



ARTICLES OF PUNISHMENT

فصلنامه‌ی حقوق کیفری و مجازات

Written by
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After his sister's sudden death, Javeed, an Iranian-Canadian immigrant returns to his home country. Expecting to grieve, he instead finds himself grappling with his identity and values while immersed in the society he left behind and faced with a deeply disturbing life or death decision.

A black and white photograph with a dark, moody atmosphere. In the foreground, a man with a beard and a distressed expression looks directly at the camera. He is wearing a light-colored shirt. To his left, a person's arm and hand are visible, reaching out towards him. In the background, another man is standing, talking on a mobile phone. The setting appears to be a prison or a confined space, with a metal grate visible on the right side. The overall tone is somber and evocative.

**“You think taking a man’s life
is easy?”**

Javeed

CONTENTS

SYNOPSIS, *PG4*

URGENCY AND RELEVANCY STATEMENT *PG9*

TEAM, *PG13*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, *PG17*

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ARTICLES OF PUNISHMENT

DECK

SYNOPSIS

PG.4



QISAS

An Islamic term meaning "retaliation in kind", "eye for an eye", or retributive justice. In traditional Islamic law (sharia), the doctrine of Qisas provides for a punishment analogous to the crime.

Qisas is available to the victim or victim's next of kin against a convicted perpetrator of murder (or intentional bodily injury). In the case of murder, Qisas gives the right to take the life of the killer if the latter is convicted and the court approves. Those who are entitled to Qisas have the option of receiving monetary compensation or granting pardon to the perpetrator instead. Additionally, if one chooses Qisas as punishment for the perpetrator, they in turn must also provide monetary compensation to the family of the perpetrator.

SYNOPSIS

CONTINUED

*In **Act 1** we are introduced to Javeed, his life in Toronto, his ongoing dilemma about whether migrating to Canada was the right decision, and importantly, his sister’s death:*

Javeed, an Iranian-Canadian (late 30s) is, on the surface, a successful young-professional in Toronto. He works late, eats take-out for dinner in front of the TV and has almost no free time during the week due to his demanding job. Javeed does, however, party hard on the weekends. He embraces everything that Canada offers him to the fullest: bars, restaurants, crowded house parties, like a stunted adolescent he can’t get enough.

Surprisingly, Javeed’s apartment does not reflect the chaotic life we are introduced to. It is designed with a lot of character, featuring amazing photographs on the walls, books, and lush with plants. A house that an artist would live in.

Yet with a well-paying job, a full social life, and a taste for the arts, Javeed does not appear happy. While on a busy street car during the grey winter morning commuter rush, he mindlessly scrolls through his friends' social media feeds and likes various posts. Some pictures of people skiing Iranian mountains, in fancy restaurants in Tehran, and their trips abroad, he wonders if he made the right decision to leave. He also scrolls past pictures of his old university friends in Canada with their new babies, getting engaged, buying houses - but he can’t imagine settling down yet.

At a dinner party in Toronto we become more familiar with Javeed’s personality when he instigates a debate on a contentious topic. In telling a story of a recent work trip Javeed took to Boston, he was taken aback by a colleague’s perspective about a certain serial killer in the news, suggesting that capital punishment should be reinstated to avoid tax-payer money going toward keeping criminals comfortable. We learn that Javeed is rational, opinionated, and compassionate. That we should hold our humanity above economics. A sentiment that is not shared with everyone at the party.

At this party he attracts the attention of ANNA (early 30s), an artist who just started her own pottery business after returning from 5 years abroad in Germany. They share a genuine bond and attraction.

The next morning they decide to spend the day together and to hop antique shops in Toronto. Their interaction is sweet and their bond seems even stronger than the night before. They have the perfect day together. One thing however, baffles Anna: “why didn’t you follow your passion for photography?” she asks. Javeed is hesitant with his answer, “That will always be a hobby for me, I couldn’t risk being a starving artist. I came here with almost nothing”.

He arrives home, orders his dinner as usual. His phone rings, a number from Iran: his sister, AVA, is dead and he must return to Iran to handle her affairs. Javeed is her only living immediate relative. His boss is not sympathetic about his sister's death. With a big deadline approaching, his boss does not want Javeed to leave for such a long time: “I didn't even know you were from Iran, that is a very long trip”. Javeed promises to continue some of his work to meet their deadline.

*In **Act 2** Javeed is presented with people and experiences which amplify his questions and uncertainty about his decision to migrate from Iran. We are also introduced to the conflict about the decision he must make regarding the murderer responsible for his sister’s death:*

Javeed arrives in Iran where no one is awaiting him and he is immediately reminded of the fact that he has no-one left in Iran.

His main connection is LAYLA (early 30s), his sister’s lifelong high school friend. She was the one who broke the news to him. He inquires about the incident from Layla but she mentions that she has been kept out of the loop by the authorities. All that she knows is that Ava was stabbed after a break-in at her home.

Javeed is having difficulty navigating the now foreign and tiresome Iranian bureaucracy to release his sister’s body for burial. In the process of preparing for Ava’s funeral, Javeed is reminded that as is the law (Qisas) in Iran, he has a duty of making a decision to forgive or kill the perpetrator. If Qisas is chosen, a financial compensation is owed to the perpetrator’s family.

SYNOPSIS

CONTINUED

During this process he meets ZAHRA. She is the frail and sickly mother of the perpetrator and has been coming to the morgue waiting for Javeed every day. In an uncomfortable interaction she begs Javeed to forgive her son. He assures her that he has no intention of taking her son's life. Javeed is overwhelmed and the burden of it all is starting to weigh on him.

Relieved to hear of Javeed's perspective about her son, Zahra heads back home. She lives in a small apartment with her younger son, KARIM, and his wife and little daughter. It is evident that they cannot afford much in life. Despite Zahra's joy about this news, Karim appears subdued in his reaction that his brother will live. Karim's wife, MITRA, is vividly disappointed with this news. In private, and in a heated conversation, she reminds Karim of his debts and the restrictive and problematic nature of his conservative older brother, "Do you remember what she did to our daughter? Who knows what would have happened if you hadn't arrived?". The tension in the family is clear, and the safety of Karim's daughter is put into question.

We are get to know who Ava was when Javeed visits her house along with Layla. The apartment is more like a large painting studio that happens to have a bed and kitchen, rather than a traditional apartment. Layla reminisces at how Ava used to teach painting to young girls of less fortunate families for free as they look upon some of the children's work. We also understand how Javeed and Ava became distant after their father's death. When asked about his decision about what will become of Ava's house, he confides in Layla how overwhelmed he feels. Layla offers to take him out in an effort for him to take his mind off the tragedy he faces.

With Layla, Javeed experiences the version of Tehran which has changed over the past 15 years since he last visited. He is struck by his modernity, fancy restaurants and the underground nightlife of the city. At the same time, the traffic is as awful as he remembers, and feels that the effort that goes into hiding underground parties is obscene.

We are introduced to the progressive nature of the Iranian youth and how aligned they are with his mentality. While inside at the party, old friends are asking him what he'll do about the perpetrator, unabashedly giving their opinions. One friend declares that if someone killed his sister, he would choose capital punishment.

Javeed leaves to take a breather on the terrace. Here Layla reveals that she's always admired Javeed for migrating to Canada, and she shares that she always had a crush on Javeed. There is chemistry between Javeed and Layla, but Javeed does not act upon this information.

At Ava's funeral, which is crowded with her friends, colleagues and admirers of her art, Karim approaches Javeed. He tells Javeed that MOHSEN, his brother and the perpetrator, has always been causing trouble at home with his controlling and conservative nature. He expresses his sorrow and remorse for what happened but is not surprised: "His friends showed him the video of my daughter at Ava's art class. He almost killed me for allowing my daughter to attend". He insinuates that it would not be the worst thing in the world if his brother was dead.

Javeed is extremely confused and disturbed by the fact that Karim is advocating for his brother's death as well as learning more about the circumstance of his sister's death. He approaches Layla who shows him a viral video of Ava in which she is talking to her students at her house about female empowerment and the right to be independent from men. We can see Karim's daughter among the students. Layla was proud but mentioned that there were some extremists who were upset. After the funeral Javeed asks if Layla would spend some time with him. She offers a kind of comfort he hasn't known before and we see this expressed through her taking him out for a traditional Persian meal. Javeed shares that she's tempting him to move back to Iran.

Javeed is at the prosecutor's office. He is now requesting to meet the murderer before he officially declares his decision. He is also told that if he were to not choose Qisas, the murderer would be free after 7 years.

Javeed meets MOHSEN (late 40's), the murderer, in prison. He reveals to Javeed that he is not that remorseful about killing his sister. Mohsen believes that people like Ava are the source of all moral corruptions. "Termites like her are eating our societies from within. if it wasn't me, some else would have done it".

Javeed is disturbed by the discussion he has with Mohsen, and even more so that he must make a decision about his fate. The weight of the encounter sits heavily on his shoulders as he walks through a familiar park from his childhood.

SYNOPSIS

CONTINUED

*In **Act 3** Javeed resolves his moral conflict surrounding the decision about Qisas. This resolution leads him to come to peace with his identity as an Iranian-Canadian who calls Canada home:*

Javeed meets up with an old friend from his school days. He visits his friend's apartment and is offered some cannabis - something he couldn't have imagined back in the day. They are relaxing, listening to music and reminiscing on their old school days, how they used to re-hash their parents' debates in the school yard. Javeed struggles to find the words in Farsi, and realizes he's more comfortable speaking in English when he is high. His friend easily switches and they continue their conversation.

Javeed decides to visit Karim the following day. Layla graciously offers to drive him to Karim's apartment. He arrives at Karim's apartment just as his daughter is returning from school, bright and academic, Karim beams with pride. He shares with Javeed that he's ashamed of how he approached Javeed at his sister's funeral, but that he simply can't see a way out of his brother's grip. He justifies his request, revealing the years of bearing abuse by his brother. And in addition, the money the family would receive in compensation could help him and his wife send their daughter to university. Javeed empathizes with Karim's desire to give his daughter a different life.

Returning to the car, Javeed shares with Layla that he could have never imagined choosing Qisas before, but that it almost seems like a crime to have Mohsen return to that family's life. He asks Layla to drop him at Ava's apartment where he stays for hours alone.

At Ava's apartment Javeed begins packing away her art, but finds himself overcome with emotion. Lying on one of her painting tarps, he closes his eyes and takes in the smells and sounds of the city. He finds an old box of photos where he and Ava are playing as kids, before their mother died. He finds another box with some tape across the front that reads 'Javeed's art'. Totally perplexed, he opens the box to see old photographs he had taken with a polaroid camera. He had no idea that Ava had saved these, or why. He smiles at the memory.

Later that evening, Javeed meets Layla at her parents' house, where he is welcomed with a big family meal. They share many laughs with her family, dance, and at the end of the evening, sitting on the front porch, Javeed and Layla are talking before his taxi arrives. Layla asks Javeed if he's happy in Canada without family and he shares that he's made a family for himself with his friends. He asks Layla if she would ever consider living in Canada - and her glance back at her family dancing and singing inside is enough of an answer - that it would be too hard to leave her family behind.

In the morning he wakes up to a notification on his phone. Anna, the girl he met before leaving for Iran, was sending photos of her finds at an antique show happening at the Parkdale Hall. He couldn't believe it was Sunday already and, even more surprisingly, he felt himself longing to be back in Toronto. Anna had sent him a picture of a film camera from the 80's and said she bought it at a bargain \$20 and hoped he would teach her how to use it when he returned. He smiles and listens to a voice message from a group of his friends who had all gotten together to make him his favourite meal of spaghetti and meatballs for when he returns.

Javeed returns to the prosecutor's office, signs some papers and leaves. We do not know his decision. Later we see Karim open the door to his apartment to find a cheque and a letter from Javeed enclosed in an envelope. Javeed writes an apology for not having the courage to choose Qisas for the family, but hopes he can still contribute to the daughter's education.

Javeed arrives in Toronto, and we see him change into some sweatpants and dig into the meal his friends made for him. We see him sign up for photography classes and take Anna to a Persian restaurant. Walking down a street it's cold and rainy, he presses the crosswalk and the traffic stops, something that never happened in Iran - he smiles to himself. It might not be perfect, but it's home.

STATEMENT OF URGENCY



**One story has
occupied my
thoughts ever
since I was 14
years old...**

Mehrtash Mohit

STATEMENT OF URGENCY

CONTINUED

This film is inspired by a story that has preoccupied me since my childhood. My father's friend had returned to Iran from abroad to deal with his sister's sudden death by a burglar. My father's friend had to decide the fate of the murderer (Qisas). I can recall the pain he experienced when the fate of another's life was put into his hands. He asked, "How can I take someone's life?"

Over the years I have reflected on whether there could ever be a circumstance in which he would have considered the death penalty. Could a law such as this have the potential for unintended consequences, perhaps preventing a society from social progress? Inspired by stories of Fyodor Dostoevsky and his method of studying human nature through unique circumstances, I will use the law of Qisas as a tool to explore how society impacts personal beliefs by exploring three themes. The two subplots about KARIM and LAYLA (see below) help in developing Javeed's character and his ultimate resolution of the dilemma.

Theme 1: An exposition of the challenges of immigration. This theme will explore notions of sense of belonging, nostalgia for an old home, and the societal values that drive a decision to migrate. This will be accomplished by implementing the character of LAYLA, Javeed's sister's best friend, who helps him in Iran. Layla paints a new picture of Iran, and entices Javeed to stay.

Theme 2: A reflection on where the line between societal values and those of an individual begin and end. This will be accomplished by portraying Javeed's struggle as he navigates the dilemma regarding the punishment for the murderer, who may repeat this ideologically motivated action, and his own values.

Theme 3: An exploration of the strong grip that poverty and circumstance can have on personal values. Through a subplot, I will explore how choosing between good and bad isn't as simple as it seems when it comes to survival. This will be accomplished by portraying the struggle of KARIM, the younger brother of the murderer who lives together with his sick mother, his wife and daughter.

Canada's ideologies are of extreme contrast to where I grew up. As a filmmaker, I feel an urgency to invite a broader audience to question this contrast and to make a socially conscious film about the struggles of an immigrant from a country that is religiously conservative. Historically, the immigrant perspective is often reduced to narratives about the conflicts in adapting to a new society, however, there are very few stories exploring what happens afterward and the persistent negotiation of identity and belonging. In addition, this story offers a chance for new immigrants to see themselves appropriately reflected in the Canadian media landscape.

This story is universally appealing as it presents the audience with numerous dilemmas: moral, personal, societal. Thus, this film is important today, tomorrow, and will continue to be in the future; questioning our values is critical in our evolution as human beings. My ultimate goal is to create a compelling realist drama which invites the viewer to imagine what they would do in a similar circumstance to the protagonist. I believe the years that I have spent studying storytelling and working in the film industry have provided me with the artistic maturity that is needed to successfully bring such a multifaceted story to life.



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TEAM

PG.13



WHO WE ARE

The key members of this project are all Iranian-Canadians and share the experience of immigration. Having lived in Canada for varying lengths of time, the team can lean upon their individual experiences to bring about authenticity in the production and seamlessness in bridging filming between Canada and Iran (i.e. travelling to Iran).

The creatives share the passion for telling immigrant stories, for digging in deep to the human experience and for taking a critical lens to societal norms.

TEAM

CONTINUED



Mehrtash Mohit
Writer and Director

Mehrtash Mohit is an independent Iranian-Canadian filmmaker based in Toronto. Mehrtash’s enthusiasm for film began 25 years ago as a young child in Iran. With few opportunities for self-exploration or self-expression in Iran, film has always held a central role in his life, but it wasn’t until he migrated to Canada at the age of 22, leaving a career in engineering and succession to his father’s business behind, that he decided to pursue cinema with purpose. Mehrtash has since built his foundation of film knowledge through Toronto Film School where he created a strong portfolio in directing documentaries, and an MFA in Film Production at York University. In his early work, Mehrtash filmed documentaries about refugees and their hardships. Building off of this, he became interested in unpacking societal values and priorities, and exposing dilemmas through narrative story-telling. Mehrtash challenges his audience to reflect on their unconscious bias, value systems and their social responsibilities.

Mehrtash’s directing credits include the award-nominated and award-winning films, including most recently Retributive Minds (Winner of Best Foreign Language film at NYCSHORTS, Nominated for Golden Sheaf award at Yorkton Film Festival in three categories, including best directing, and screened in many more). Mehrtash is driven to fulfill his purpose and use the opportunity that moving to Canada has offered: to use his voice and perspective authentically to enrich the Canadian film and cultural landscape and encourage the next generation to express the multifaceted fabric of our society on screen



Dordaneh Dadui
Producer

Dordaneh Dadui is an Iranian-Canadian Filmmaker. Dordaneh migrated to Canada from Iran 22 years ago. After realizing her passion for film, Dordaneh studied at Toronto Film School in 2011. Her films center on the immigrant experience, as well as political and social issues such as, . Dordaneh has numerous productions in her portfolio ranging from commercials to short films, including two of Academy-award winning director Salar Pashtoonyar’s short-films. She has collaborated with director Mehrtash Mohit on four projects including a PSA, commercial and two short-films. She has directed many productions, some of which went on to film festivals and won the audience and festival awards. Dordaneh took a break from filmmaking for 4 years to focus on raising her daughter. This experience paired with raising her daughter in a society vastly different from the one in which she herself was raised has further shaped her perspective in film. She is passionate about bringing opportunity and a voice to immigrant women, and to bring a maternal immigrant perspective to the screen. She is back in the industry, ready to make films people want to see and talk about.

TEAM

CONTINUED



Golan Sahraei
Assistant Director

Golan Sahraei is an Iranian-Canadian First Assistant Director. Golan received her bachelor’s degree in Cinema Studies in Art University of Tehran in Iran. She worked in several film productions in different roles through-out those years in Iran. She moved to Canada in 2016 and started working in postproduction for 6 years. Meanwhile, she worked as crew member for different commercials, short films and other types of production. She started studying Broadcasting TV at Humber college in 2019 and is currently working as Videographer, Production coordinator and First AD for various productions.



Pirayeh Rastgar
Production Manager

Pirayeh Rastgar is an Iranian-Canadian Filmmaker. From the young age Pirayeh was fascinated in capturing moments with her camera. She always loved watching movies and was curious about what goes behind the scenes. When she moved to Canada, she participate in her High schools Drama class and got the opportunity to be casted as the lead role in school’s play she got more love and excitement for creating art. But she pushed those feeling aside and assumed that was just a hobby and all those feeling would fade away by time. Therefore, she decided to study business at Ryerson university. In her 3rd year of study, she got the opportunity to take a few elective courses related to film making and got all those emotions rushing back to her. Ultimately after lots of thinking she decided to give her passion a chance and in rolled in Toronto Film School for film production. Since her graduation Pirayeh has worked in different roles in film industry.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ADDITIONAL FUNDING

It is important to note that this project has already been awarded a Canada Council of Arts grant in the value of \$25,000.00 for researching and writing the screenplay. This fund is being utilized to conduct research on the subject of Qisas, the characters, and to write the most comprehensive, compelling and well-structured screenplay. A research assistant will help me to better identify, organize, classify and implement all the findings of the research. I will also engage a criminal lawyer or consultant in Iran who can help me better understand the depth and detail of the Qisas law and its immediate impact on families in Iran. This lawyer/consultant can also help me identify individuals who have dealt with this law before and potentially reveal new angles and dynamics in the story that I might not have been privy to before. Furthermore, I will hire a psychologist to help me better understand the psychological impact of such a law as well as the experience of migration on individuals as well as illuminating new psychological angles to the story.

Once the screenplay is finished, a script doctor/proofreader will be hired to further polish the script and help me navigate the potential revision that is needed. A first draft will be ready by the time of Telefilm submission and further drafts will be crafted after the submission.

FILMING IN IRAN

As outlined in my statement of urgency, the film is a very personal one for me, both in terms of its themes of duality and societal paradigms, but also in terms of its localities: Toronto and Tehran. And I have already tested out these elements on screen, recently shooting a short-film version of the story on a trip back to Iran. I think having already tested the film out in a microcosm can only benefit the feature’s successful realization, as not only do I know what was resonating on screen and what wasn’t, and can extrapolate going forward, but it also gave me the chance to delve back into the practical hurdles of shooting in Iran.

Filming in Iran is -to put it in North American terms- a whole other ballgame. There is a level of red tape and governmental censorship that doesn’t exist in Canada. But being from there, and having now shot a shortened version of the project, I’ve learned how to navigate the various systems at play in order to satisfy authorities while shooting whatever the script demands.

LINKS TO PREVIOUS WORK

RETRIBUTIVE MINDS

[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/402639430/AF4E076045](https://vimeo.com/402639430/AF4E076045)

FARIBA

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MORE VIVID THAN A SCULPTURE

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