library



Figure 18: Hamlet came back from honeymoon, in “Hamlet Seasonal Salad” directed by Hadi Marzban- April 1991.

Courtesy of Iran Theatre Website



Figure 19: Shiva Ebrahimi as Gertrude in “Hamlet” directed by majid Djafari-November 2002

Courtesy of Shiva Ebrahimi



**Figure 20: Afshin Hashemi in “Hamlet the prince of grief”
directed by Mohammad Aghebati.**

Courtesy of Mehdi Shaban

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