



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Research Commons

<http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/>

Research Commons at the University of Waikato

Copyright Statement:

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

The thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of the thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from the thesis.

**Revitalising the Representation of Iranian Women:
A Critical and Creative Exploration of Gendered Identity in the
Contemporary Art of Iran.**

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy in Screen & Media Studies
at
The University of Waikato
by
NEDA NOURMOHAMMADI



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2019

ABSTRACT

Iranian women have been at the centre of many socio-political changes and challenges during the long history of their country. During those changes, the actualisation of their roles has nevertheless been constrained by religiously-based traditions: both ancient and recently-developed. The representation of women's lives, whether carried out by artists within or outside Iran, has also been a factor that mis-represents what the lives and aspirations of Iranian women, particularly contemporary Iranian women, are like. They have frequently been depicted in stereotypical ways, covered with 'the veil', evoking connotations of oppression, segregation, and victimisation. The global media's circulation of a small range of images of Iranian society, coupled with Iranian artistic and cultural producers choosing to represent Iranian women by using the same motifs as Islamic propagandists, arguably produces the impression of a lack of subjectivity and dynamicity in female identities in particular. These burdensome representational practices frustrate many Iranians but can only be discussed explicitly once an individual, such as myself, is outside the context of Iran.

This qualitative research project includes a creative practice component and is set out within the theoretical and methodological framework of an autoethnographic approach. This approach draws on my personal experiences and points of view on different subjects raised from the research data. The practical component of this research involves an exhibition of my art-making practice engaging with the themes that emerged from my research data. Theoretically and practically, my research project is inspired by real events in the everyday life of Iranian society and my own life experience. I hoped to revitalise the representations of Iranian women with dynamic and subjective aspects of identities.

The data in this research were collected in four stages. Firstly, I interviewed a number of Iranian women artists based inside and outside Iran to understand the main influences on my participant artists' productions, and the ways in which these artists engage with social, political, ethnic, and gendered themes. Secondly, I asked the artists to provide me with one of their works they thought best exemplified their practice. I analysed these works using a Social Semiotic approach to understand how the participant artists represented identities in Iranian

society, particularly those of women. Thirdly, I showed my participant artists' works to different focus-groups to understand how they developed narratives about them that were sometimes similar to mine and sometimes different. And finally, I created a series of artworks to explore ways to associate expressions of a diasporic Iranian female identity with a more of subjective sense of 'self'.

The interview data revealed that the artists in my research sample and I share similar viewpoints about Iranian women's identities in relation to social and political subjects; however, our strategies in approaching these subjects through art differ in some cases. Using Social Semiotics, my analysis of the visual data showed the complexity of the ways in which artists in my sample approached female subjects through their works; subsequently, the focus-group data also revealed complex interpretations of the artworks of my research sample among the members of different groups. Nevertheless, the combined findings from these stages showed significant parallels between the veil as an Islamic religious sign and discourses around 'Muslim Women' as being oppressed and obedient in patriarchal societies.

By critically reviewing the analysis of my research data and relating them to my theoretical framework, I build the conceptual structure of my autoethnographic practice. Inspired by the works of artists in my sample, in my practice, I explored progressive ways to construct female subjects as having agency in relation to political themes and alternative positions. Ultimately, this research project suggests that the logical framework of an academic context offers a ground for conceptualising progressive strategies for representing gendered Iranian identity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my wonderful team of advisors. My whole-hearted appreciations go to my chief supervisor Dr Ann Hardy for her immense knowledge and continuous support of my research. She embraced the challenges of this complex multidisciplinary study and provided me every resource to arrive at this destination. I feel extremely lucky to have had her wisdom in my PhD journey.

I had the privilege of having Dr Lisa Perrott in my supervisory panel. I am thankful for her endless patience, enthusiasm, and her valuable advice on my research and writing of this thesis. Her insightful comments and encouragement inspired me to widen my research from various perspectives.

Words cannot express my gratitude for having Tim Croucher (Waikato Institute of Technology) as my supervisor in the practical component of this research project. His tremendous support and insight have been a treasure that kept me confident and energetic during the stage of my art-making practice and the final exhibition.

My sincere appreciation also goes to all my research participants, particularly the artists for sharing their personal experiences and their time. This research project would be impossible without their generous contributions.

I am thankful to Stephanie Chalmers, Wendy Richdale, Tony Nicholls, and those who generously and kindly helped me organize my final exhibition. A special thank you goes to Dr Emit Snake-Beings for assisting me with taking some of the photographs in the stage my art-making experiments. I am also thankful for all the technical support I received from Luke Jacobs at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

I would like to thank Andrea Haines for her expert proofreading, and Anne Ferrier-Watson, my academic liaison librarian, for her referencing advice and assistance with the formatting of my thesis. I would also like to acknowledge the staff members at the Department of Screen and Media Studies, University of Waikato, for helping me in many ways.

Above all, I would like to thank my family in Iran: My parents, my sisters (Forough and Nasim), my brother (Ali) for their emotional support and encouragement. Last but not least, I would like to thank my fiancé, Chris, for his unconditional support and understanding during the hardest times of my writing and always showing how proud he is of me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	x
TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS	xiii
GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS	xiv
INTRODUCTION	xv
1 CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH IN CONTEXT	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Aspects of the Regulatory System of Iran.....	1
1.3 Art after the Islamic Revolution	2
1.3.1 Art and Propaganda: Adopting the Veil.....	3
1.4 Iranian Women in Society, Culture, and Media	8
1.4.1 Iranian Women’s Resistance to Islamicisation	11
1.4.1.1 The Green Movement	13
1.4.2 Political Uses of Clothing as a Form of Resistance in Iran.....	15
1.5 Dominant Modes and Strategies in the Practice of Iranian Women’s Artists 17	
1.5.1 The ‘Othered’ Self	18
1.5.2 The Contemporary Art of Iran in the International Art Market.....	23
1.6 The Representation of Women in Iranian Mythology.....	24
1.7 Summary	26
2 CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS	28
2.1 Introduction	28
2.2 Cultural Practices.....	29
2.2.1 Representation.....	31
2.2.1.1 Iranian Women’s Identities and the Politics of Representation33	
2.2.1.2 The Concept of Islam in Relation to the Representations	37
2.2.2 Consumption: Decoding Cultural Representations.....	41
2.2.3 Production: Construction of Culture through Representations	41
2.2.4 Identity: Lived Cultures	42
2.3 Post-colonialism and the Political Identity of Iranian Society	44

2.3.1	Postcolonial Feminism	46
2.4	Contemporary Self-Orientalisation	47
2.5	Strategies of Representation of Women	51
2.6	Feminist Art in Action.....	54
2.6.1	Feminist and Political responses	57
2.6.1.1	Asia-Pacific Deconstructing Stereotypes of Ethnic Identities .	61
2.7	Iranian art in Diaspora: Ethnicity and Internationality	63
2.7.1	Cultural Hybridity and Diaspora-isation.....	66
2.8	Summary	67
3	CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	68
3.1	Introduction	68
3.2	Practice-Led Method	69
3.2.1	Practice of Subjectivity - Autoethnography	71
3.3	Research Questions and Focus Questions	73
3.4	Research Sample	75
3.4.1	Semi structured-interviews.....	75
3.4.1.1	Conducting the Interviews	76
3.4.1.2	Visual Data	77
3.4.2	Focus-group discussions	77
3.4.2.1	Selecting the Samples	78
3.4.2.2	Conducting the Focus-Group Discussions.....	80
3.5	Ethical Considerations.....	80
3.6	Data Analysis Method	81
3.6.1	Visual Analysis Method.....	82
3.7	Summary	84
4	CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS.....	85
4.1	Introduction	85
4.2	Section One: Introducing the Research Participants	85
4.3	Section Two: Interview Data Analysis.....	91
4.3.1	The Artists' Engagement with Feminist Ideas.....	91
4.3.2	Artists' Relation to Their Regulatory Environments	95
4.3.3	Artists' Relation to Religion	97
4.3.4	Artists' Engagement with Social Issues.....	99

4.3.5	Artists' Engagement with Politics.....	101
4.3.6	Artists' Relation to Audiences	103
4.3.7	Artists' Use of Digital Media.....	106
4.3.8	Artists' Relation to Nostalgia.....	110
4.4	Summary	111
5	CHAPTER FIVE: VISUAL DATA ANALYSIS	113
5.1	Introduction	113
5.2	Visual Data Analysis	113
5.3	Local Artists' works	115
5.3.1	Yalda Moaiery's Work.....	115
5.3.2	Farzaneh Khademian's Work.....	119
5.3.3	Newsha Tavakolian's Work.....	122
5.3.4	Keramati's Work.....	126
5.3.5	Anvari's Work.....	131
5.3.6	Shadi Ghadirian's Work.....	137
5.4	Diasporic Artists' works.....	140
5.4.1	Navab's Work	140
5.4.2	Manouchehri's Work	144
5.4.3	Sharifi's Work.....	148
5.5	Summary	151
6	CHAPTER SIX: RECEPTION STUDY	153
6.1	Introduction	153
6.2	The Focus-Group Data Analysis	154
6.2.1	Islamic Ideological Implications	155
6.2.2	Socio-Political Implications	162
6.2.3	Cross-Cultural Implications	167
6.2.4	Aesthetic Implications.....	169
6.2.5	Feminist Implications.....	172
6.3	Summary	176
7	CHAPTER SEVEN: RESEARCH IN PRACTICE.....	179
7.1	Introduction	179
7.2	My Art-Making Trajectory.....	180
7.2.1	Self Portrait (Key Necklace)	181

7.2.2	Hands of Dissent	187
7.2.3	One from 1001 (Sand Story)	191
7.2.4	Fatwa on Kaashi	195
7.2.5	My Paradox	201
7.2.6	Shrine	206
7.2.7	Heritage Souvenir Suite	213
7.3	The exhibition: Patiently / Insistently / Intensively	216
7.3.1	Arranging the Artworks in the Gallery's Space	217
7.3.2	Viewers' Feedbacks on the Exhibition	224
7.4	Summary	226
8	CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS & CONCLUSION.....	227
8.1	Introduction	227
8.2	Theorising the Ideological Aspects of the Representations of Iranian women's Identities	227
8.3	Strategies of Resistance in the Works of My Participant Artists	230
8.4	Theorising Feminism in the Works of My Participant Artists	231
8.5	Engagement of Diasporic Iranian Viewers with Representations of Iranian Identity	233
8.6	Strategies for My Art-Making Practice and Practice-Led Research	234
8.6.1	Mapping My Art Practice	236
8.6.2	Avoiding Representational Traps.....	237
8.7	Limitations of the Study	238
8.8	Suggestions for Further Studies	240
8.9	Conclusion.....	241
	REFERENCES.....	243
	APPENDICES	272

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: <i>Certitude of Belief</i>	4
Figure 1.2: Mullah, Mother, and Soldiers.....	4
Figure 1.3: Iranian Islamic Revolution Propaganda Art.....	4
Figure 1.4: Woman’s Day poster.....	5
Figure 1.5: Police forces in Tehran donated flowers to the chadori women.....	6
Figure 1.6: A bad-hijab woman getting arrested by the moral police force.	6
Figure 1.7: [Hijab is security].....	7
Figure 1.8: Poster advertising Hijab.	7
Figure 1.9: An Image from <i>Ettelaat</i> Newspaper Archives in the days after the Islamic Revolution.....	15
Figure 1.10: Leila Mousavi wearing a headscarf with a print of the <i>Ettelaat</i> <i>newspaper</i>	16
Figure 1.11: Farkhondeh Shahroudi, Installation of <i>Guards</i> series.....	17
Figure 1.12: Shadi Ghadirian, <i>West by East</i>	18
Figure 1.13: Shirin Neshat, <i>Women of Allah</i> Series.....	19
Figure 2.1: The Circuit of Culture.....	31
Figure 2.2: Me next to Forouhar’s work <i>Swanrider</i> exhibited at GOMA.	34
Figure 2.3: Candice Breitz, <i>King</i>	35
Figure 2.4: Cindy Sherman, some images from her 2016 series.	36
Figure 2.5: Oprah Winfrey lifts the Burqa off an Afghan woman.....	38
Figure 2.6: Golshifteh Farahani, the cover of <i>Égoïste</i> magazine.....	40
Figure 2.7: Ghadirian’s <i>Like Every Day</i>	52
Figure 2.8: Elke Reinhuber, <i>Me and Myself</i>	53
Figure 2.9: Judy Chicago, <i>Female Rejection Drawing</i>	58
Figure 2.10: Sylvia Sleigh, <i>At the Turkish Bath</i>	58
Figure 2.11: Jenny Holzer, [Raise boys and girls the same way].....	59
Figure 2.12: Jenny Holzer, [Abuse of power comes as no surprise].....	59
Figure 2.13: Jenny Holzer, [Men don’t protect you anymore].....	59
Figure 2.14: Jenny Holzer, [Protect me from what I want].....	59
Figure 2.15: Cindy Sherman, from different series.....	60
Figure 2.16: From <i>Velvet Dreams</i> Documentary.....	61
Figure 2.17: Lisa Reihana, <i>In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]</i>	62
Figure 5.1: Yalda Moaiery, <i>Under the Shadow of Iman Khomeini</i> series.....	116
Figure 5.2: Farzaneh Khademian, <i>Election</i>	119
Figure 5.3: Presidential election polling station.....	121
Figure 5.4: Presidential election polling station.....	121
Figure 5.5: Newsha Tavakolian, Still image of <i>Look</i> video art.....	123
Figure 5.6: Newsha Tavakolian, Still image of <i>Look</i> video art.....	123
Figure 5.7: Newsha Tavakolian, Still images of <i>Look</i> video art.....	124
Figure 5.8: Newsha Tavakolian, Still image of <i>Look</i> video.....	125
Figure 5.9: Simin Keramati, still images from <i>Self-portrait</i> video.....	126

Figure 5.10: Simin Keramati, still images from <i>Self-portrai</i> video	127
Figure 5.11: Simin Keramati, still images from <i>Self-portrai</i> video	128
Figure 5.12: Simin Keramati, still images from <i>Self-portrait</i> video	129
Figure 5.13: Haleh Anvari, from the <i>Chador Dadar</i> series	132
Figure 5.14: Parastou Forouhar, <i>Friday</i>	133
Figure 5.15: Shadi Ghadirian, # 10 from the <i>Nil,Nil</i> series	137
Figure 5.16: Shadi Ghadirian, # 1 from the <i>Nil,Nil</i> series	138
Figure 5.17: Désirée Navab, <i>Super East-West Woman</i>	141
Figure 5.18: Désirée Navab, <i>Passing by</i>	141
Figure 5.19: Roxana Manouchehri, <i>Power</i>	144
Figure 5.20: Soody Sharifi, <i>The feast of ID</i> from the <i>Maxiature</i> series.....	148
Figure 5.21: Soody Sharifi, detail of ‘ <i>The feast of ID</i> ’	149
Figure 6.1: Members of the focus-groups	154
Figure 7.1: Second experiment before creating <i>Self Portrait (Key Necklace)</i>	182
Figure 7.2: Facebook page of Rouhani’s Presidential campaign.....	183
Figure 7.3: <i>Self Portrait (Key Necklace)</i>	185
Figure 7.4: Photo shots for the work <i>Self Portrait (Key Necklace)</i>	186
Figure 7.5: photo shots of me with wig	186
Figure 7.6: The selected photo shot for the work <i>Self Portrait (Key Necklace)</i> .	186
Figure 7.7: The Green Movement in 2009.....	189
Figure 7.8: From left to right, my first and second trials in casting my hand.....	190
Figure 7.9: My third trial in casting my hand with the peace gesture.....	190
Figure 7.10: <i>Hands of Dissent</i>	191
Figure 7.11: The first experiment before creating <i>One from 1001 (Sand Story)</i>	192
Figure 7.12: <i>One from 1001 (Sand Story)</i>	195
Figure 7.13: First experiment before creating <i>Fatwa on Kaashi</i>	196
Figure 7.14: Second practice before creating <i>Fatwa on Kaashi</i>	197
Figure 7.15: My Poster for <i>Women’s Day</i>	198
Figure 7.16: Third experiment before creating <i>Fatwa on Kaashi</i>	198
Figure 7.17: Detail of <i>Fatwa on Kaashi</i>	199
Figure 7.18: Detail of <i>Fatwa on Kaashi</i>	200
Figure 7.19: <i>Fatwa on Kaashi</i>	201
Figure 7.20: First experiment before creating <i>My Paradox</i>	202
Figure 7.21: The selected photograph for <i>My Paradox</i> practice.....	204
Figure 7.22: Details of the work <i>My Paradox</i>	204
Figure 7.23: <i>My Paradox</i> , digitally manipulated photograph	205
Figure 7.24: Ali-Malek shrine, Dezfoul-Iran	207
Figure 7.25: First experiment before creating <i>Shrine</i>	207
Figure 7.26: A green strip tied to the shrine	208
Figure 7.27: <i>Shrine (Piece 1)</i>	210
Figure 7.28: <i>Shrine (Piece 2), Persian Carpet (1)</i>	211
Figure 7.29: <i>Shrine (Piece 3), Persian Carpet (2)</i>	212
Figure 7.30: Reliefs of the cedar/cypress tree, Persepolis	213
Figure 7.31: Reliefs of foreign visitors bringing gifts to the Persian king.....	214

Figure 7.32: A photoshoot image.....	215
Figure 7.33: Digital design of <i>Heritage Souvenir Suite</i>	215
Figure 7.34: <i>Heritage Souvenir Suite</i>	216
Figure 7.35: The design of the exhibition brochure.....	217
Figure 7.36: The installation of <i>One from 1001 (Sand Story)</i>	218
Figure 7.37: Gallery 1 with the works <i>Shrine</i> and <i>One from 1001 (Sand Story)</i>	218
Figure 7.38: The installation of the <i>Shrine</i> in Gallery 1	219
Figure 7.39: A view of the window display of the gallery from Collingwod St.	219
Figure 7.40: The installation of <i>Fatwa on Kaashi</i> in the gallery	220
Figure 7.41: The installation of <i>Hands of Dissent</i> in the gallery	220
Figure 7.42: Installation of <i>Self Portrait (Key Necklace) & Hands of Dissent...</i>	221
Figure 7.43: Installation of <i>Self Portrait (Key Necklace) & Hands of Dissent...</i>	221
Figure 7.44: The display of <i>Heritage Souvenir Suite</i> in the gallery	222
Figure 7.45: The work <i>My Paradox</i> is on the left side of this image.....	223
Figure 7.46: Fashion students visiting the exhibition.	225

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

The following transcription conventions are used for all extracts of transcribed interviews and focus-groups' discussions data.

<i>Italicised text</i>	indicates titles of productions such as artworks, books, books, films, and etc.
<u>Underlined text</u>	identifies the parts of data from the interviews or focus-group discussions which are highlighted by the researcher.
[...]	denotes omitted materials
[]	denotes explanatory material written in the brackets for clarifications by the researcher

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Chador: A large piece of cloth that is wrapped around the head and upper body leaving only the face exposed, worn especially by Muslim women. Before the Islamic Iranian Revolution, black chador was reserved for funerals and periods of mourning. Light, printed fabrics were the norm for everyday wear. Currently, the majority of Iranian women who wear the chador use the black version outside and reserve light-colour chador for indoor use such as prayers.

Chadori: Women who wear the chador.

Fatwa: Religious authorities' orders; a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognised authority.

Hijab/Hejab: The term refers predominantly to the Islamic head covering for women and underlying religious precepts associated with it. Hijab in Islam is a symbol of modesty and privacy for women and in Iran hijab is legally required when women are in public. However, many women push the boundaries of compulsory hijab by showing hair and undermine the imposed dress code. There are different styles of Islamic clothing commonly associated with the word hijab which are different in Islamic countries; chador is the preferred form of hijab for Iranian women by the Islamic regime of Iran.

INTRODUCTION

This research project started with an ever-present feeling of identity consciousness in relation to my nationality as I journeyed out of my home-country, Iran. In 2010, when I left Iran for the first time, I soon realised that external signifiers of my identity triggered predetermined responses in most people's minds outside Iran. These codes were limited and predominantly ideological; resulting in views of Iranians as oppressed and victimised. Such negative assumptions are stronger in relation to women's identities because of the compulsory rule of the Islamic hijab for women in Iran.

The international media's circulation of a small range of images of Iranian society, coupled with Iranian artistic and cultural producers choosing to represent the identities of Iranians by using the same motifs as those used for Islamic propaganda, have led to identity crises for individuals like me outside the context of Iran.

Official narratives regarding Iran and Iranian society, circulated by globally dominant press media, particularly in the United States, often label the country as a theocratic and Islamic fundamentalist society devoid of any freedom; a state which is looked at as being in turmoil, and a 'problem' to be solved (Semati, 2010). Such assumptions can direct people internationally to the idea that Iranian society is both culturally and religiously oppressed. Meanwhile, in Iran, although there is still a disproportionate amount of power in the hands of Islamic clergy, the actual society is far from the model that the Islamic regime has as an ideal. Beneath the superficial propagandistic images of the lives of people in Iran that filter through to the outside world, there is a vibrant society. While artistic and cultural productions are linked with cultural identities and mirror underlying values mediated by signs and images (Spencer, 2014), Iranian artistic and cultural producers in representing identities seldom draw on dynamic aspects of lives in Iranian society through their works.

Being a woman, I strive to understand the processes by which Iranian women artists make sense of identity, and construct and communicate meanings. In this case, their audience is myself as a diasporic Iranian person and other people

outside Iran from a range of different ethnicities. Therefore, my focus in this study is on Iranian women artists and their artistic and cultural representations of their ethnic identity through dealing with ethnic, social, and political themes, both inside and outside Iran. I look at the media they choose to work in and at their typical subjects of representation.

While my lived experience and observations of the identity in Iran were dynamic and complex, outside Iran, in relation to that former life, the identity of Iranian people has been mostly represented by reductive, simplified, or passive stereotypes. As a result, I have chosen to use an autoethnographic approach (Eldridge, 2012; Ellis et al. 2011; Mizzi, 2010; Starr, 2010; Duarte, 2007; Dyson, 2007) in this research project. Although my own frustration with reductive representation has been longstanding, through this project, I have also come to understand the forces that produce such constrained representations and, expressing myself through art-making, have realised that such constraints can be difficult to avoid.

I started this research project with a strong view that Iranian women artists through their practice obediently aligned their representational practice with the particular version of Islam promoted by the post-revolutionary Iranian governments. However, this view was challenged during my research trajectory; as it will be discussed throughout the study, the Iranian women artists in my sample often use nuanced methods for criticising the Islamic regime.

This PhD project includes a creative practice component (see Appendix 1) which involves my art-making practice that over two years evolved into an exhibition held in Hamilton in November 2017. There is a record of this exhibition on the DVD attached to the back-cover of this thesis. This research project involves both producing original artworks in different chosen mediums, and engaging in critical reflection, examination, and analysis of data in relation to representations of Iranian women's identities.

The practical aspect of my project, which is informed by a practice-led research method, recognizes creative potential as a continuous movement between the theoretical aspects of the study and the art making process (Smith & Dean, 2009;

Sullivan, 2010). As the thematic structure of this research is situated at the intersection of art and ethnography, the creative part of this research continues exploring the questions which are raised by my engagement with cultural, social, and political perspectives in relation to the contemporary art of Iran.

The use of autoethnography as my method in the creative part of this research draws on my own personal life experiences, both inside and outside Iran, as a means of intervening in the representation of Iranian society, particularly in relation to the female subject. I intend to challenge and debunk some of the misconceptions contained in simplified, Islamic ideological representations of Iranian society.

There is a long history of recorded analyses of the Middle Eastern subjects in different fields, and some scholars engage with the strategies in which the representations of identities in the contemporary art of Iran are constructed (for example Allerstorfer, 2013 & Fitzpatrick, 2013). However, there is an absence of knowledge of the contemporary art of Iran that contextualizes Iranian women and their artistic representations of gendered identity within/against a wider cultural framework that my research fills.

The objective of this study is then: To investigate the construction of gendered identity through the practices of Iranian women artists, both inside and outside Iran's regulatory system. This is done by exploring ways to associate art practices with dynamic aspects of subjectivity in two groups of Iranian women artists: domestic/local artists (by which I mean those who are based in Iran); and diasporic (those working outside Iran). So, this study takes an exploratory, qualitative research approach to be the most appropriate method of inquiry to investigate the cultural and ethnographic practices of the Iranian female artists "for the purpose of helping 'insiders' (cultural members) as well as 'outsiders' (cultural strangers) better understand the culture" through the production in the practical stage (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 1-3).

The main questions addressed by this research project are:

- I. How are the representations of gendered identity in the practice of contemporary Iranian women artists constructed? And to what extent do their representations of identities engage with notions of transformation and dynamicity?
- II. How can creative practice help to reflect, enact, and create new possibilities for investigating the questions of identity through changing positions, perspectives, and strategies of representations to exhibit new aspects of ethnic subjectivity in the cosmopolitan context of New Zealand?

Other subordinate key research questions navigating the major issues of this study are developed in the following sequence of chapters:

Chapter One outlines the characteristics of the structure in which contemporary representations of Iranian female identities are typically developed. These include the practices of Iranian women artists, both living in Iran and overseas.

In Chapter Two a theoretical framework is constructed within which the visual representations created by the Iranian women artists participating in this research can be analysed and understood. While my own theoretical framework can be described as feminist postcolonial autoethnography, the participating artists who are my research subjects also operate within environments animated by theoretical framings such as postcolonialism, feminism, and Orientalism. This chapter also includes discussion of a number of strategies and modes of address utilised by the artists in their visual practice.

The research methodology for this research project is described in Chapter Three, which includes the methods of gathering data and the tools used for data analysis. The practice-led nature of my research and its relation to my autoethnographic approach in the creative stage is fully explained in this chapter.

Chapter Four provides an analysis of extracts from semi-structured interviews with nine Iranian female artists, where I define the ways in which they outline positioning of identities through their art-making practice in relation to the key themes found in the interview data. My objective in this chapter is to understand

the main influences on the productions of my participant artists, and the ways in which these artists engage with social, political, cultural, religious, ethnic, and gendered subjects.

Chapter Five contains my analysis of the visual data comprising the artworks of artists participating in this study. At the end of each interview with an artist, I asked them to choose one of their artworks that best represents the current socio-political direction of their body of work. This was for me to analyse the artworks to understand how these works represent identities in relation to different subjects, and also to show them to focus-groups in New Zealand in pursuance of understanding how people with certain social backgrounds will interpret the works once they (the works) are out of their original context.

My analysis of the data from three focus-groups discussing their interpretations of the artworks of my research sample is presented in Chapter Six. These three key focus-groups include art experts, feminists, and Iranian participants in New Zealand. My objective here is to understand the ways in which meanings in relation to the representation of Iranian ethnic identities, particularly women, are constructed in the viewers' points of view, and to identify the dominant modes of engagement among viewers of the artworks.

The process of creating the practical component of my research is described in Chapter Seven. By critically reviewing the analysis of my research data, particularly the visual data analysis, and relating them to the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two, I build the conceptual structure of my autoethnographic practice. The main objective of this chapter is to explore ways to associate the representations of identities with dynamic aspects of the inherent subjectivity of the self.

Chapter Eight presents a discussion of the main findings from the interviews with the artists, their visual artworks, focus-group discussions, and my practical part of the research. This chapter aims to answer the main research questions with reference to the theoretical framework. The synthesis of the findings from the different forms of data aims to discuss the development of strategies that I used in my practice to associate the representations of Iranian identities with more

subjectivity and dynamicity, particularly in relation to female subjects. This chapter concludes the research by acknowledging the limitations of my study and making recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the context of my research project. My objective here is to outline the characteristics of the structure in which the representations of Iranian female identities have been developed in the practices of Iranian women artists, both living in Iran and overseas. In examining the politics of art production by Iranian women artists, it is important to understand the socio-political and ideological forces that have informed the visual representations of women. Outlining the contextual characteristics of contemporary Iranian art production will help to clarify the complex factors conditioning the art practices of my participants. An important feature, for instance, is the role that regulatory systems play in the practice of Iranian artists inside and outside Iran.

1.2 Aspects of the Regulatory System of Iran

The regulatory system in relation to Iranian art and cultural productions functions in two different ways; firstly, there are the formalised government policies and regulations in Iran which affect the visual language in representations and restrict the practice of the domestic artists. Secondly, there are the informal conditions and norms, with secular tendencies, which occur in the opposition to and subversion of the religiously justified Islamic regime and allow day to day social life to operate in a freer manner.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Iran, known as *Vezerat-e Ershad*¹, restricts, reviews, and controls the productions of artists, and in the case of visual artists, if the codes used in the artworks are not in line with the Islamic morals of the government, the artists will not get permission to exhibit their works publicly (Zahir, 2008). This control affects the aesthetic decisions of artists and

¹ The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was founded after the Islamic Revolution in 1980. This ministry insists that all artistic and cultural productions have to be approved as conforming to the government's interests. If they do not, it is illegal to disseminate them (Keshmirshakan, 2009).

their approach in art (Mostafavi, 2010). In my view, the awareness by the artists that to be able to exhibit and sell in Iran they have to perform within a restricted structure, leads to the construction of symbolic representations imbued with feelings of anger and frustration.

1.3 Art after the Islamic Revolution

In the period from the late 1970s until the mid-1990s, artistic productions in Iran were strongly affected by the socio-political transformations that took place in all areas of life. The Revolution aimed to build a whole new society, based on the Islamic doctrine of Shiaism, in which an Iranian identity is synonymous with an Islamic identity. Art was not an exception; the artistic and cultural activities done in the Pahlavi regime were rejected by the Islamic regime of Iran soon after the Revolution (Keshmirshakan, 2006).

The Islamic regime was determined to control the content of art and cultural productions, and their sensitivity was most intense about the representations of women. Since the dress code for women had changed, women were required to cover their whole body; they were not allowed to show any part except for the face and hands. For example, in film-making, besides covering their hair, women had to dress in loose clothes and there was to be no touching between males and females in either still or moving imagery. Control over art and cultural productions was so important for the Islamic regime, that during the Revolution more than 180 theatres exhibiting films and plays were destroyed or burned down by non-official radical Islamists. The reason for such destruction was because those theatres were considered as sites for spreading Western culture and corrupting the Iranian people (Sreberny & Mohammadi, 1994; Whatley, 2003).

The valued art in the early years of the Islamic Revolution was representing social commitment to the ideals of the new Islamic government, which entailed presenting ideological messages and articulating narratives of revolutionary stories; these kinds of representations were approved and supported by the government, particularly until 1990 (Keshmirshakan, 2006). The reason was, perhaps, to erase the Pahlavian past and create a new predominant historical narrative of the revolution (Ram, 2002).

Post-revolutionary artistic policy and production after 1979 was greatly affected by revolutionary aspirations. This situation was intensified even more during the period of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), when a propagandistic genre in Iranian art emerged. This was also a time when the practice of graphic design, often seen as posters, grew in Iran for propagandistic purposes. Propagandistic works reflected political, religious and epic ideologies. Murals were another art form encouraged during the war; the murals' subjects were mostly martyrs and political and religious leaders such as Ayatollah Khomeini (Chelkowski & Dabashi, 2000; Keshmirshakan, 2009).

1.3.1 Art and Propaganda: Adopting the Veil

During the Islamic Revolution, many women intentionally chose to wear the veil as a symbol of unity with Ayatollah Khomeini and a sign of opposition to the Shah's regime. The Islamic regime, therefore, through the representation of women, used the veil as a political tool to propagate the solidarity of identification of social life with Islamic laws. The Islamic regime, after the Revolution, ushered in "tight control over cultural activities and sponsored prominent public events to promote the state ideology through art and through performance" (Buch & Worthen, 2007, p. 215); as a result, artistic activities had to be formed in relation to propagandistic² guidelines.

The abundant use of the chador in the representations of women in today's art of Iran continues the Islamic propaganda of the time of Revolution and the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq which produced depictions of veiled women and warrior men. In particular, an idealised image of women in chador circulated as one that government and related institutions supported. These images were disseminated by national television and publications as well as by posters and photographs in public spaces (see Figures 1.1-1.4).

² Propaganda is a form of purposeful persuasion used by governments in order to manipulate societies' beliefs (David-Blais, 2011, p. 259). The use of propaganda is not restricted to governments, but also can be applied to other entities such as regimes and corporations.



Figure 1.1: *Certitude of Belief*
(Source: Kazim Chalipa, circa 1981)



Figure 1.2: *Mullah, Mother, and Soldiers*
(Source: Husayn Khusrawjirdi, circa 1981)



Figure 1.3: Iranian Islamic Revolution Propaganda Art. Mural, Mashad, Iran.
(Source: Alexandra Boulat, 2004)



Figure 1.4: Woman's Day poster, [... and we [women] will celebrate and respect our only warrior cloth (the chador)] 1979.
(Source, 'Asheville' the Courtyard Gallery & Agency, 2013)

Figures 1.1-1.4 are examples of posters and murals from the first decade of the Islamic Revolution, which was concurrent with the Iran-Iraq war. As these examples suggest, the portrayals of women, at the time of revolution and the war, are loaded with religious and ideological signifiers such as the black veil. The use of other elements such as the dove, which is a symbol of freedom and peace, and poppy flowers, which are symbols of martyrdom, function to relate the notions of freedom and bravery to Islamic ideologies.

As shown in Figures 1.1-1.4, the women in these images are represented as supportive of the Islamic regime in these times in dramatic and emotional ways. Encouraging women to support the government's mandates is shown by a woman holding a gun (Figure 1.3), raising a clenched fist (Figures 1.2 & 1.4), and a mother sacrificing her son (Figure 1.1). This propaganda is not intellectual; instead it is an appeal to emotion which shapes indefinite subjects into concrete images (Van de Water, 1938, p. 234).

The clustering of cultural motifs and manipulative communication still exists almost four decades since the Islamic Revolution through a branch of propaganda which, in a global term, can be called 'Public Relations' (PR); PR intends to enhance the relationship and create goodwill between public and different organisations (Seitel & Rockefeller, 2007). Public Relations is a one-sided presentation of ideas and beliefs which benefit the message sender and seek advantage through 'behavioural compliance' and 'attitudinal change' (Moloney, 2006, p. 167).

After an initial period of acceptance, the law mandating the following of hijab as the Islamic dress code later faced a great deal of resistance from women in different ways (see 1.4.2) (Milani, 2015; Zahedi, 2007). The Islamic regime uses various ways to enforce women for wearing the Islamic hijab; they praise and patronize veiled women by giving them flowers on the street in the hope that this show of favour will encourage ‘bad-hijab’³ women to wear it (Figure 1.5); they arrest and fine those who are not following the Islamic dress code properly (Figure 1.6); and they advertise the need to follow the hijab dress code by placing billboards and posters in different locations (Figure 1.7-1.9).



Figure 1.5: In an attempt to honour the veil on the streets of the city, police forces in Tehran donated flowers to the chadori women. (Source: Fararou, 2015)

The images above show the moral campaign activity of rewarding women in veil with flowers. In contrast, the image below shows that the government punishes those who are so-called ‘bad-hijab’ women; the moral police, who are female, in this case approach the women and advise, arrest, or fine them.



Figure 1.6: A bad-hijab woman getting arrested by the moral police force. (Source: Leila Mouri, 2014)

The following are examples of recent billboards and posters advertising the desirability of wearing hijab by the Islamic regime. They reveal how desperate the Islamic regime is to convince women to properly cover themselves in accordance with the Islamic dress code. In Figures 1.7 and 1.8 women are likened to food;

³ In the Persian language ‘bad-hijab’ is a term used to describe women who do not follow the Islamic dress code properly. The pronunciation of this word is similar in English.

those who do not wrap themselves in the veil are exposed to flies and other insects, which denote the male's concupiscence (Figure 1.7). As mentioned earlier, in practice, Iranian women, particularly the younger generation, mostly disobey the Islamic dress code, and do not comply with the government's model of the 'decent woman'.



Figure 1.7: [Hijab is security].

As the above image shows, the government promotes the value of the Islamic dress code by comparing women with food and objects. The chador, in this case, is the wrapping material that prevents women from depravity, immorality, and debauchery, by shutting out the 'vermin'; for example, flies being a symbolic representation of men as entities who have no control over their sexual desires.

The question 'how does hijab protect Iranian women from sexual assault?' seems to be answered by degrading men to the category of predatory insects; a lecherous gender that gets excited easily by looking at women, while women are reduced to candies and nuts or an object that just exists for consumption (see Figure 1.8).



Figure 1.8: Poster advertising Hijab.
[Valuable things have hard cover on them]

The image of Iranian women in this kind of state of propaganda is all about promoting an Islamic ideological identity. My point here is that there are connections between the artworks of contemporary Iranian women artists and the ways in which women are represented in the Iranian government's propaganda. The art practice of women, although it is often created out of oppositional intentions, is carrying similar elements to the propagandistic representations of women in the past and PR in today's Islamic government (see Chapter Five).

1.4 Iranian Women in Society, Culture, and Media

Iranian women have been contributing actively to the nation's arts and culture for thousands of years. Conventionally, this contribution has been in 'applied art' fields like textiles, and carpet-weaving (Aghdashloo, 2014; Alipour, et al., 2015). Women began creating fine art about 1940, because the father of Iran's last monarch, Reza Shah Pahlavi, allowed them to practice, work, and study freely as artists. At that time, some women, such as Behjat Sadr, Farah Osouli, Bitva Vakili and Mansureh Hosseini, started working in fine arts and became teachers and artists; they launched totally new movements by opening galleries for displaying of their works (Aghdashloo, 2014). Even though there is little recognition of Iranian women artists in the history of this period of Iran's art, nevertheless, Iranian women, along with men, have always manifested their vigour in art, especially in modern and contemporary styles. However, women artists and their practices in Iranian art history have not received the same support as men⁴ (Aghdashloo, 2014).

The Revolution in 1979 led to the Islamicisation of the government's policies and socio-political changes which affected art and cultural production. While Iranian women's rights during the Pahlavi era (1925-1979) had been progressing, after the Islamic Revolution they found themselves rolled back five decades in regard to their freedom of choice in their life-styles. The involvement of Iranian women against the monarchist regime, particularly through street demonstrations, was

⁴ The artists experimenting in this period triggered entire new movements, participated in international art fairs, and opened galleries. But while a limited number of individuals (mostly men, such as Hossein Zenderoudi, Parviz Tanavoli, and Siah Armajani who were mostly European educated) excitedly explored Iran's belated 'modernism' in the visual arts, none specifically focus on women (Aghdashloo, 2014, para 5).

extremely effective during the Revolution. However, for the next three decades they have been trying to regain the rights they had perhaps unexpectedly, lost. As a result, they have created one of the most vibrant women's social movements in the Islamic world. These women's movements include activists who have gained international recognition in a wide-ranging assortment of professions in their contemporary social lives (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010). According to Tohidi (2016), the goals of the women's movements in Iran are to "defy sexism and resist in daily life in support of change for equality" (p. 83).

According to Tahmasebi-Birgani (2010), the Iranian women's movement's demands for "equality and self-determination need not be divided along ideological lines, such as secularism versus religion"; for example, the campaign of *One million signatures for the repeal of discriminatory laws*, also known as *change for equality*, demands 'an end to discriminatory laws against women in the Iranian law'⁵. This campaign has continuously worked to improve women's rights in various spheres. Members of such campaigns are "Muslim, non-Muslim, religious and secular"⁶. Moreover, "[i]nstead of focusing on their political or ideological affiliations, these women consciously, and against many odds, decided to come together over common issues and problems" (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010, p. 79). Some of the campaign's goals are: Promotion of collaboration and cooperation for social change, identification of women's needs and priorities, amplifying women's voices, increasing knowledge, and promoting democratic action⁷.

After the 1979 revolution, women were encouraged to accept Ayatollah Khomeini's vision of women's proper occupations: "The fundamental job assigned to women is marriage and motherhood, even though some see this as a diminution of women. Motherhood is the most important job for a woman" (Khomeini, 1984, cited in Khaz Ali, 2010, p. 18). In addition, the rules enforcing gender segregation were applied to almost all organisations and activities; all women were forced to obey the rules of the Islamic dress code called 'hijab' and the enforcement of this dress code was undertaken by the control of a 'moral'

⁵ From the campaign's website: <http://www.we4change.info/english/>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

police force⁸. The colourful fabrics of women's clothing and men's neckties vanished, and veils covered the human landscape of Iran with grey and black. This intense shift in the appearance of the society became the symbol of strict Islamic governance and consequently Iranian women dressed in chador became unavoidable visual motifs in propagandistic images. Similar visual themes in artworks have become both a symbol and a tool of, social subjugation in relation to representations of women.

In the meantime, the American mass media started to represent these fundamental changes in the situation of Iran, particularly by the use of the iconic image of 'women in chador' (Roushanzamir, 2004, p. 18). According to Mehdi Semati⁹ (2008), ever since the Islamic Revolution, such representations of Iran and Iranian society, circulated mainly by Euro-American media, typically label the country as a theocratic and fundamentalist society, to the extent that in the early 2000s it was labelled as part of an 'Axis of Evil'¹⁰. As international mass media continue to depict Iran as 'a problem' that serves their 'ideological purposes' (Semati, 2008, p. 3), the reality of Iran and the actual complexity of its society remains masked (see Ali Abazari et al., 2008; Nooshin, 2008; Seyed-Emami, 2008).

Ali Abazari et al. (2008) explain that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a combination of a system with authoritarian religious governing rules and a secularised society. However, in Iran secularisation does not necessarily mean 'the death of religion', or vanishing of 'religious symbols' or 'religious institutions'; "In Iran, secularization is tantamount to rationalisation, specialisation, structural-functional differentiation, bureaucracy, and autonomy of the social subsystems" (Ali Abazari et al., 2008, p. 251-252). Secularisation, a process that eventually occurs in a governing system, is present in the everyday life of Iranian society. Nevertheless, despite the contradictory forces which are features of living under the Islamic Republic, the youth culture is developing dynamically. For instance, there is frequent creation of activities such as

⁸ Moral police force or Guidance Patrol is the main Islamic religious police in the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic regime of Iran. Its task is to impose Islamic dress codes and norms of conduct in public, particularly regarding the hijab of women and men who are deemed improperly dressed according to the dress code (Sharafedin, 2016).

⁹ Mehdi Semati is a professor in the Department of Communication at Northern Illinois University.

¹⁰ In 2002, George Bush, the president of America at the time, defied Iran as the country of 'Axis of Evil' that supports terror and attempts to create mass destruction weapons (Shay, 2017).

unauthorised underground concerts and music festivals which are officially sanctioned in the Islamic regime (Nooshnin, 2005 & 2008; Rastovac, 2009).

Despite many obstacles, the current successes of women in different capacities are notable; for instance, the number of women graduating from universities in Iran is, statistically, higher than that of men (Khaz Ali, 2010. p.10), which shows that Iranian women have progressed their social lives and that they have potential for developing their position in society. A dominant character among Iranian women is Shirin Ebadi, a lawyer, human rights activist and founder of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre in Iran, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her pioneering efforts to promote democracy and human rights, particularly for women and children.

1.4.1 Iranian Women's Resistance to Islamicisation

As Ali Abazari et al. (2008) and Milani (2005) explain, Iran after the Islamic revolution has turned into a paradoxical society in which religiosity is challenged by the secularised actions/reactions of the society in multiple ways.

Esfandiari (1997) explains that since the Islamic Revolution in Iran women have frequently refused to follow the traditional roles of mother and housekeeper that the Republic has tried to force them into. Year by year, especially during the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the government's energy for suppression slackened, especially during the presidency of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami¹¹ (1997 - 2005), and the harshness of its fervour reduced. Khatami's presidency was a turning point in the contemporary culture and art of Iran since it caused a vibrant change in the life of Iranian society, particularly for women. Khatami's parliament is notable for:

[...] its commitment to political and cultural reform and for the caucus that agitated for women's greater presence. Among its accomplishments were the passage of the UN's [United Nations] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); raising the minimum age of marriage for girls from puberty to 13; and removing the ban on single young women travelling abroad

¹¹ Seyyed Mohammad Khatami was a pro-reform president in Iran.

on state scholarships (Moghadam & Haghghatjoo, 2016, p.2).

The censorship codes and portrayal of women in films and visual productions also became slightly relaxed. However, the government remained in control of permitting the display of creative productions within Iran (Whatley, 2003, p. 31). In this period, art and cultural environments actively promoted a level of liberalisation in creative practices (Keshmirshekan, 2009, Seyed-Emami, 2008). The relaxation in different spheres of social environments was particularly beneficial for women, in that the regime's sensitivity over the dress code reduced somehow; therefore, most Iranian women continued to push against the restrictions and exploit the best of any relaxation to resist Islamicisation. Iranian women have been challenging Islamic discipline, by tactics such as showing their hair under their scarves, applying heavy makeup and using nail polish. They have also more actively engaged with literature and the arts and the combination of their tactics of resistance (de Certeau, 1988) with their chosen fields of self-expression has led to a concentration on body-based aesthetics. While the Islamic regime evidently attempts to constrain women to dress 'modestly' in a manner aligned with a strict interpretation of Islamic principles, women in Iran resist the imposition of these rules on their lives on a daily basis.

Although, as Milani (2015) says, "the specter of procrustean cultural control is never far from the horizon in Iran, defiant resistance through the sophisticated use of metaphors in every discursive form manages to persevere" (p. 59). About the constant friction between women and the Islamic regime Milani (2015) further explains:

When a regime tries to engineer and control every facet of life—from sartorial style to quotidian minutiae—then all facets of that life become potential loci of resistance. A scarf worn an inch higher on a woman's head, revealing just a few more strands of hair, or a name for a newborn baby chosen from the lexicon of pre-Islamic Persian mythology rather than the roster of Islamic saints, becomes a tool of resistance and an indicator of defiance (p. 59).

The point here is that, despite the societal realm being ostensibly governed by Islamic rules, Iranians, in particular women, often resist complying with the

religious rules. The desire for more rapid social change has increased again recently. The involvement of women in the social movements of Iran has influenced women's self-perceptions, and consequently has encouraged critical thinking amongst many Iranian women; this includes both personal and communal actions and reactions to different issues. For instance, in September 2016, the supreme leader of Iran issued a fatwa by which Iranian women were prohibited from riding bicycles. According to Iran's state-run media, the reason for this order is that "riding bicycles often attracts the attention of men and exposes the society to corruption, and thus contravenes women's chastity, and it must be abandoned" (Rafizadeh, 2016, para. 3). This fatwa, which permitted women to ride bicycles only in spaces reserved especially for them, such as women-only parks¹², was immediately challenged by women after it was issued. Women's reaction in cyberspace, however, revealed that they undermined the fatwa by riding their bikes in public places immediately after the fatwa was issued. They posted photographs and videos of themselves on different social media to show their opposition to the fatwa (see Revesz, 2017). This example clearly shows the contradiction between the dynamic aspects of identity in Iranian social environments and the ideologically unified official representations of identity. However, as we will see, what the artists participating in this research mostly represent in their art practice is those ideologically confined aspects.

1.4.1.1 The Green Movement

The Green movement happened in 2009, at the time of the presidential election. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad¹³, a conservative political figure, who became the President of Iran in 2005, and took a religious hard-line approach during his presidency, once again became the candidate for the conservative party ('Osul-Garâyân). Ahmadinejad's popularity had significantly declined, and many Iranians realised that Iran was in a critical situation. To prevent the election of Ahmadinejad to a second term, many people were drawn to the polls to vote for Mousavi instead. Societal feelings of suffocation by Ahmadinejad's government members were very tangible; for example, the number of moral police force had

¹² Women-only parks can be found in most large and mid-sized Iranian cities.

¹³ Ahmadinejad's economic policies and hostilities towards some countries and his disregard human rights are criticised nationally and internationally.

quickly increased, and the previously increasingly relaxed social atmosphere had become religiously strict once again. Mir Hossein Mousavi, the candidate for the reformist party (Eslah Talaban), became the most popular candidate. He was an open-minded political figure with a background in art and architecture¹⁴, who was seen as able to improve the situation of the country.

When it was announced that Ahmadinejad had been re-elected, Mousavi stated that the results were fraudulent, and consequently protests were formed by his supporters. The protests were a series of street demonstrations throughout Iran that began on 14th February 2009. As Mousavi had chosen the colour green for his campaign colour, his supporters used green as a symbol which united them during the protests.

As Staci Gem Scheiwiller (2013) explains, the Green Movement that started at this time was a political struggle for a redefinition of national identity mainly aimed at reforms of the existing constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran. As a response to the huge protests, the government and its security forces attacked the protesters in the streets of different cities of Iran. Iranian women from any category, old and young, poor and rich, traditional and secular, religious and non-religious, were at the front of these demonstrations, at times even outnumbering men. A 26-year-old female protester, *Neda Agha Soltan*, a university student, was shot on one of the first street demonstrations, and subsequently became the figurehead of the Green Movement, a symbol of protest and strength in Iran that was also recognised internationally (see Fathi, 2009).

In Milani's words, "[t]he movement soon embodied the frustrated aspirations of Iran's century-old quest for democracy and desire for peaceful change" (2010, p. 1). The protests were peaceful, with the motto of 'Where is my vote?'; but the throng of people was so huge that the regime was threatened by them, and eventually, the movement was suppressed in early 2010, thereby "quash[ing]

14 Mousavi served as the president of Iranian Academy of Art until 2009, before he was removed by the conservative parties. His wife, Zahra Rahnavard, is also a professor, artist, and politician, who is also known as a women's rights activist. Rahnavard was a political advisor of the former president 'Mohammad Khatami'.

public displays of opposition. The Green Movement [then] retreated into a period of soul-searching and regrouping” (Milani, 2010, p.1).

1.4.2 Political Uses of Clothing as a Form of Resistance in Iran

A significant factor strengthening women’s resolve to undermine the Islamic regime’s restriction on their lives has been the role of the Internet. It has been a decade since Iranian women have started to use the freedom of cyberspace to challenge the government’s control over their bodies. The compulsion of the Islamic dress-code has been challenged in the campaign of *My Stealthy Freedom*, a Facebook page, managed by Masih Alinejad¹⁵. On this Facebook page, women undermine the imposition of the Islamic hijab in public by taking off their head scarves and posting their photos online.

The exploitation of clothing as a tool for confronting the Islamic regime by Iranian women has also been used for the purpose of criticising/questioning the Islamic regime. On the 20th of January 2016 a number of pictures of Leila Mousavi, the niece of Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the reformist candidate in the 2009 presidential election, were broadcast on the internet. In those pictures, she is wearing a headscarf with a print of the *Ettelaat newspaper* on it (Figure 1.9), an edition published a month after the Islamic revolution in Iran (Figure 1.10).



Figure 1.9: An Image from *Ettelaat* Newspaper Archives in the days after the Islamic Revolution (Source: Benjamin Sadr, 2014)

¹⁵ Masih Alinejad is an Iranian journalist and author. Alinejad currently works as a presenter/producer at VOA Persian Service. She is known for her criticism of Iranian authorities and has won several awards, including a human rights award from the United Nations Watch's 2015 Geneva Summit for Human Rights. She now lives in exile in New York City (Kamali Dehghan, 2015).



Figure 1.10: Leila Mousavi wearing a headscarf with a print of the *Ettelaat newspaper* (Source: IranWire, Online Journal, 2016)

The dominant headline in the newspaper, published on 11th of March 1979, is ‘*There is no obligation about the Hijab*’ which was the proclamation of Ayatollah Taleghani. Other titles on the newspaper patterned headscarf are: ‘There is no Dictator in an Islamic government’; ‘Water and electricity are free of charge’; ‘The Islamic government is under no one’s monopoly’; ‘Dictatorship has to become democrat government’ (Sadr, 2014). About the design of this headscarf Leila states:

I bought this scarf from a shop in one of the main city centres in Tehran. Texts and the pictures on the scarf belong to the Ettelaat newspaper archive which whenever you go to Ettelaat publication office and ask for it they let you access it. All the questions and answers are manifested on the scarf itself; there is no sigh or regret, for whatever Iran is the result of whatever its people wanted it to be (Source: IranWire, Online Journal, 2016).

As Leila Mousavi explained, the idea of the headscarf with the newspaper pattern is highly symbolic. It collects and shows many of the never kept promises given to people before and at the very early stage of the Islamic revolution, and how subsequently people were forced to adapt to the situation and forget about their ideals. She blames the people as much as the government; from my point of view, Leila is reminding Iranian people of the fact both that their participation in the 1979 revolution led to losing their freedom, and that they can again choose an alternative way.

Such democratic challenges coming from the younger generations of women are addressed to issues of law enforcement and women’s rights (such as their dress code and their social roles). Their actions show remarkable resourcefulness and resilience in dealing with unwanted rules and obligations. These kinds of actions by women, although small, are an effective force for the democratisation of

Iranian culture in that they challenge the power structure of the regime, not only at a private level but also in the public realm of politics (Milani, 2015, p. 59).

Iranian women's activism through clothing, in this context, reveals that when they have restricted means, they use their agency through those means. Iranian society acts in conscious ways to make political opposition visible and audible.

1.5 Dominant Modes and Strategies in the Practice of Iranian Women's Artists

Soon after the Islamic Revolution, as artistic and cultural productions created in Iran were under the surveillance of the regime, there was an increased attention to traditional forms of art, such as calligraphy and miniature making. An interest in participating in the international art scene among Iranian artists started re-emerging at that time too. These restrictions on the use of visual language by contemporary Iranian artists resulted in certain dominant modes and strategies in art and cultural productions. Some artists use identifiable symbols of Iran, such as Farkhondeh Shahroudi, a diasporic female artist, with her use of deconstructed Persian carpet in *'the Guards'* series (2005), stitched military cloths, and variable installation dimensions, as displayed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin (Figure 1.11).



Figure 1.11: Farkhondeh Shahroudi, Installation of *Guards* series, Pergamon Museum Berlin, 2005 (Source: Farkhondeh Shahroudi's website)

Another group uses ideological symbols and concepts; the chador, as I have noticed, is probably the most popular. For example, Parastou Forouhar in her works *Friday* (2007), and *Swan Rider* (2004), and also the majority of the artworks used the black chador through different strategies. This group of artists represent the interactions of women and religion as their themes; at times, they

make explicit reference to religious rules under the system of censorship of Iran; for instance, Tehran based artist Shadi Ghadirian, one of the artists in my sample, in her *West by East* series (2004) (Figure 1.12).



Figure 1.12: Shadi Ghadirian, *West by East*, 2004
(Source: Shadi Ghadirian's website)

In the *West by East* series Ghadirian covers the parts of the women's body where the skin is exposed, explicitly highlighting issues of gender, politics, and religious rules and regulation in the Iran's context.

1.5.1 The 'Othered' Self

The Western tradition of representing the 'other', and the intercultural power relations in exotic and Orientalist modes have been productive frameworks in the practice of some Iranian artists. A well-known Iranian female artist, whose works engage with the concept of Orientalism, is Shirin Neshat (born in 1957), who has been described as the most famous and influential Iranian contemporary artist (Williams, 2013; Ulaby, 2015; Danto, 2010). Neshat left Iran in 1974 when she was 17 to study Fine Arts in Los Angeles. She did not return to Iran until 1990, 12 years after the Islamic revolution. In an interview with Lina Bertucci (1997), Neshat says about her visit to Iran:

Probably one of the most shocking experiences I have ever had...the difference between what I had remembered from Iranian culture and what I was witnessing was enormous (p. 84).

The radical transformations in the country after the fundamentalist regime had taken over, propelled her to produce an ambiguous set of representations of identity in a series of photographs called *Women of Allah* (1997) exhibited in New York City, which attracted the attention of the international art world (see Figure 1.13). These artworks incorporate ideological motifs, such as the chador, with other ethnic elements, such as calligraphy, into the representations of women.



Figure 1.13: Shirin Neshat, *Women of Allah* Series, 1994

In her black and white *Women of Allah* series, Neshat represents herself, and the female gender in general, in a contemporary Orientalist format, codified and juxtaposed with signs such as the veil, to signify fundamentalism and a gun to signify violence, with these elements also cropped and framed to emphasize restriction. The manuscripts written on body parts, which romanticize the imagery, are poems by Forough Farukhzad¹⁶, written in Farsi. The Western viewer, who may not be familiar with Persian writing, may fail to understand their meaning; instead, they might see them as Arabic calligraphy and associate them with Islamic rituals, or think they are religious decorations.

Arthur C. Danto¹⁷ (2010) says about Neshat's works that, in the *Women of Allah* series, the artist moved viewers' minds "to engage their sympathies, or at least inflect their thoughts" (p. 13). Aligning myself with Stuart Hall (2013) who asserts that binary oppositions can be "open to the charge of being reductionist and over-simplified – swallowing up all distinctions in their rigid two-part structure" (p. 225), I believe that the 'otherness' in Neshat's works, where she

¹⁶ Forough Farukhzad is a contemporary Iranian feminist poet.

¹⁷ Arthur Coleman Danto (1924 – 2013) was an American art critic and philosopher, who is best known for having been influential, long-time art critic for *The Nation* (the oldest continuously published weekly magazine in the United States) and for his work in philosophical aesthetics and the philosophy of history.

represents her countrywomen as ‘other’ to non-Iranian viewers, is essentialised to produce victimhood and thereby to limit the agency of the female subject. Since Neshat’s audiences are primarily non-Iranians, these images reinforce the concept of ‘victimhood’ attached to the understanding by the Euro-American societies of Muslim identity after 9/11 (Zine, 2002, p. 2).

Similarly, Neshat’s later works: the black and white video installations, *Turbulent* (1998), *Rapture* (1999), and *Fervor* (2000), showing men and women on two screens facing each other, represent the legally-mandated rule of segregation of males and females in the Islamic state of Iran. While these works can evoke sadness, regret, or anger in representing visions of Iranian lives, they also give segregation a settled presence it does not actually have in lived Iranian society. Moreover, despite being a diasporic artist, Neshat avoids entailing any sense of hybridity, instead she chooses to represent “a stable, binary image of Muslim women’s identity” (Rounthwaite, 2008 p. 166).

These works also appealed to the West and made Neshat very popular on a larger scale; especially after she won the Golden Lion at the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999 for these installations (Danto, 2010, p.10; “Shirin Neshat”, 2018). The common point of her video trilogy is the ‘intensity’ of the effect of religion on the public life of Iranian women, reducing them to silent entities. With exaggerated black and white visuals showing ‘elegy-like ritualistic events’, Neshat represented this version of Iranian women’s identity in an Islamic culture and became an ‘internationally acclaimed photographer, videographer, and filmmaker’ in the mid-1990s (Danto, 2010, p. book cover).

Neshat’s recognition in the art world has inspired other Iranian artists to conceptualize their art by drawing on similar cultural codes as those seen in Neshat’s works, but these are presented through different techniques and media; for example, the use of chador in both the *Like Every day* (2000) series of Shadi Ghadirian, who works and lives in Iran, and also *Super East-West Woman* (2002 -

2008) by Aphrodite Désirée Navab. About this trait in Iranian art Sholeh Mostafavi¹⁸ (2010) says:

[...] many galleries abroad began to exhibit artworks of this kind, with an eye to their independent artistic quality, but it seemed they essentially resonated a hidden affinity toward an irrational world which simultaneously or separately unveiled the same romantic notions about the ancient savage Iran which exist about the country today (para. 6).

The point here is that these types of works, which perhaps seek to evoke the West's admiration through activating tropes of exoticism and Orientalism, do not actually represent the range of identities in Iran, either today or in the past three decades. While many non-Iranian female artists, in other countries, try to employ strategies by which their ethnic representations surpass and subvert the tropes of Orientalism by drawing on postcolonial discourses (see Chapter Two), Iranian women artists in my study often choose to practise and exhibit within these modes. The frequently-repeated motifs and features of such representations, such as elements from religious dress codes (the veil) and the passive positioning (impotent gaze) of the human figures are also seen in the art practices of some of the artists participating in this study (see Chapter Five).

While the Iranian government has been determined to control art and cultural productions, including music, film-making, writing, and so on, it seems that art cannot be totally monopolised by the Islamic regime and those in power. For example, Abbas Kiarostami, an Iranian film maker, whose works have been produced within Iran and some other countries, and who is a well-known director in the international film scene, often used an observational documentary style in his film-making. Through the use of this genre, he illustrates the transformation of Iranian society through the dialogue and image of the world around him. While the Islamic regime tries to promote and portray an ideological and religiously observant image of the society through all types of media, Kiarostami dodges

¹⁸ Sholeh Mostafavi is a graduate of art history and archaeology of the Middle East and Europe, who worked for five years in the Islamic arts department of one of the museums of Frankfurt. She then moved to Karlsruhe (2004) to work in the only German museum covering the Culture and Arts of None-European countries. She has curated several exhibitions on the contemporary arts of Eastern countries, particularly Iranian art. In 2009, she curated four exhibitions in the Karlsruhe's women festival called Iran.

censorship edicts to find ways to tell human stories, managing to undermine the authorities' preferences for certain themes and subjects, portraying instead, the reality of the society in tangible ways. So, without focusing on Islamic ideological aspects, his subjects are the everyday life challenges facing Iranian society.

Another interesting point in this case is that, although Kiarostami is a male, he has created one of the most “radical feminist” Iranian films in the form of his movie *Ten* (2002) (Mike Leigh, cited in Andrew, 2016, p. 52). This movie is filmed entirely in a car, and is divided into ten scenes, each depicting different conversations between the main female actress (the driver of the car) as she drives around Tehran¹⁹, and a variety of passengers, including her son, her sister, a prostitute, a young woman, and an old woman on her way to prayer. In the span of this movie, Kiarostami brings up a spectrum of subjects in relation to women, such as marriage, divorce, parenthood, religion, sex, and relationships. About Kiarostami's approach in his cultural production, Neshat (2016), the female visual artist, says:

In cinema Kiarostami pioneered a new form that was minimal and poetic, humanistic yet deeply subversive, transcending the codes of censorship. Many other Iranian film makers tried to follow in his footsteps but what distinguished Kiarostami was his refusal to remain local and his refusal to simply feed Western curiosity (cited in Andrew, 2016, p. 51).

While this example points to the conditions under which art and cultural productions could be more subjective, artists outside Iran, such as Neshat herself, continue to make images that portray the opposite of what she says about Kiarostami's production:

In the aftermath of the 1979 revolution, when the image of Iran suddenly declined from a rich culture of poets and mystics into a violent and barbaric land of fanatics, Kiarostami turned his camera towards the faces and lives of Iranians, contradicting the ugly politics and religious fervour. He gave Iranians hope. His gentle, deeply philosophical and poetic lens made us understand that malice and hatred were not a part of our grain (cited in Andrew, 2016, p. 51).

¹⁹ Tehran is the capital city of Iran.

While I admire the compositional strength of Neshat's works, their lack of subtlety in ideological terms is tantamount to Orientalism; it is ironic given Neshat's respect for Kiarostami's materialistic cinematic storytelling.

1.5.2 The Contemporary Art of Iran in the International Art Market

Iranian women's art is popular internationally; women artists both inside and outside Iran have been contributing to different exhibitions and art venues almost all over the world. International art venues are attracted to the artworks by indicators of ethnic alterity and unexplored localities, most of the time associating them with gender issues (Torshizi, 2012).

In artistic representations of Iranian identities outside Iran the use of Islamic ideological motifs, particularly when associated with the female gender (such as the depiction of women in chador) provokes a binary positioning of 'self' in relation to others, similar to that of the concept of East and West. In my view, this dichotomous way of representing ethnic identity evokes a reductive self-exoticisation. This has also been observed by the Iranian art historian Hamid Keshmirshakan (2010), who asserts there are two primary concerns in the contemporary art practice of Iranian artists and the international art market: identity and exoticism. He further explains that artists' obsessions with engaging in social and cultural concerns through their practice, integrated with particular representations of identity, are so strong that exoticism seems to be the outcome of exploring identity (p. 489). This is a point which I will be exploring through the analysis of visual data collected from the artists of my research sample.

As Ron Shapiro (2000) explains, the Latin word 'exoticus' means foreign, alien or 'other' (p. 43). The encounter of the concepts of Orientalism and exoticism seems to be common in postcolonial studies involving representations of women; authors of such studies include: Burima (2016), Khair (2012), McCabe (2008), Oueijan (2006), Shay and Sellers-Young (2003), Hout (2002), and Colmeiro (2002). The concept of 'exoticism' in this study is predominantly used in relation to the ethnic and cultural otherness, as constructed in Orientalism, and also to ethnocentric stereotyping (as in Eurocentric views of non-European cultures), in which 'the other' is represented by difference and the notion of 'alterity'. The

concept of ‘exoticism’ in relation to visual representations produced by Iranian artists is explained by Keshmirshekan (2015):

Exoticism in a strong or radical sense could direct works of art towards an unrealistic and non-creative product which has been shaped purely for the interests of the ‘others’. These artworks are particularly criticised when the artists are not expressing their own concerns, but rather creating to meet foreign demand (p. 127).

I believe what Keshmirshekan means by ‘the others’ here refers to the international art market and cultural venues outside Iran, where Iranian artists exhibit and market their productions. In this sense, it is possible to say that ‘othered’ representations of identities in the Iranian visual art productions, persist as a means of appeal to the aforementioned market, and as a means of exposing or celebrating their alterity outside Iran. In other words, there is a Euro-American expectation that Iranian artists will exhibit identities through visualised signifiers of ethnic or political aspects. The fulfilment of these expectations, catered to by the artists for their own reasons, has resulted in the formulation of a relatively monolithic / fixed political identity reproduced through different modes of expressions.

1.6 The Representation of Women in Iranian Mythology

*Shahnameh*²⁰, written around 1000 AD, is one of the most important pieces of Persian literature. It reflects a sense of past Iranian culture and mythology in the medieval era (Khaleghi Motlagh, 2012; Loveimi, 2016). *Shahnameh*’s stories are about heroism of both women and men with no religious prejudice in relation to the characters (Forouzanfar, 1990). For example, Gurdāfarīd is one of the heroines in the book; she was a champion who fought against Sohrab (another Iranian hero who was the commander of an army) and delayed the Turanian troops who were marching on Persia of that time. She is a symbol of courage and wisdom for Iranian women. In describing her heroic character, Ferdowsi writes:

But one of those within the fortress was a woman, daughter
of the warrior Gazhdaham, named Gordafarid. When she
learned that their leader had allowed himself to be taken, she

²⁰ *Shahnameh*, which in English translation means ‘The Book of Kings’, is a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between c. 977 and 1010 CE.

found his behaviour so shameful that her rosy cheeks became as black as pitch with rage. With not a moment's delay, she dressed herself in a knight's armour, gathered her hair beneath a Rumi helmet, and rode out from the fortress, a lion eager for battle. She roared at the enemy ranks, 'where are your heroes, your warriors, your tried and tested chieftains?' (Translation of *Shahnameh*: Yar-shater, 1998, p. 214).

The powerful representation of women in *Shahnameh*, which has several other examples of female self-determination, has been replaced in contemporary times by Orientalist signifiers such as the veil. Another instance of women's agency in ancient Iran is the character of Shahrzad²¹; the storyteller of the book *One Thousand and One Nights* (629 A. D.), a collection of tales, which is one of the world's most famous works of literature. The book contains many female characters who have pivotal roles in the stories. Some of the women are described as being artists, writers, politicians, leaders, and warriors. These characters are positioned as brave, courageous, moderators of quarrels, loving, and witty, thus they provide a unique perspective on women's roles, which results in enhancing the representation of the female subjects. Like *Shahnameh*, *One Thousand and One Nights* contains a series of representation of men and women in complementary positions (Hoseini & Zarea-zadeh, 2010; also see Tavousi, et al, 2006).

Ruyin Pakbaz²² (n.d.) in comparing Iranian literature and visual art in the modern era says: "modernization necessitates a change of art norm and criteria. The same necessity caused the transformation of Persian poetry. Yet compared to the visual artists, poets were more successful in finding a new form and content" (para. 4). He then specifies two influential key factors in differentiating the transformation of contemporary poems and visual arts as below:

Firstly, the rich and deep heritage of Persian poetry which contained the essence of the culture of the past; and secondly,

²¹ Shahrzad was the wife of the King Shahriar, who executed his first wife for having an affair, from that even on, the king announced a law that he will marry a virgin each night, after he consummates marriage then kills her at dawn. To restore the king's relationship with women, as well as delaying her death, Shahrzad tells episodic stories which go on for 1001 nights; then Shahrzad told the king that she had no more stories to tell and by then the king had fallen in love with her, so, he spared her life, and made her his queen (Hoseini & Zarea-zadeh, 2010).

²² Ruyin Pakbaz is a prominent Iranian art historian and is the author of the *Encyclopaedia of Art of Iran*.

the advent of new poets who looked deep into the problems of their time. In fact, [our] new poetry is born from [our] classical poetry opening up new paths, while our visual arts imitate modern styles and try to cast traditional elements in a modern mould (para 4).

Pakbaz further asserts that literature goes beyond tradition while visual artists characterize a fixed identity by using certain norms and traditions. However, the contemporary generation of Iranian visual artists are using new media to engage with modern art movements, but conceptually “they are not in line with modern styles of the West but rather moving in the opposite direction” (Pakbaz, n.d., para. 6). The meaning here is that while the artists use modern media in their art-making practice, the content of their works remains conventional. As a result, visual artists and poets have approached tradition in two different ways, which take them to two different destinations.

While I agree with Pakbaz’s argument about artists’ tendency to refer to the past, by which I mean the early post-revolutionary time, in my view, the use of conventional resources is not an issue in the art and cultural productions of the Iranian artists. Instead, the ways in which these elements are used in relation to the representations of identity, ethnicity, socio-political and gender subjects is an important issue. Considering the strong and dynamic models of depicting the female subject available in the examples of ancient Iranian literature, contemporary artworks representing passive aspects of Iranian women identities do not match the aspirations of people in today’s Iranian society.

1.7 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined some traits of contemporary Iranian society, particularly those affecting women, along with some characteristics of the contemporary art production of Iranian women, both in Iran and outside Iran. It is remarkable that Iranian women's struggle for their rights and freedom often fails to be addressed through the practices of Iranian artists.

I remain concerned to consider the extent to which any combination of Iranian ethnic identity and passive or reductive characteristics in representing Iranian women can do justice to women's determination to resist the Iranian government's

suppression of freedom in their everyday life struggle. The next chapter will help to clarify the complex nature of the practices of the Iranian women artists in my research sample by situating my enquiry with reference to a number of contemporary theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter constructs a theoretical framework within which the visual representations created by the Iranian women artists participating in this research can be analysed and understood.

This research is set within the theoretical and methodological framework of an autoethnographic approach (see 3.2.1), which draws on my personal experiences and personal examination of different subjects raised from the research data. According to Jones et al. (2013) all personal productions can be considered as “examinations of cultures”, however, not necessarily all personal works are “autoethnographic” (p. 22). The characteristics outlining this autoethnographic research project include:

- (1) purposefully commenting on/critiquing of culture and cultural practices, (2) making contributions to existing research, (3) embracing vulnerability with purpose, and (4) creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response. (Jones et al., 2013, p. 22).

The self-reflexivity of an autoethnographic approach is balanced in part by reference to scholarship that argues for the political importance of art to societies because of its importance in circuits of cultural production. The place of representation in the model of Circuit of Culture (Du Gay, 1997; Du Gay, et al., 1997; Hall, 1997) shows that representations reflect and partially determine what kinds of identities are legitimised and validated within a society. While various societies have developed certain representations in contemporary art, one of my chief goals in this research project is to identify recurring representational motifs in the practice of the Iranian women artists in my sample.

As will already be clear from the proceeding chapter my own position is not a neutral one. Acknowledging my own subjectivity, I am passionate about supporting greater freedom of self-expression in the art and lives of Iranian women. Therefore, I analyse those works looking for patterns indicating restrictions or expansion of opportunities for the expression of diverse identity.

This chapter, then, is structured following a logical relational flow, in order to unfold a thoroughgoing explanation of overlapping concepts associated with the art and cultural productions of the artists in this study.

The theoretical framework of this research is constructed within which the visual representations created by the Iranian women artists participating in this research can be analysed and understood. While my own theoretical framework can be described as feminist postcolonial autoethnography, the participating artists who are my research subjects also operate within environments animated by theoretical framings including postcolonialism, feminism, and Orientalism which circulate in the Iranian higher education system and art culture generally. This chapter also includes discussion of a number of strategies and modes of address utilised by the artists in their visual practice. From this discussion, a series of questions emerge that develop into a conceptual structure relevant to the field of Iranian-made cultural representations.

2.2 Cultural Practices

Kress (1988) defines culture as “the set of human practices that produce meaning and the objects that are the result of those practices; it encompasses all forms of human engagement in those practices, and their effects on humans acting together as a culture” (p. 182). According to Hall (1997), culture is the “shared values of a group or of society” and it includes “feelings, attachments and emotions as well as concepts and ideas” (p. 2). Raymond Williams (2011) explains that any culture has two aspects:

The known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture: that is always both traditional and creative; that is both the most ordinary common meanings of the finest individual meanings (p. 6).

The second characteristic of culture in this definition is embedded in the fact that culture is vibrant and always in the process of making. The dynamic nature of this characteristic is tuned to the definition of identity as a fluid process and concept,

supporting my own discomfort with assigning static quality to either culture or identity.

Culture depends on individuals' interpretations of the world around them and also how they make and share meanings through their participations in that culture. Cultural meanings therefore "are not only in the head. They organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real practical affects" (Hall, 1997, p. 3). Culture, as a socially transmitted characteristic, behaviour, and knowledge of any social group, derives from the social environment (Birukou, et al., 2009; Brumann, 1999, Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

According to Hakoköngäs and Sakki (2016), 'the social power of visual images, especially photographs, has been known for a long time' (p. 646). Höijer (2011) also says: "social representations are about processes of collective meaning making resulting in common cognitions which produce social bonds uniting societies, organization and groups" (p. 3). Therefore, the visual messages involved in social representations can affect the formation of conceptions and attitudes towards the depicted societies. This is particularly the case with photographic representations, which because of their realistic nature can generate more credibility (Joffe, 2008). In Hall's (1997) words, meaning, which is formed and exchanged in a subjective and personal level and interacts socially, "is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and to whom we belong" (p. 3).

About the importance of meaning making, Hall (1997) states:

Meaning is also produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural things; that is, when we incorporate them in different ways into the everyday rituals and practices of daily life and in this way, give them value or significance... Meanings also regulate and organize our conduct and practices –they help to set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed (p. 3).

This quote points to the significance of the process of meaning-making through cultural practices in relation to governing and regulating the demeanour and ideas of people about themselves and others. The British cultural studies model of the Circuit of Culture (Figure 2.1) suggests that meanings are produced in different sites and circulated by various practices or processes.

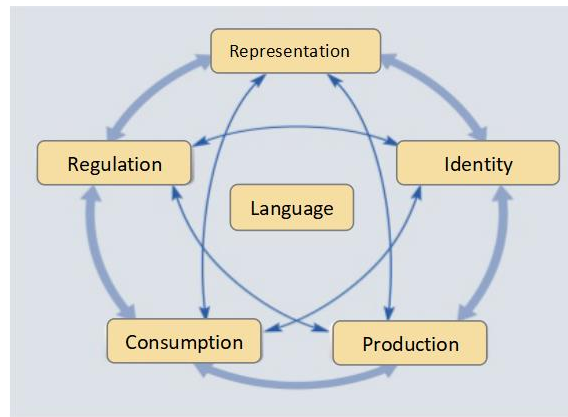


Figure 2.1: The Circuit of Culture. Du Gay et al., 1997.

As the question of meaning is embedded in different levels of the practices, the Circuit of Culture model of analysis suggests that in meaning making, which is an ongoing process, there are five main cultural processes in describing the meanings that the artworks come to hold in their articulations. These processes are identified as: a) Representation: how the cultural products are represented by artists; b) Identity: what gender and social identities are associated with them; c) Production: how they are produced; d) Consumption: how they are consumed; and lastly, e) Regulation: under what systems their use and distribution are regulated (Du Gay, 1997; Du Gay, et al., 1997; Hall, 1997). However, language - the use of signs and images by which the meaning is produced - stays at the heart of the circuit the entire time (Hall, 1997).

2.2.1 Representation

According to Stuart Hall, representation is “the sphere in which identity is always constructed” (cited in Spencer, 2014, p. xix). Therefore, the role of subjectivity is pivotal in defining a shared identity. This is one of the most critical points in the social semiotic analysis (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001) of the representations in this research. The constant tensions between the Islamic regime of Iran and sections of the wider society clearly illustrate the people’s resistance against strong Islamic laws and restrictions, especially in the case of women. However, even if people are personally opposed to the government’s desire for maintaining the religious system and are resistant to the restrictive laws imposed on women, the encodings of art and cultural productions of some women artists, in my view, often give the appearance of being compliant with the Islamic regime. However, I acknowledge that artists’ representations can perform in complex and critical

ways, despite appearing to be interpolated within a highly authoritative, constraining regulatory system. Artists may have utilised careful strategies to create meaning through representation or subversion that are not immediately detected. Through the analysis of my research data, I intend to understand the ways in which the identities of Iranian women are constructed through the art practice of my participant artist, including subversive representational practices where they are used.

The pioneering definition of ‘social representation’ by Serge Moscovici (1984) describes the two main processes of representation which make the unfamiliar familiar or the unknown known: “anchoring and objectification” (p. 24). The anchoring process is the process of assimilating the elements of representation within incorporated codes of a certain society. Hall (1999) also uses the term ‘mapping’ in representations, which has the same connotation as ‘anchoring’; they both mean that the representations are related to a familiar context or phenomenon. Objectification²³, however, makes the unfamiliar familiar by making concrete, abstract ideas and phenomena. Moscovici (2000) explains “objectifying’ as a very active process in social representation in comparison with ‘anchoring’”. Drawing on Moscovici (1984), Hakoköngäs and Sakki (2016) describe the process of objectification as having three phases:

The first step is to discover the iconic quality of an imprecise object or idea and convert a concept into an image. Thereafter, concepts that could be represented or converted into images, symbols or metaphors are integrated into a pattern, which Moscovici (1984) calls a figurative nucleus. Finally, in the third stage, a figurative nucleus becomes a topic of everyday communication in connection with the formerly abstract phenomenon (p. 648).

In the case of the art practices of my participant artists, I will try to understand whether, or to what extent their works have been created through the processes of anchoring and objectification in relation to representations of identities.

²³ The term ‘objectification’ has various meanings and has been used differently by theorists.

2.2.1.1 Iranian Women's Identities and the Politics of Representation

Since Orientalist discourses became influential in the art and cultural production of Iran, the most dominant mode in the representation of identities of Iranian women has become merged and mixed with a monolithic archetype of Muslim women. As I live outside Iran, my primary concern in this regard is non-Iranian viewers' interpretations that may arise from the super-sign of the 'veil' (Wagner, et al., 2012). The use of the veil may particularly mask other potentialities in the process of meaning-making in the representations (Torshizi, 2012, p. 563). Since the veil is one of the most familiar signifiers in representing Muslim ideologies, it therefore accentuates the religious aspect of identity more than anything else. In representing national identity by focusing on religious aspects of it, Anthony Smith (1991) asserts:

Religious identities derive from the sphere of communication and socialization. They are based on the alignments of culture and its elements – values, symbols, myths and traditions, often codified in custom and rituals. They have therefore tended to join in a single community of the faithful all those who feel they share certain symbolic codes, value systems and traditions of belief and ritual (p. 6).

Religious and ethnic identities are, therefore, often placed in conjunction; this is where the concept of 'otherness', in relation to the West, arises. The ideological elements characterising Iranian women's representations have tended to concentrate, and therefore, reproduce a monolithic religious identity devoid of subtle concepts related to personal and subjective aspects.

One might argue that the patriarchal, oppressive, and undemocratic regime of Iran simply forces women to stay silenced and marginalised victims in the society. Therefore, the identities portrayed in such visuals are not fabricated, and the resemblance of the context through the representations is authentic. However, I assert that representations which only associate female identities with Islamic ideological principles often do not resonate with the active resistance of Islamicisation of women in Iran.

Since the artworks created by Iranian artists represent my ethnicity, and in the case of women's production often represent female identities, and since it infuriates me when they illustrate low levels of dynamicity in identity, within an academic framework, I intend to associate representations of identities with more paradoxical and vibrant aspects of the Iranian women's lives. I draw on my personal experience as a diasporic Iranian to make my point clear. On September 29th (2016) I visited the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) where two exhibitions were being held: Cindy Sherman's latest exhibition, and the exhibition of 'Queensland's Collection of major works by leading international artists' (Goma's website), called *The World View* which featured works from different artists of different nationalities. In this exhibition, I saw a familiar image, a woman in the black veil (Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2: Me standing next to Parastou Forouhar's work *Swanrider* exhibited at GOMA.

Parastou Forouhar²⁴ is an Iranian artist who left Iran in 1991 and lives and works in Germany. The description next to her work was as below:

The central figure in *Swanrider* is a chador-clad woman, played by the artist, riding a gigantic swan-shaped paddle-boat on the calm waters of the River Lahn at Bad Ems in Germany. The work references numerous cross-cultural myths and fairytales, from Leda and the swan, to Hans Christian Anderson's tale of the ugly duckling transformed into a beautiful swan, to Richard Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*,

²⁴ Forouhar was one of my research participants at the beginning of my data collection; however, since she did not respond to my emails, I had to exclude her.

which features a knight carried on a boat drawn by a swan. The work's playful use of clashing cultural references and contrasting black and white shapes emphasises what Forouhar views as the importance of moving beyond 'such opposites as good and evil, fortune and misfortune, the beautiful and ugly'.

In this so-called cross-cultural work, which respectively references Greek, German, and Danish cultural myths, the only distinguishable element of race, ethnicity, and nationality is the 'Iranian black chador'. Yet, where is Iranian myth in relation to this image? Why is the element of the chador often the only sign of Iranian-ness in the representations? Why is it only the chador that delineates the positioning of an Iranian woman in relation with other contexts in such works? These were the questions rushing through my head as I saw that work; especially considering other works juxtaposed with Forouhar's work in the exhibition, which were all autonomous and avant-garde in subject. For example (Figure 2.3) a 16-channel video installation called *King (a portrait of Michael Jackson)* (2005) by Candice Breitz, a female artist from South Africa, showed men and women from different age categories, in different clothing styles, who were singing and performing Michael Jackson's songs. The entire video was loaded with rhythmic voices, colours, and movements generated from an independent idea, perhaps about the globalisation of identities relating to the same music.



Figure 2.3: Candice Breitz, video installation, *King (a portrait of Michael Jackson)*, Exhibited at GOMA. (Photographed by: Neda Nourmohammadi).

In comparison with the Breitz video installation, which showed the bringing together of a group of people from various ethnic identities singing a song by

Michael Jackson, the isolation of the Iranian female subject in Forouhar's work unsettled me.

A corridor separated the space of *The World View exhibition* from Cindy Sherman's exhibition (Figure 2.4). Sherman's photography and art mainly draw on issues of gender, identity and the role of women in contemporary society. By putting on different styles of clothing, using wigs and exaggerated make up, Sherman alters her appearance and illustrates the construction of identity involved in different guises and personas. Her latest series of works was inspired by Hollywood's portrait of society through female characters of the 20th century; women who used 'their intellect and sexuality to rise through social classes' (Works' description at the exhibition).



Figure 2.4: Cindy Sherman, some images from her 2016 series.
(Source: Ellyn Kail, 2016)

What interests me in comparing these two artists in their art practice within the space of the exhibition is the instability of the representation of gender in Sherman's works and the fixity of the representation of women in Forouhar's different works throughout her career. It seems that it is an advantage for Forouhar to keep on using the symbol of women in chador because it is a strong useful form from which to represent Iranian women.

The chador seems to be the indispensable element of Forouhar's representations of women such as the poetic mode²⁵ in the *Shooting & Flashing* and *Friday* series (2009), the ironic mode in the *Blind Spot* series (2000), a parody mode in the *Sign*

²⁵ Bill Nichols, an American film critic and theoretician, offers a prescient definition of the poetic mode: 'The poetic mode is particularly adept at opening up the possibility of alternative forms of knowledge to the straightforward transfer of information, the prosecution of a particular argument or point of view, or the presentation of reasoned propositions about problems in need of solution. This mode stresses mood, tone, and affect much more than displays of factual knowledge or acts of rhetorical persuasion'. (Nichols 2010, p. 162)

series (2004), and mythical references in the *Swanrider* series (2004). While these kinds of works contain implied criticism and might be viewed with appreciation for being critical of the gender issues in the Islamic regime of Iran, the female identity is nevertheless represented in a fixed position throughout her works in different modes, as a political religious being and an oppressed post-revolutionary Islamic subject²⁶.

2.2.1.2 The Concept of Islam in Relation to the Representations

In an article on Muslim representations, Nabil Echchaibi (2013) explains how Muslims themselves have been trapped in the ‘unveiling obsessions’ of the West, in particular America. Echchaibi explains that the use of “motives and the subjective position of their authors [...] are indicative of an enduring representational trope or trap which forces Islam and Muslims into perpetual objects of scrutiny in need of proving their normalcy and unveiling their hidden privacy” (p. 1). As the Orientalist discourse influentially defined by Said (1978) proposes, the West and the East are different worlds; the West is superior and the East inferior.

To make these differences salient, the veil seems to be the perfect motif for representing the oppression, subordination, and inferiority of Middle-Eastern cultures, and of Oriental women specifically. The West instead, acts as the saviour of the East by trying to “unveil” the image of oppressed Muslim women. For example, in a live show in 2001 Oprah Winfrey performed as the liberator of by lifting a burqa off the head of a Muslim Afghan woman as the audience cheered (Figure 2.5).

²⁶ See artist’s works in her website: www.parastou-forouhar.de



Figure 2.5: Oprah Winfrey lifts the Burqa off an Afghan woman, 2001
(Source: Frank Micelotta, 2001)

The above image shows Western concern for Muslim women as entities with no voice, power, and determination who need to be rescued by Western women.

Echchaibi argues that art media and cultural productions by Muslims are caught in what he calls ‘the double burden of Muslim representations’ in which Muslims constantly attempt to prove the ‘normality’ of their lives in order to reclaim the face of Islam and Muslims in the world after the 9/11 attacks in New York (p. 1). Despite the integration of Muslim lives into various communities in diaspora, the religion of Islam is still the most dominant interactive feature by which Muslims are being continually inspected. As a response to such a situation, Muslims have used cyberspace to ‘correct the record on Islam and highlight the Muslim point of view’; the broadcasting of the hashtag of *Muslim lives Matter* is an example of themselves as members of a community movement which stands as advocate for Islam as a religion of peace and a rejection of extremism.

However, according to Echchaibi, these kinds of reactions from Muslims are ‘apologetic’ in response to problematic issues related to Islam, and they counter mostly the reductive portrayal of Islam in the public sphere. Therefore, Muslims, in defending their faith and de-generalising the negative / extreme picture which the media shows of ‘Muslimness’, often fall into a confined channel in representing themselves; the identities they present are often loaded with religious ideologies and signifiers. Consequently, many Muslim representations tend to be representations of Islam. Cyber movements such as *worldhijabday.com* and *MuslimGirl.com* embarked on by Muslim hijabi women in America are examples

of representing 'hijabi' Muslim women as good citizens living a life of modesty. While these representations conform to the politically and pragmatically desirable category of 'harmless good citizens' they are also explicitly religiously observant.

It is important to discuss the differences between the lives of Iranian women and the American Muslims that Echchaibi talks about in relation to the notion of 'Islam'. Echchaibi's American-based Muslims defend Islam, practice their faith, and try to show only 'good' Muslims in their representations. In other words, they strive to be the 'caretakers' of Islam, and project these qualities in their productions even when they do not intend to (Echchaibi, 2013, p. 10). However, in Iran, an onerous form of Islamic observance is imposed on the society and many people, especially the younger generation, are frustrated with the obligations forced on them through the disciplines and doctrines of Islam. For example, Iranian women who, when leaving the country for any reason, even a short trip, remove their scarves as soon as they get on the aeroplane; whereas Arab Muslims keep following the dress code of hijab, even when it is not compulsory to wear it. In this case it might be more relevant to address Echchaibi's Muslims as 'pious adherents' (Echchaibi, 2013, p. 2), and many Iranians (not in generic terms, but at least the majority of those in an outside-Iran context) as perhaps 'Muslim labelled' or maybe 'post Islamic Muslims'.

An exaggerated example of Iranian women's frustration with the Islamic restrictions on their lives is the famous Iranian actress, Golshifteh Farahani. After acting in the Hollywood movie *Body of Lies* in 2008, Farahani was reportedly prevented by Iranian authorities from leaving Iran. Seeking a way to express her frustrations with the taboo that the Islamic Republic of Iran has made of the female body, she posed nude for the French photography magazine, *Égoïste* in the year 2011 (Figure 2.6).



Figure 2.6: Golshifteh Farahani, the cover of *Égoïste* magazine
(Source: Marie Ottavi & Johanna Luysen, 2015)

About her nude portrait Farahani says:

In these photo-shoots I just wanted to ask ‘What is your problem? Look at me, what is your problem? Am I a threat? Why do you have this much fear of women? Why do you want to put the veil on women? The reason I think is the weakness of men that they oppress women this much... And then, unconsciously your body becomes a tool to respond to this anger, you just open it up, and say look at it, there is nothing here... (The Hollywood Reporter, 2015).

Farahani uses her body as a site for her performativity (Butler, 1988; Holmes & Marra, 2010) in order to confront the Islamic codifications of gender in Iran with women’s frustrations with the Islamic restrictions on embodiment of women. I have tried to communicate this feeling of dissatisfaction with the Islamic regime of Iran by women through my art practice (to be explained in Chapter Seven). I argue that the artistic and cultural representations of women by Iranian producers are often caught in what, drawing on Echchaibi, I call the ‘multiple burden of the representations of Iranian women’. This is because firstly, Iranian women are controlled within their own society by a religiously-mandated patriarchal authority, and then, they are even more controlled by the enduring colonising forces of the relationships between them and non-Iranian identities and, finally, they are often trapped in the International art-market’s expectations.

2.2.2 Consumption: Decoding Cultural Representations

With reference to the elements of the Circuit of Culture, Consumption is the process by which the contents of representations are obtained, decoded, and used by audiences. John Fiske (1990) uses the term ‘audiencing’ to refer to this process as “the most important site at which an image’s meanings are made, [...] renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances” (cited in Rose, 2016, p. 38). According to Denzin (2001):

Consumption represents a site where power, ideology, gender, and social class circulate and shape one another. Consumption involves the study of particular moments, negotiations, representational formats, and rituals in the social life of a commodity. The consumption of cultural objects by consumers can empower, demean, disenfranchise, liberate, essentialise, and stereotype (p. 325).

The active role of reception in identity construction is acknowledged, not only in the consumption process but also during the production and representational phases (Leve, 2012; Mackary, 1997). About the importance of cultural consumption practices, Katz-Gerro (2004) says:

First, cultural tastes serve as a means for distinguishing social groups. Cultural consumption is a standard and a basis for social and cultural positions, preferences, and behaviours. Second, consumption is central to the process by which social groups reproduce themselves. In the sphere of culture, resources are embodied in symbolic abilities and tastes, and the consumption of cultural products with high symbolic value contributes to the legitimization of privilege and facilitates the selection of the next privileged generation (p. 12).

The process of interpreting the representations in this study will be the link between the theoretical and practical parts of this research; which I have tried to communicate first, my own decoding of the images, and second, the data from a set of focus-group discussions.

2.2.3 Production: Construction of Culture through Representations

The process that artists go through to imbue their cultural production with significations is the process of cultural production. Hall (1993) refers to this

process as encoding. However, encoding a message is not identical with decoding practices, which is the process by which audience members interpret the works. Encoding can prefer certain meanings or responses but cannot prescribe or guarantee decoding, which has its own conditions of existence.

According to Hall (1997) and Jenson (2008), the visual media are a privileged and influential implement for the construction of social reality in the globalised world. Therefore, the role of the media and techniques in which significations are conceptualised through representations, also needs to be discussed at this stage. The modality and genre of the artworks are also taken into consideration within this process. This includes the study of the competing characteristics of the works at this site to understand how cultural production contributes towards their meaning (Rose, 2016).

2.2.4 Identity: Lived Cultures

The subject of identity is an important topic in the study of artistic representations of Iranian society. The initial aim of the analysis of contemporary art productions of Iranian women artists, both in and outside Iran, is to understand the ways in which identity as a concept is explored and projected by the artists in their art productions.

Identities within a culture create meaning symbolically through representations (Woodward, 1997). While identity is conceived of in some contexts as a fluid concept (Buckingham, 2008; Taylor & Spencer, 2004), one of the major issues in the art practice of women artists in this research is the construction and *maintenance* of identity (Albert, 2006). About the flexibility of identity Taylor and Spencer (2004) state:

Identity is a work in progress, a negotiated space between ourselves and others; constantly being re-appraised and very much linked to the circulation of cultural meanings in a society. Furthermore, identity is intensely political. There are constant efforts to escape, fix or perpetuate images and meanings of others. These transformations are apparent in every domain, and the relationships between these constructions reflect and re enforce power relations (p. 4).

Gender, ethnicity, and nationality are aspects of identity that lead to complex readings of the visual representations made by women artists. According to James Paul Gee (2000), identity is “being recognized as a certain kind of person in a given context” (p. 99). The formation of identity is a process in which an individual defines her/him ‘self’ (Hung, et al., 2011); this could be reshaped during different stages of life “in relation to the identities of others, sometimes in concert with them, sometimes in opposition to them, but always in relation to them” (Hull & Zacher, 2007, p. 75). Similarly, Howarth (2011) describes identity as “an individual’s sense of who they are in relation to others around them” (p. 2). These definitions both refer to the formation of identity as a process and in relation to contexts and relationships. Therefore, drawing on Lev Vygotsky’s (1986) social constructivist point of view, I believe, the formation of identity does not take place in isolation; instead it occurs in social contexts. This means that an individual’s identity is partially constructed from social roles and cultural categories which reveal information about multiple factors such as class, religion, ethnicity, and gender, particularly the category of gender which is fundamental to and pervasive in this research. Consequently, the question of identity from an individual level ripples out to a collective level and therefore the ‘self’ that the artist uncovers is also a ‘social self’ and consequently aggregated with that of others becoming a ‘national identity’ in a larger scale as a collective phenomenon (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1991).

According to Akeel Bilgrami’s (2006) theory about identity, the concept of identity in relation to political themes can be studied in terms of two aspects; ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’. The subjective aspect of identity is what individuals conceive themselves to be, whereas the objective aspect is how they “might be viewed independently of how they see themselves” (p. 5). This means one’s objective identity is who he/she is/might be seen as, in the light of certain social or biological facts about him/her. While I agree with Hall’s (1994) assertion that cultural “identity is not a fixed essence” and is fluid (p. 226), Bilgrami’s terms in regard to aspects of politics of identity are utilised throughout this research for exploring the mediated principle of identity represented in the artworks of my research subjects in relation to the theme of politics.

The subjective and objective aspects of identity are often closely linked; however, subjective identity entails some adjacent objective vision of identity (Bilgrami, 2006). For example, I am born Muslim objectively (born in a Muslim context) but do not subjectively identify as a Muslim female for I do not practise Islam, and I do not cover my hair as women are supposed to do because of the freedom of choice in clothing outside the regulatory system of Iran. In analysing the art practice of Iranian women, Bilgrami's vocabulary of 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' for studying gender identity is applied to establish more clearly what is being investigated through the representations.

2.3 Post-colonialism and the Political Identity of Iranian Society

Postcolonial theory encompasses a series of rich "syncretic theoretical and political positions that creatively employ concepts and epistemological perspectives deriving from a range of scholarly fields (such as anthropology, African American studies, cultural studies, film and media studies, women's studies [...and etc])" (Prasad, 2003, p. 7). Postcolonialism, fundamentally, seeks to "critique and analyse the complex and multifaceted dynamics of modern Western colonialism" (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008, p. 91).

Edward Said's (1979) *Orientalism* is a salient reference point in the studies of many postcolonial scholars such as Young (2016), Loomba (2015), Johnson, et al. (2013), McLeod (2000), Harding (1998). While postcolonialism explores the political, social, and cultural effects of decolonisation, continuing the anti-colonial challenge to Western dominance, *Orientalism's* focus is the representation of the Orient/East by the imperial power of the Occident/West. I acknowledge there are many criticisms of the binary opposition of the terms East/Orient and West/Occident in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (see Irwin, 2006; Jasanoff, 2006; Lewis, 1982). For example, Bernard Lewis (1982) asserts that Said fails to take into account the historical hybridity of the regions across these categories. However, using these terms enables me to also define realities that do not depend upon these categories, such as diasporic identities and the process of cultural hybridisation.

Colonial discourses have been greatly influential in the development of postcolonialism. Generally, they investigate the ways in which “representations and modes of perceptions” are employed as armaments of colonial power to keep colonised societies submissive to colonial rules (McLeod, 2000, p. 17). A significantly influential theory in regard to the studies of postcolonialism is Said’s Orientalism. He explores the ways in which “colonialism institutionally created a wide-ranging body of knowledge which supported the divisive practice of colonial government and settlement” (McLeod, 2000, p. 21). In Orientalist discourses, Western producers portray the Occidentals as superior, modern, and developed, while the Orient is associated with backwardness, inferiority, and obsolescence in relation to the West (Prasad, 2006; Said, 1979), “and thus in need of supervision and guidance to become civilized and modern” (Golnaraghi & Mills, 2013, p. 160). Hence, discourses of colonisation are grounded in the binary positioning of a non-Western ‘other’ against a contrastive representation of the West (Golnaraghi & Mills, 2013; Said, 1979).

The use of postcolonial theory in analysing my research data might be viewed as controversial because Iran has never formally been colonised by the West. However, as Samuel Helfont²⁷ (2015) argues, in the structure of the Islamic regime of Iran and its politics, in which an authoritarian government has imposed itself on Iranian society, people face similar challenges as those in colonised societies in that they are struggling to move from a colonised state of being into a postcolonial situation (para. 6). In other words, while the Islamic regime has politically, socially, and culturally colonised Iran through religiously mandated rules, many in the society are struggling to surpass the colonised situation to achieve greater self-determination. Because the strengthening of Islamic elements in society, especially the imposition of the Islamic dress code/hejab for women, happened quite suddenly and relatively recently (only 40 years ago) the metaphor of postcoloniality does not apply with the same force as in a society that has suffered being colonized for a century or more. Nevertheless, I think the comparison is an interesting and productive one. Helfont further explains that

²⁷ Samuel Helfont is a Senior Fellow in the Foreign Policy Research Institute’s Program on the Middle East, and an Assistant Professor of Strategy and Policy at the Naval War College’s program at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA.

after the Islamic regime came to power, Ayatollah Khomeini ruled the country under Shiaism and suppressed both the socialists and nationalists. Helfont explains how contemporary Iran faces many issues similar to those in states that have emerged from colonial empires:

Islamic Iran, like post-colonial states, has championed what its supporters consider to be an authentic, indigenous political identity (in this case Persian Sha'ism) as an alternative to what they see as the colonial order. As such, Islamic Iran attempted to impose Persian Shi'ism on a heterogeneous society. In this process, it has marginalized other languages and restricted the rights of other religious groups (2015, para. 32).

While I think Helfont should have identified women as a group marginalised in the process of this particular postcolonial reaction, postcolonial theory is useful in this study in the analysis of the ongoing actions and reactions in Islamic political identity. This is because postcolonialism shapes my own practice and some of the representations of women in the art and cultural productions of the Iranian women artists in my research sample (see, for example, 5.3.5).

2.3.1 Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminism is derived from an oppositional response to a perceived disregard for gender issues in mainstream Western feminist attitudes in constructing a singular definition of gender and woman (Calas & Smircich, 1996; Dube, 2002; Golnaraghi & Mills, 2013). The most influential criticisms of Western feminist scholarship for its generalising, or its colonising, inclinations are Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1985) *Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism* and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (1988) *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*. Spivak asserts that "the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism" (Spivak, 1985, p. 243). She uses the term 'epistemic violence' to describe the harsh effects of a process of marginalizing subaltern and third-world female voices within western imperialist discourses/epistemic in which the colonial subject is constituted as 'other'. In this regard she states: "[if], in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (1988, p. 28).

Mohanty (1988) argues that the frequent representation of the ‘third world woman’ as repressed serves to bring into focus the ‘first world’ women’s assumption of freedom and the premise that western women are “secular, liberated, and have control over their own lives” (p. 81). Mohanty and Spivak are sceptical of the hegemonic positioning of women and gender issues by Western feminists who then apply their ideas to non-western women. I concur with their idea that postcolonial feminism provides a ground for a cross-cultural study of women in a multifaceted space. This is because postcolonial analyses mostly concentrate “on the complex subjectivities produced by intersections of gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc. in the context of specific First World/Third World relationships” (Calas & Smircich, 1996, p. 233).

‘First-world’ feminism has been criticised by postcolonial critics “due to the lack of attention paid to the problems suffered by women with links to countries with a history of colonialism” (McLeod, 2000, p. 181). In relation to Iran, it is important to take into consideration that the regulatory system of Iran and its influence on the articulation of women’s voices, their creative dialogue, and their female agency cannot easily be discussed through Western feminist discourses.

Therefore, in this research, I take on a postcolonial feminist approach with the object of offering a rationalisation for the ideological aspects of Iranian ethnic identities through the art production of my research subjects. My main focus is on postcoloniality as an influence on the representations of Iranian identities; for example, understanding of the ‘self’ as ‘other’ as a result of using Islamic ideological motifs, such as the veil, in representing Iranian identities. Through analysing my data, I intend to understand the extent to which postcoloniality informs the significations of the representations of identities, in particular, female subjects.

2.4 Contemporary Self-Orientalisation

As explained in the previous chapter (1.5.1), an important factor in studying the contemporary art of Iran, both inside Iran and in diaspora, is the subject of ethnicity, as the art practice of Iranian women artists in my sample often reflects ethnic aspects of identities. However, the ethnic representations of these artists embody forms of identities that are ‘othered’ outside Iran, especially in Euro-

American contexts; Neshat's works are exemplary of representing the 'self' as 'other' in the context of America. Mehrzad Boroujerdi (1996) argues that "all societies acquire their identities through juxtaposition to another" (p. 6); this is where the subject of difference arises with the dichotomous terms of 'self' and 'other'.

Arif Dirlik (1996) uses the term 'self-Orientalization' to refer to the construction of the Orient through the use of Orientalist discourses, not only by Westerners, but also by Oriental intellectuals who live in, or supply products for, the West, whether consciously or unconsciously. Lisa Lau (2009) uses the term 'Re-Orientalism' to discuss the production of South Asian diasporic writers:

Orientalism is no longer only the relationship of the dominance and representation of the Oriental by the non-Oriental or Occidental, but that this role appears to have been taken over (in part at least) by other Orientals, namely, the diasporic authors (p. 572).

If we exchange the word 'authors' for 'artists' in Lau's statement, we can easily apply the same statement to Iranian diasporic artists. Those artists who adopt an Orientalist mode in their practice enter in the process of self-Orientalisation; a process in which the representation of the Orient is dominated and distorted within the position of 'the other' (Lau, 2009, p. 571). By applying the term 'self-Orientalisation' to my analysis of the artworks, it can be said that some Iranian women artists endorse and conserve Orientalist representations; this contemporary self-Orientalisation 'perpetuates' and 'consolidates' the existing power relations between the West and the East (Meng, 2015, p. 91).

Self-Orientalising and self-exoticising strategies, whether used consciously or unconsciously, enable artists, both local and diasporic ones, to exhibit the kind of culture that, in Chow's (1995) words, "is at once subalternized and exoticized by the West" (p. 177). Therefore, by using this strategy, Iranian women artists reify the imaginary Orient popular in the Western art market; this seems to be the key to a secure spot in the Western art-scenes. Yulia Tikhonova (2010), a New York based art curator and critic, noted this tendency in relation to the *Iran Inside Out* exhibition in 2009 in New York City. About the art production of the new generation of Iranian artists, Tikhonova says:

In [the] context of booming interest towards Iranian art in the West, more than ever the artists from the Middle East are conscious of the expectation that the art market invested in them (p. 108).

She continues, Iranian artists “are eager to wear veil or beard and make their patterning even more esoteric to show that the West expected to see, and achieve some economic, political, or other benefits” (2009, p. 108). This is mostly represented by “the cliché subjects of calligraphy, religion, and war” (Tikhonova, 2010, p.109). Tikhonova also uses the term ‘ethnic marketing’ to define the art strategies which draw on ethnographical references that appeal to the Western art market.

An important point to be considered in this study concerns the regulatory sites of art productions. Unlike diasporic artists, those in Iran are limited by a more constrained visual language because of the government’s interference in public visual representations; therefore, censorship influences the artists’ choice of visual language in portraying the content of their works. While diasporic artists are more likely to use re-Orientalising/self-Orientalising strategies in a conscious way, artists in Iran might unconsciously manage to become ‘re-Orientalisers’; in other words, artists might be ‘interpellated’²⁸ (Althusser, 1968) into an Orientalist structure and portray ideological representations without strategic purposes, because these representations are dominant in the culture.

Althusser (1968) describes ideology and ideological state apparatuses, as a “[r]epresentation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (cited in Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 693). In this sense, ideology is in the first place institutional, that is a product of the workings of a particular set of social processes, and later on to be considered a matter of consciousness. For example, according to my data from the diasporic Iranian focus-group discussions, the sign of the chador implies the salience of their ethnic nationality, so, even if not ardent Muslim themselves, they become subject to Islam. According to Althusser, the structure of ideology involves “the interpellation of ‘individuals’ as subjects” and “their subjection to the Subject”.

28 Louis Althusser (1968) uses the term interpellation to describe the process by which ideology constitutes the subject and makes individuals caught up in the dominant ideologies.

These led to “the mutual recognition of subjects and subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself; and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly [...]” (ibid, p. 701). In regard to the later but linked concept of performativity of gender, Butler (1988) states: “[...] gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again” (p. 526). In other words, through the act of interpellation a subject comes into social existence. In this sense, interpellation is a performative speech act; it is then possible to say that the link between Butler’s notion of gender performativity and Althusser’s interpellation in relation to the representations of Iranian women’s identities is the realm in which cultural producers/artists feel able and constrained to perform. Being conscious of the regulatory structure can compel local Iranian artists to use elements in their works compliant with the Islamic regime’s structure; therefore, even though such elements might be used by the artists strategically, they can be read in less critical ways as Orientalist or ideological. In other words, the practices of artists, due to the limited visual vocabulary permitted to them, are pulled into/interpellated by dominant ideologies.

However, while artists can use Islamic ideological elements in ways that are complicit with Orientalist discourse, they can also use these elements in a critical or subversive way, and some of the artists in my sample may be using these familiar symbols somewhat subversively. The analysis of the visual data in this research will provide an understanding of how I think such elements have been used in the practice of the contemporary Iranian visual artists in my research sample. My point here is not to condemn the ways in which artists essentialise their works, but, as a diasporic person, I intend to develop grounds for the development of an innovative consciousness in employing resources that are part of Iranian cultural storehouse for art and cultural producers/ artists. In the practical part of my research, I have tried not to set my artworks within binaries in representing my ethnic identity and gender relations. I believe, the key for departing from such positional ground is to reflect on the subjectivity of ‘self’ in artists. As the subject of identification, artists can deploy strategies for distancing from interpellation, essentialisation, and self-exoticisation/Orientalisation. I intend

to add active dimensions to the representations of identities as my response to the popular passive/compliant aesthetics of ethnic representation of identities in the contemporary art of Iran.

2.5 Strategies of Representation of Women

The symbolic function of metaphors provides possibilities for a less restricted space, within the context of Iran, for artists' expressions. The surveillance of the Islamic regime over cultural productions (see Chapter One) in Iran affects aesthetic decisions of artists and their approach in art-making practices (Mostafavi, 2010, para. 8). Artists' consciousness of the fact that to be able to exhibit and sell in Iran, they have to perform within a restricted space, even against their personal will, leads to the construction of symbolic representations loaded with feelings of anger and frustration. But interestingly, even those artists living and working outside Iran seem to be drawn to the same space as those within the context of Iran.

In relation to the subject of women, the use of symbols is very common; this is where the process of negative stereotyping or "negative generalization" (Lippmann, 1965, p. 88) of Iranian women's identities evolves from a 'value-free process' into a 'value-laden' one (Berg, 2002, p. 14). In defining the rigid logic of stereotypes, Berg says "stereotyping is triggered by a reductive, all-or nothing logic, by which stereotypes place anyone identified as an out-group member into the stereotyped category, then assign the stereotypical traits to that individual" (p. 15). Relevantly, Bhabha (1983) notes that fixity is a key component "in the ideological construction of otherness" (p. 18). Also, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay *Can the subaltern speak?* (1988) uses the term 'strategic essentialism' to explain the use of certain stereotypical elements that different national, ethnic, or cultural groups employ to present themselves. "This is the idea that it is sometimes advantageous for them to temporarily 'essentialize' themselves and bring forward their group identity in a simplified way to achieve certain goals" (Banerji, 2013, p. 16).

In an exhibition held in Germany in 2004, entitled *Women in the Orient - Women in the West*, artists from Occidental and Oriental culture took themselves, their

local environment, or their direct habitat, as the starting point or alternatively, looked as observers at the outside of each other's culture. At the centre of all the works, though, is the female body. It is posed and photographed in the ways that show how social and religious norms shape women's identities in different places in the world.

The most obvious difference between Occidental and Oriental women in the representations below is how the gender identities are associated with fashion and appearance, which in the context of that exhibition means the presence or absence of veiling and unveiling. In the Ghadirian series below, the empty chador replaces human beings. The exhibition showed images of individual life, reflecting the diversity of female experience in their homelands. The most striking difference was provoked in the works by Oriental artist Shadi Ghadirian from Iran (Figure 2.7), and Occidental artist Elke Reinhuber, from Germany (Figure 2.8). Both artists in these two series of works represent women's roles in every-day's life by responding to their own culture,



Figure 2.7: Ghadirian's *Like Every Day*. 2002
(Source: Shadi Ghadirian's website)

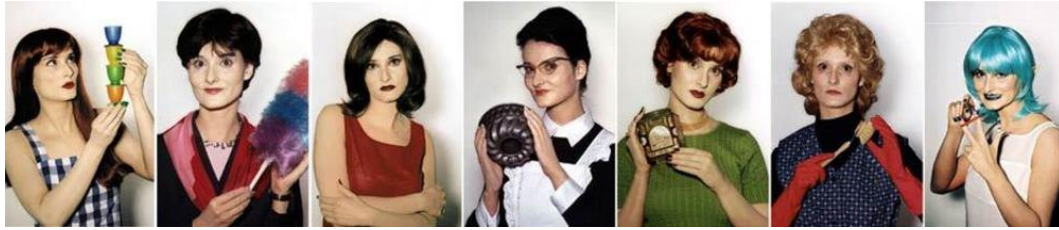


Figure 2.8: Elke Reinhuber, *Me and Myself*, 2000
(Source: Elke Reinhuber's website)

Reinhuber's series of self-portrait works, *Me and Myself* (2000) show her as the main character represented in seven different appearances with appurtenances for domestic tasks. She represents herself in an appropriate appearance for each role. Ghadirian's *Like Every Day* (2002) is a series of photographs in which women are shown totally covered in different floral chadors with household equipment replacing their faces. The chador, as the ever-repeating outfit in this series of works, represents a type of Muslim women's status locked up in the privacy of their house practising domestic tasks.

According to Lorenz (2010), the identity of individuals and collectives refers back to the "properties that make them different from each other in a particular frame of reference" (p. 24). In the aforementioned examples, the representation of Iranian women is framed by ideological references and objective aspects of identity; reinforcing this frame, consequently, leads to a gap between the identity of Iranian women and the rest of the world. When artists exhibit the 'identity' of Iranian women in the context of international cultural venues, the isolation and fixity emanating from the works is agitating to me, especially encountering events and exhibitions, which perpetuate a fixed marginalised, ethnic, ideological identity. They have generic titles such as *She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World* (2013), *Social Order, Women Photographers from Iran, India and Afghanistan in America* (2012), *Pictorial Representations from the Arab World and Iran in London* (2012), *Islamic Art Now1 & 2: Contemporary Art of the Middle East in America* (2015-2016), and *Unveiled: new art from the Middle East in London* (2009). Such categorisation of representations of identities involves the positioning of boundaries between nations and subsequently Iranian ethnicity remains a field of heterogeneity and differences.

2.6 Feminist Art in Action

Aligning myself with Gonzalez and Posner (2006), I believe that every art practice has a distinctive political character (p. 212), or as Grant Kester (1998) explains, aesthetics is tied to socio-political realms (p. 8). The relationship between art production and the artist or producer is in building or maintaining 'power' in social, cultural, political, and ideological concepts through their practice. Therefore, whether aware of it or not, through their art, artists "assume a social role" and consequently "become a particular kind of social agent" (Van Laar & Diepeveen, 1997, p. 52).

According to Ashcroft et al. (2007), agency is defined as "the ability to act or perform an action" (p. 6). In contemporary theory, an agent characteristically has instantaneous awareness of their actions and the goals which the action is intended at realising (Wilson & Shpall, 2012). Therefore, the concept of agency is related to the question of whether or not individuals are able to undertake actions autonomously and freely. Agency in feminist and postcolonial discourses is an important concept, as it makes a reference "to the ability of post-colonial subjects" to commence actions autonomously against the 'imperial power' (Ashcroft, et al, 2007, p. 6). About the relationship between agency and the use of language, Judith Butler (1995) writes:

To be constituted by language is to be produced within a given network of power/discourse which is open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergences with other such networks. "Agency" is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed (p. 135).

Considering the subject of representing identity as a discursive process by which it is reconstituted, agency can be found in the potential of the process of resignifying instituted by the use of signs/resources. According to Butler (1990), "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (p. 25). In my view, Butler is suggesting that there are possibilities of transforming those 'expressions' already constituted in relation to the subject of gender through the notion of active performativity of agency. Based on this

notion, I conceptualise agency as ‘dynamic’ and performative, where artists as cultural producers take up subjective identity positions for creating new trajectories for expressing gendered identity.

The socio-cultural notion of construction of identity is important in its dynamic interface between the realms of the social and the personal, and its movement beyond notions of personality. In this research, I argue that a performative view of identity can support dynamic conceptualisations of representation through the reflexivity of an autoethnographic approach which allows reflecting on ‘self’.

This research project is then, informed by the conceptualisation of feminism in relation to artists’ productions as referring to the process in which expressions of gender is constituted by the notions of gender performativity and agency (Butler, 1990- 1995).

From nearly four decades ago, since Lippard’s consideration of critical objectives and active forms of art, “the aesthetic and social value of politically oriented art has remained active” (Agerstoun & Auther, 2007, p. vii). According to Mullin (2003), activist art is political in two aspects; it explores both political topics, and public participation in the areas of politics and reception (p. 191). In engaging the audience, activist artists seek “to see art as a mutually stimulating dialogue, rather than as a specialized lesson in beauty or ideology coming from the top down” (Lippard, 1984, p. 343). Although it is very difficult to measure the impact of such works on viewers, the artists aim towards sparking a dialogue through developing a creative process “to advance ideas and elicit a thoughtful response” (Mathews, 1995, p. 186).

Since the beginning of feminist activist art in 1970s, a wide range of issues related to gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity and their connection with cultural and socio-political ways of oppression has been raised through artists’ practices (Agerstoun, 2007, p. vii). Many contemporary feminist art theorists (such as Felski, 1995; Marcus 1992; Rich, 1990) have acknowledged that good feminist artworks are not defined by any specific characteristics or styles. However, Mullin (2003) argues that good feminist works are those which reflect the subjects of “sex and gender and work toward potentially progressive change” and also

“expose gendered stereotypes and gender expectations”, “envision alternatives to sexist social practices” (p. 191).

I agree with Mullin that constructive feminist art in its active form is critical, constructive, and progressive. By ‘critical’ I mean seeking to reveal causal ideologies or existing formations which have negative effects on women’s lives; by ‘constructive’ I mean approaching the subject of identity by exploring alternative positions and outcomes through their works; by ‘progressive’ I mean believing in the common ground of feminist doctrines, which is for women to live in a world devoid of ‘sexism’, ‘racism’, ‘oppression’, inequality, and hoping for equality and inclusiveness in human lives (Hooks, 2014, p. xii). Therefore, I study gendered representation of identity by exploring and identifying whether, or to what extent, the art and cultural practices and insights of my research subjects are critical, constructive, and progressive in relation to female gender.

The aesthetic decisions of my participant artists reflect interactive encounters with socio-political concerns from the post-revolution time up to now, especially in relation to female subjects. In this regard, Andrea D. Fitzpatrick (2013), by exemplifying the images of the *Women of Allah* series by Shirin Neshat as ‘postcolonial allegories’, says “what I perceive as the allegorical turn in recent Iranian art is a method for artists to “speak” about polemical issues in Iran in ways that allow more safety but equally poetic, multifaceted and far-reaching result” (p.158). Fitzpatrick’s use of the word “allegorical” is synonymous with the cluster of terms “symbolic”, “polysemantic” and “multiplex” (Fineman, 1980, p. 54), which means that the artist encodes the message she wishes to communicate by avoiding direct critical signs/language, which have the potential to entangle the artist with the regime’s authorities. However, using an allegorical strategy in the case of Neshat’s works did not help and she was banned from going back to Iran in 1996 because of the political content of her works that associated the Islamic identity with violence and fanaticism (see Gerges, 2017; Holman, 2013; Holden, 2010). Therefore, I argue that allegorical representations due to their symbolic/metaphorical language, can be both multifaceted in the decoding process, and be illative depending on their political motifs. As some of my research subjects have used symbolic language in their works, in this research I

aim to understand the ways in which allegorical modes of representation enable artists to communicate their socio-political concerns.

Lippard (1984) argues that most of the time political art is related to the liberating achievements of artists struggling against the oppressive impulses of the governing system in a society. Regarding the importance of the ‘self’ as a particular conductor of a society’s attitude and values through any media, Shani Orgad (2012) states that “the self has become a principle prism through which the other, the nation, possible lives and the world are explained, understood and imagined” (p: 180). While I believe artists’ aspirations in representing ‘the self’ and their messages might be similar at their core, the outcome of the visual representations in the process of decoding differs. Due to the use of certain modes and strategies (such as a melancholic mode) and motifs (such as Islamic ideological signs), I have observed that sometimes the representations can carry fewer subtleties²⁹ in subjectivity than what the artists intend to convey to viewers. Therefore, through this autoethnographic study, I attempt to reallocate and redistribute symbolic socio-cultural references conceptually through informative narratives of lived experiences, in order to make an affirmative shift from what I perceive as the aesthetics of a passive resistance to an active one. In this manner, my body of artworks constitutes an attempt to blur the restrictions set up by the governing system of the Iranian society and employ strategies to engage the real world with a dynamic image of subjectivity.

2.6.1 Feminist and Political responses

The issues of power, status, and control over representation have been central for contemporary feminist artists in the West too. Whitney Chadwick (1996) explains that as a result of the disconnection between women artists and society from the Renaissance era onwards, Western contemporary women artists have been trying to find ways in which to overcome their historical position as ‘Other’ in the male dominant sphere of art. Over the last 50 years, women artists have used different strategies for creating a space in which women artists have their own visual language and ways of expression (Chadwick, 1996). For example, the American

²⁹ I acknowledge the possibility that I may not be fully aware of some of the subtleties in my participant artists; therefore, they could also be missed in my interpretations of their artworks.

female artist, Judy Chicago, conscious of the goals of feminism in the 1970s, created ‘a women-centred iconography and lexicon applicable to art’ (Figure 2.9), to represent “women’s essence, experiences, and aesthetics” (DeBiaso, 2012, p. 1).



Figure 2.9: Judy Chicago, *Female Rejection Drawing*. (*Rejection Quintet* series), 1974.

Chicago, by using minimal abstractions, associated her works with female anatomy to investigate female subjectivity and “celebrate female knowledge and experience” (Chadwick, 1996, p. 358). The British artist Sylvia Sleigh came to prominence as a feminist artist in the 1970s (Grimes, 2010), by presenting the nude figure of a man, posed as a reclining Venus or odalisque (Figure 2.10), thereby “reversing the history in which men contemplate the naked body of women” (Chadwick, 1996, p. 370).

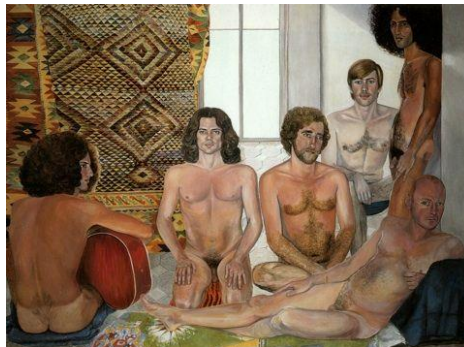


Figure 2.10: Sylvia Sleigh, *At the Turkish Bath*, 1976

Jenny Holzer, a feminist conceptual postmodern artist, recognised art as a form of information travelling from an individual channel towards the society, or the world in a larger scale. In a series of text installations, Holzer used phrases about different topics and plastered or projected them over buildings, walls, and people; her works communicate messages related to topics of violence, oppression, sexuality, feminism, power, war and death (Figure 2.11-2.14) with the aim of

sending her message across “as the authoritative voice of the mass culture” (Chadwick, 1996, p. 382).



Figure 2.11: Jenny Holzer, [Raise boys and girls the same way], *Taxi Project*, 1996



Figure 2.12: Jenny Holzer, [Abuse of power comes as no surprise], *Truisms* series, 1979-1983



Figure 2.13: Jenny Holzer, [Men don't protect you anymore], From *Truisms* series, 1979-1983



Figure 2.14: Jenny Holzer, [Protect me from what I want], From *Survival* Series, 1982

Cindy Sherman, in her works, sometimes employs signs associated with the male gender, in a response to media portrayals of women and how the value system of a society “reinforces cultural myths of power and possession” (Chadwick, 1996, p. 382). Her self-portrait photographs challenge the stability of gender identities constructed through Western media such as photography, fine art, and advertisements.



Untitled #352, 2000 *Untitled #420, 2004* *Untitled #458, 2007-2008*
Untitled #122, *#129, 1983* *Untitled #146, 1985* *Untitled #216, 1989*

Figure 2.15: Cindy Sherman, from different series of works between 1983-2008.

The use of dolls, fake body parts and heavy make up in Sherman’s works (Figure 2.15) creates a variety of strange, and sometimes obscene, images to attack the typical idea of beauty. Through defamiliarisation³⁰ of the female body, Sherman alters female characters as a means of interrupting cultural conventions of representing women depicted in the dominant media. Her works might be called ‘self-portraits’, in that Sherman only uses her own body to mock the fashion-beauty machine through the characters she represents; but, on the other hand, she rarely represents her own everyday identity. Instead, she shows a wide range of

³⁰ Defamiliarization as a strategy is used, similarly to detournement (Stubbs, 1996) for "interrupting conventional signifying systems by altering their familiar coding and re-routing their dominant or intended meanings" (Perrott, 2017, p. 529). Defamiliarizing enables the construction of new meanings by a "playful reproduction of cultural forms, liberated from the perceived constraints of individual consciousness" (ibid)

positioning of identities through the use of various references in a particular culture; a visual catalogue of all the relationships one can have with a culture's iconography. Through her art, Sherman reacts to the 'not-so-healthy role models' for women in the media and in art history (Black, 2016).

2.6.1.1 Asia-Pacific Deconstructing Stereotypes of Ethnic Identities

Artists from different regions and ethnicities around the world have also taken different routes to dispel and repudiate similar stereotypical representations of their culture. For instance, indigenous women of the Pacific Islands and New Zealand have had to contend with their representation as 'dusky maidens'³¹. In order to deconstruct ethnic stereotypes of sexualised Pacific people and the colonial fascination with Orientalist and exotic fantasies about Pacific Island women, New Zealand Samoan artist Sima Urale, one of an emerging group of diasporic Pacific screen artists, uses irony as a strategy. Her art production addresses issues of feminism, race, and social change in a new framework (Pearson, 2005, p. 188).

Urale's mock documentary *Velvet Dreams* (1999) examines the revival in kitsch art of portraying images of Asian and Pacific women on velvet, by searching for the artists who created them (Figure 2.16). Adopting 'discourses of sobriety', which are in quest of "the historical or natural world itself rather than offering openly imaginative representation of it", Urale's documentary film uses an ironic and humorous tone throughout, which concurrently critiques and commemorates the stereotypical images of sexualised and seductive Pacific women (Nichols, 1994, cited in Pearson, 2005, p. 186).



Figure 2.16: From *Velvet Dreams* Documentary, 1997

³¹ "Dusky Maiden stereotype highlights the role played by images in the subordination of Polynesian cultural and sexual difference" (Smith, 2008, p. 81).

Another example is Lisa Reihana, an indigenous artist of Māori descent who is based in New Zealand. Reihana's recent project, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (2015) reimagines the encounter of Europeans and Polynesians in the age of Empire (Figure 2.17).



Figure 2.17: Lisa Reihana, *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]*, 2015 - 2017, Biennale Arte 2017. (Source: John Hurrell, 2015)

In this artwork, she challenges historical / mythical stereotypes related to the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand and imperialism, especially around early cultural encounters between the indigenous Māori people and the British colonizers. She does this by depicting the Māori and Polynesian people in traditional performative gestures in the presence of Europeans. Against a background of an idealised Pacific landscape, represented by French-crafted wallpapers, Reihana represents both Europeans and people of Māori ethnicity in the land exchanging their cultural traditions in a manner that embodies the agency of the Māori, and acknowledges the complexity of cultural identities and intercultural contacts between those people (Batchen, et al., 2015).

These examples of Māori and Samoan artists undergoing “a process of fixing and reifying specific differences in relation to the ideal Western (white, and male) subject” (Smith, 2008, p. 81) illuminate the role of the artist in providing deconstructive twists in the discourses surrounding stereotypical representations. By reviewing the strategies of women artists in different parts of the world, I have sought liberating ways for approaching the subjects of gender, ethnicity, and political issues in the practical part of my study.

2.7 Iranian art in Diaspora: Ethnicity and Internationality

The original meaning of the term ‘diaspora’ is mostly associated with historical events involving the dispersal of the Jews (Butler, 2001, p. 189). According to Naficy (2001), “people in diaspora have an identity in their homeland before their departure, and their diasporic identity is constructed in resonance with their prior identity” (p. 14). However, the concept of diaspora, in a contemporary sense has expanded. According to Zlatko Skrbiš (2017):

Conceptualizing diaspora in a broader fashion reinforces the link between globalisation processes and rapid diaspora formation, and breaks with the past tradition, which perceived diasporas as a consequence of necessarily traumatic and massive [internal] uprootings. The formation of modern diasporas is not necessarily linked to such developments but could be seen as a product of a combination of economic, cultural and/or political factors (p. 5).

The benefit of broadening the scope of diaspora in this way is a shift, which takes the concept away from connotations of exile and victimhood and directs it to a position of agency. William Safran (1991) explains that members of a diaspora retain collective memories of ‘their original homeland’; that “they idealized their ‘ancestral home’, were committed to the restoration of ‘the original homeland’ and continued in various ways to ‘relate to that homeland” (cited in Parladir & Özkan, 2014, p. 107). The connection between diasporic people and their homeland is outlined by Steven Vertovec (1999) in relation to three general meanings of diaspora:

- i. Diaspora as a social form, which refers to the traditional interests of economics, sociology, and political sciences.
- ii. Diaspora as a type of consciousness, which emphasizes “describing a variety of experience, a state of mind and a sense of identity” (Vertovec, 1999, p. 8).
- iii. Diaspora as a mode of cultural production, which is usually conveyed in discussions of globalization, [...] “is described as involving the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena” (Vertovec, 1999, p. 19).

In this research, the focus is mostly on the second and third meanings of diaspora: The second meaning is related to this study in three ways: some of the artworks in my research sample are created by artists in diaspora; later, diasporic Iranian members engage in a focus-group discussion interpreting those artworks; and my own practice is that of a diasporic Iranian woman. The third meaning of diaspora as a mode of cultural production is used in this research in order to discuss the production of identities in the artworks of my research sample, as they “produce and reproduce themselves anew, through transformation and differences” (Hall, 1990, p. 235).

The chief scholars in the field of diaspora studies, including Bhabha (1994), Hall (1990, 1991), and Gilroy (1997), have accentuated the significance and power of trans-cultural/hybrid cultural identities as a means for challenging or subverting fixed / stereotypical, essentialised representations of identities (see 2.7.1). In this study, the concept of diaspora is discussed in relation to the formation of identity through the art practice of the artists in my research sample who work outside Iran. The aesthetics of diaspora, in the artworks of these artists, have the subject of ethnicity at their centre, highlighting the question of culture, and identity.

Following on from Hall (1991, 1998), I am concerned with the representations of cultural identity created through the works of artists and intellectuals. Hall underlines the necessity of accommodating the existence of new artistic hybrids in the creations of diasporic artists. In Hall’s words (1998): “We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity, without acknowledging its other side” (p. 225). However, throughout this study I argue that the connection of cultural identity and its positioning through diasporic artists’ works are often “subject-ed in the dominant system of representation” which contains Islamic ideological motifs (Hall, 1998, p. 225). As cultural identities undergo constant transformation and “are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall, 1998, p. 225), I argue that diaspora is a space offering, not only possibilities for hybrid artistic depiction of identity, but also with contingencies for resisting the cliché representation of the subject of Iranian identity and its reinforced relation to Islamic ideology. Avtar Brah (1996), in this sense, says:

The word diaspora often evokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure (p.193).

Therefore, the emphasis in my research, particularly on the practice of art-making, is on ‘potential’ and ‘process’, and by extension, on destabilising the existing power structure reflected in the art and cultural productions of the diasporic artists of my sample. Ang (2005) formulates this point best, by explaining:

Since diasporas are fundamentally and inevitably transnational in their scope, always linking the local and the global, the here and the there, past and present, they have the potential to unsettle static, essentialist conception of “national culture” or “national identity” with origins firmly rooted in fixed geography and common history. [...] A critical cultural politics of diaspora should privilege neither host country nor (real or imaginary) homeland, but precisely keep a *creative* tension between “where you’re from” and “where you’re at”. I emphasise creative here to foreground the multiperspectival productivity of that position of in-between-ness (p. 34-35).

This formulation of diaspora as a state which can keep people from settling into fixed forms of identity, combined with the concepts of ‘hybridity’ and ‘the third space’ (Bhabha, 2004), is useful for analysing the artworks of my research subjects outside Iran, and for me to engage with the characteristics of some of my own artworks.

The use of these notions, then, is, firstly, to discuss how the participating artists’ artworks represent the issues they deal with, and consequently to relate their encodings to the ways in which the viewers in the focus-group discussions (viewers located in both Western and diasporic contexts) interpret these issues. Secondly, in the process of my art-making this notion will influence my thinking and my art-making practice. To apply it to my own creative practice, I employ ‘autoethnography’ as a transformative methodology, which is a kind of self-narrative form of research in which the cultural and the personal are connected (Duarte, 2007; Dyson, 2007; Eldridge, 2012; Mizzi, 2010; Starr, 2010). Dutta and Basu (2013) conceptualize how “autoethnography intersects with the idea of

positionality in the context of postcolonial scholarship” as a means of reflecting on personal “reflexivity” and “positionality” (p. 143) for creating “[a] fractious ideology of imagining the possibilities of listening to the subaltern - her/his silences and interjections, her/his theories and struggles” (p. 160). Aligning myself with Dutta and Basu, as a diasporic scholar, I believe that the use of an autoethnographic approach in this research enables me to critically engage with the notions of identity, ethnicity, and culture, both in theory and practice. The use of this approach is further discussed in the next chapter (see 3.2.1).

2.7.1 Cultural Hybridity and Diaspora-isation

‘Hybridity’, as a notion that initiated from colonial discourses, is conceptualised as a strategy of resistance of colonised people to colonial rules. Homi K. Bhabha (1996) describes the term “hybrid” as “engendering a new speech act” (p. 58). This point refers to questions concerning different subject positions in the artistic productions by the diasporic artists in my sample. Hall’s notion of “new ethnicities” (1996) is also aligned with the overlapping concept of hybridity; “[...] the process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and ‘cut-and-mix’—in short, the process of cultural diaspora-ization” (p. 448).

Discourses of power seek to perpetuate certain forms of identity and sideline others by enforcing “a logic of binary oppositions” (McLeod, 2000, p. 225) and, therefore, challenge the emergence of new forms of identities. However, the transformative propensity of the “third-space” (Bhabha, 2004) provides potentiality for diasporic people to rethink identity in regard to fluidity and hybridity. According to Bhabha (1996), hybrid identities use cultural resources in order to negotiate competing versions of constructions of identities:

They [hybrid identities] deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community [...] that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole (p.58).

As indicated here, hybridity is related in important ways to the concept of diasporic identities, and the shared use of these concepts may provide a complementary framework from which to explore strategies of resistance to

colonial discourses in the art practice of my participant artists, particularly those in diaspora.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has provided a theoretical framework for the following chapters. I reviewed the relevant theoretical perspectives, in order to outline how these theories are related to the practice of art making by the Iranian women artists participating in this research. In this chapter, I have identified how the art production of the women artists of my sample have been represented and deployed within theory.

I also demonstrated how some ideas and concepts are interwoven in a shared quest to understand how the constructions of identities are shaped in the practice of Iranian women artists. In addition, I discussed the analytical gaps that I perceive exist within literature concerning the discussion of the contemporary art of Iran. I introduced and considered research fields and theoretical perspectives, which shape the underlying infrastructure for this research project, each also linked to the foundational theorists' key ideas. The next chapter will discuss the methodological aspects of this research, which provides an outline of data collection, research sample groups and the data analysis process.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology and methods used to address the research problems and questions outlined in the previous chapters. As stated previously, this qualitative study is autoethnographic in nature and has a creative practical component to it. In qualitative research, depending on the research objective, data can be collected in different forms. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005):

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experiences; introspection; life story; interviews; artefacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual lives (p. 4).

As Denzin and Lincoln pointed out, qualitative research is a reliable method for investigating certain phenomena due to the possibility of the use of various types of data. This study takes an exploratory, qualitative research approach as the most appropriate method of inquiry for the contextual part of the research. The purpose of this research project is: To explore ways to associate the representation of female identities with dynamic aspects of subjectivity. This is done firstly by investigating the construction of identities through the practices of Iranian women artists, both inside and outside Iran's regulatory system and secondly through my own practice of art-making in relation to different subjects emerging from the research data.

In this chapter, I will first explain the structure of this study as practice-led research through the use of a critical reflective lens of autoethnography. Second, I will re-present the key research question of this thesis, together with a number of focus questions, which highlight different aspects of the key question. Third, the research sample will be fully explained, which includes a sample selection, and a data collection method. Fourth, I will discuss ethical considerations in relation to this research project. Finally, I will explain the methods of analysing data, which includes an explanation of different processes of art-making of the contemporary

Iranian women artists through the Circuit of Culture model, including visual social semiotics as a tool for analysing the artworks of my research participants.

3.2 Practice-Led Method

Practice-led research (PLR) was formally recognised as a method for contributing to knowledge in academia in the mid-1990s (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010). While a traditional PhD is a written thesis of 80 to 100 thousand words in a body of research (Hoddell et al., 2002), a PLR in art and design reduces the word count as a means of balancing the relationship between the theoretical and practical parts of research. According to Graeme Sullivan (2010), “art-based educational research has a direct lineage to qualitative research traditions [...] with a commitment to the critical study of culture in all its socio-political and multimedia forms” (p. xi). My research project is a PhD project with Creative Practice Component³² (Appendix 1), which is described by Ings (2015) as a journey “into both self and the realm of new knowing, finding the voice[s] for a text” that genuinely lead the practice (p. 1281).

It seems that in academia the term ‘practice-led research’ is largely affiliated with the term ‘practice-based research’. Many scholars use these terms synonymously (see Smith & Dean, 2009 & Yammouni, 2014) “to characterise the way in which practice can result in research insights, such as those that arise out of making a creative work and/or in the documentation and theorisation of that work” (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 2). However, some researchers such as Nimkulrat (2007), Candy (2006), and Coumans (2003) delineate the nuanced distinctions between ‘practice-

³² ‘A PhD which includes a creative practice component is an alternative to the traditional PhD by single ‘unpublished’ thesis document. This model is an option for students who intend to integrate a creative practice component such as a music or dance performance, composition, film or literary production, creative written work, exhibition or design, with a thesis. The PhD with a creative practice component involves both producing new and original works in the candidate’s chosen medium/media, and engaging in critical reflection, examination, and analysis of both their own processes of creative production in the chosen field and the wider social, cultural, theoretical and conceptual contexts in which this occurs. As with all types of academic research, the PhD with a creative practice component is original, speculative and systematically pursues new knowledge. However, while the outcomes of research with creative practice can mirror the range of outcomes found in many different academic disciplines, it is the presentation of those outcomes that differentiates creative practice research from other approaches’ (University of Waikato, n.d.)

based' and 'practice-led' research, which I agree with. There are two important differences between practice-based and Practice-led research:

First, the difference is drawn on the nature of art/design practice. Practice in practice-based research can be carried out freely for its own sake in order to produce artefacts. [...] On the contrary, practice in practice-led research is conscious exploration with the knowledge involved in the making of artefacts. Second, the difference is in the roles of practitioner and researcher. In practice-based research, the practitioner's role may be more dominant than the researcher's role. The emphasis seems to be on practice, since a practitioner-researcher carries out her research solely based on her own practice. In practice-led research, the two roles appear to be equally important, because research becomes an intertwined part of practice (Nimkulrat, 2007, p. 2).

Aligned with this explanation, my intention in pursuing practice-led research is to create a body of work as a form of contribution to knowledge preceded by the methodological, theoretical, practical, and political aspects surrounding the research. Smith and Dean (2009) also explain the term PLR as a development of the practice of creative researchers, "partly for political purposes within higher education, research and other environments, to explain, justify and promote their activities, and to argue [...] that they are as important to the generation of knowledge as more theoretically, critically or empirically based research methods" (p. 2).

About the process of creative visual responses to research problems Sullivan (2010) explains:

By visualizing ways and means to think, reflect, enact, and create, new possibilities for investigating questions and problems are revealed. The outcomes may apply existing knowledge in new ways, adapt past practices for alternative uses, change perspectives and positions, or create entirely new ways of seeing and understanding (p. 193).

PLR is, then, based on the concept of knowledge and learning about the research topic (Rutten, 2016, Sullivan, 2010; Smith & Dean, 2009; Busch, 2009). In this process, the analysis of data based on the conceptual/theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two, influence my creative practice in art-making process. As

the issues and problems arise from the critical context, a range of ideas form as responses to the problems and questions. In other words, the research moves between theory and practice, as they continuously feed each other.

3.2.1 Practice of Subjectivity - Autoethnography

PLR, which is also addressed as ‘reflective practice’ by Rutten (2016, p. 299), equally emphasizes the significant role of the ‘critical process’, the ‘artist’, and the ‘creative product’ (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48). Rutten (2016) and Rutten et al. (2010) relate the notion of ‘reflexivity’ and the role of the practitioner in reflective practice projects to the relevance of the concept of ‘praxis’, “which is the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Paolo Freire, cited in Rutten, 2016, p. 299). In this light, self-reflexivity, in the practice of art-making, allows the artist to reflect upon her/his personal experiences as a central element in a research project. Welby Ings (2014) recognizes ‘reflexivity’ as an advantage of autobiographic inquiries. He explains:

[A]utobiographic inquiries are capable of engaging the researcher in very high levels of reflexivity. This dynamic is important because it locates the designer at the core of the issue being studied, and emphasises throughout the candidate’s role as both a researcher and the subject of the investigation (p. 678).

The central position of self-reflexivity during the investigation of certain phenomena in creative studies “can also result in the empowerment of marginalised voices” (Ings, 2014, p. 678). According to Baker (2011), the goal of understanding PLR, critical engagement and subjectivity as reciprocally reliant practices is:

[...] to explore the tensions or cohesions between what one *does* and who one *is* – that is, to breach the gaps between creative and critical research and writing on one hand and subjectivity or identity on the other - and to explore how subjectivities inform engagement, participation and consumption in the creative industries without reinforcing the notion of a stable, unified subject or self (p. 44).

In connection with the emphasis on ‘subjectivity’, both in relation to the artist’s engagement with the critical phase and to the creative productions,

autoethnography is the appropriate methodological framework for this research. Autoethnography, which is ‘initially subjective’ (Custer, 2014, p. 8), in the practical phase “seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 1). The individual role of the practitioner, then, in autoethnographical practices is pivotal in the field of visual art. The central role of the researcher (artist) has a few advantages which include: having “access into learners’ [readers’] private worlds and provide rich data”; contributing to ‘others’ lives by making them reflect on and empathise with the narratives presented”; allowing “the researcher to write first person accounts which enable his or her voice to be heard, and thus provide him or her with a transition from being an outsider to an insider in the research” (Mendez, 2013, p. 282).

Mäkelä (2007) explains that “in the 1980s, social scientist Donald Schön stressed the role of the practitioner, whose understanding and knowledge from a particular field corresponds to a perspective situated within the process of praxis” (p. 158). The role of praxis in PLR is described as ‘essential’, because the practical part is considered as the “driving force behind the research and in certain modes of practice also the creator of ideas” (Mäkelä & Routarinne 2006, p. 22). Furthermore, according to Ings (2014), the combination of the ‘personal’ and ‘scholarly’ aspects of life of researchers in autoethnographic inquiries operates at three levels:

First, they are a contribution to the academy through a demonstration of scholarship. Second, they are artistic works that seek to advance human understanding by linking the self with a social context, and third, they are a politically positioned form of intellectual activism (p. 683).

Ings’s statement highlights the position of autoethnographic researchers as informed subjective agents for exploring ways to approach complex problems. “Autoethnography is a creative process [...] Creativity and innovation that inspires change, transformation, and revolution offers multiple ways of seeing the world” (Custer, 2014, p. 6-7). On this basis, this methodology in practice can illuminate a wider horizon of the questions of identity through representational practices by critically reflecting the personal experiences that have constructed my identity.

This subjective praxis, therefore, enables me to actively participate in the dialogue between the verbal and visual aspects of this research. Mariza Mendez (2013) also mentions that this approach facilitates “the ease of access to data since the researcher calls on his or her own experiences as the source from which to investigate a particular phenomenon” (p. 282). This can be another advantage of autoethnographical works; however, she states that this benefit can limit the conclusions due to subscribing analysis to a personal narrative. Bochner and Ellis (1996) deny this as a limitation by saying: “If culture circulates through all of us, how can autoethnography be free of connection to a world beyond the self?” (p. 24). The use of a comprehensive critical / theoretical framework in the process of analysing data also helps to overcome the aforementioned limitation in the case of this study.

3.3 Research Questions and Focus Questions

The main questions of this research project are:

- I. How are the representations of gendered identity in the practice of contemporary Iranian women artists constructed? And to what extent do their representations of identities engage with notions of transformation and dynamicity?
- II. How can creative practice help to reflect, enact, and create new possibilities for investigating the questions of identity through changing positions, perspectives, and strategies of representations to exhibit new aspects of ethnic subjectivity in the cosmopolitan context of New Zealand?

In order to explore these questions, firstly, I interviewed two groups of Iranian women artists: Domestic/local artists (based in Iran), and Diasporic (those working outside Iran). They gave me information about their motivations and practices, and then I asked each of them to provide me with an artwork which best represented the socio-political direction of their practice. Secondly, I analysed these artworks, and finally, I conducted three focus-group discussions in New Zealand about the artists' works. The key research questions navigate the major issues of this study and reflect on the practical process of my research project. My

main research questions are explored through investigating different sub-questions in four phases of data analysis, which are listed below:

a. From the artist interview data:

- i. What are the main influences on the art practice of Iranian women artists?
- ii. In what ways do restrictions on permitted visual language in Iran develop congruent types of visual language [in comparison to those of similar practitioners out of Iran] (How does context inform practice for both of these groups)?

b. From the artwork analysis:

- i. How have Iranian ethnic identities, reflected in visual artworks, been formed and represented?
- ii. What are the differences and similarities between the socio-political perspectives and aesthetic traits of Iranian women artists inside and outside of Iran, if any?
- iii. How are subjectivity and gender represented through the practices of the artists?

c. From the focus-group discussion data:

- i. How are meanings in relation to the representation of Iranian female ethnic identities constructed through the viewpoints of viewers located outside Iran?
- ii. What are the dominant discourses by which representations of Iranian women's identities are described by the viewers of the artworks of my research sample?

d. From the creative practice part of the research:

- i. Can I develop new ways, perspectives, and positions through my creative practice for expressing my subjectivity as a diasporic Iranian woman artist?

- ii. Can creative practice be a vehicle for visualising ways to create new possibilities for exploring questions of identity in artistic and cultural representations?
- iii. In what ways does working in the transnational context of Aotearoa New Zealand affect the ways that I, as the artist, use visual language?
- iv. In what ways has my creative practice challenged my pre-existing understandings about the representational strategies of Iranian women artists?

3.4 Research Sample

This qualitative study employs in-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions as the primary source of data, together with focus-group discussions as a secondary source of data.

3.4.1 Semi structured-interviews

According to Weerakkody (2009), “semi-structured interviews are more suitable when the researcher’s interest is limited to specific topic areas and they have some idea what they are looking for” (p. 167). As the research objectives and the chief topics addressed in this research are outlined clearly, this method was an appropriate one to adopt for data collection. The open-ended interview questions (see appendix 7) allowed the participants to articulate their ideas and experiences in relation to each question. The aim of doing interviews was to understand the social, cultural, and political positioning of each artist, and also, to gain some understanding of the representational strategies utilised by the artists. Other issues considered include: the means by which the artists became involved with the creative production, and their engagement with a range of influences that affect their practice.

One advantage of using a semi-structured method of interviewing in this study was that it allowed me to ‘include additional questions’ in order to ask the interviewee to elaborate the subject further in cases of ambiguity (Weerakkody, 2009, p. 168).

3.4.1.1 Conducting the Interviews

The main findings have emerged from my in-depth interviews with nine female artists. The artists occupy two groups (local, which indicates those who are based in Iran) and diasporic, which means those who are based outside Iran); six of them were based in Iran and three of them in other countries; all the participants are introduced in detail in Chapter Four. The reason for this division is to investigate any possible differences and similarities between the strategies that local and diasporic artists use in their practices/representations.

The participating artists in my research were selected on the basis that they are professional women artists and their representations of identities carry gendered and ethnic themes. I was interested in understanding how female artists think about and reflect upon the subject of identity from their personal perspectives and through their art-making practices embedded in socio-political contexts

In selecting my interviewees, I aimed to interview the most well-known women artists whose practice in art addressed Iranian ethnic identity. I was familiar with the popularity of some of my participant artists before searching the artists; for example, Shadi Ghadirian and Newsha Tavakolian in Iran, and Désirée Navab in diaspora. Therefore, I decided to contact them through their websites. I even considered interviewing Shirin Neshat because of her success in the international art scene; however, I could not find any contact information for her.

For finding other artists in my sample, I searched online for Iranian women artists who are actively practicing their art and contacted them through their websites. This is how I approached Soody Sharifi, Roxana Manouchehri, Simin Keramati, and Haleh Anvari. Yalda Moaiery and Farzaneh Khademian, however, were recommended to me by an Iranian male documentary photographer in Iran; I searched them online and by looking at their websites I noticed that they were actively producing series of photographs about Iranian lives and identities in relation to different subjects; therefore, I included them in my research sample.

The interviews were done via phone and online audio chat services such as *Skype* and *Viber* applications. Six of the artists are categorised as local/domestic (based

in Iran) and three are diasporic (based outside Iran). The local artists based in Iran, include: Shadi Ghadirian (photographer), Newsha Tavakolian (photographer), Haleh Anvari (photographer), Simin Keramati (mixed-media), Farzaneh Khademian (photographer), Yalda Moaiery (photographer). The diasporic artists are: Aphrodite Desiree Navab (photographer, based in America), Soody Sharifi (mixed-media, based in America), and Roxana Manouchehri (mixed-media, based in Ireland).

After contacting the artists and e-mailing them the information and consent forms (appendices 3 & 4) for participating in the research I arranged their preferred date and time; then I contacted them via their choice of media, including phone and online audio chat services such as *Skype* and *Viber* applications. Nine months after starting this research, I conducted the interviews with these artists between April and December 2015. The duration of the interviews was approximately two hours. The interviews were conducted in Persian with all the participants except for Navab and Anvari who preferred to speak in English because it was easier for them to express their thoughts in the English language.

3.4.1.2 Visual Data

At the end of each interview with an artist, I asked them to choose one of their artworks that best represents the current socio-political direction of their body of work. The reason I asked each artist to choose a work themselves as opposed to me selecting them was to avoid being biased in addressing the research question. The purposes for requesting these works were: firstly, for myself to analyse them, in order to investigate how these artworks represent identities in relation to the subjects of gender, politics, religion, ethnicity, and culture, which are dominant themes in the visual art and cultural productions of Iran. Secondly, to show the artworks to the focus-groups in New Zealand in pursuance of understanding how people with certain social backgrounds (see 3.4.2.1) will interpret the works.

3.4.2 Focus-group discussions

A small part of my research was to get information from New Zealand based respondents about the artworks of my research subjects, by conducting a series of focus-group discussions over the artworks of my participating artists. The

viewers' evaluation and interpretation (from both diasporic Iranian viewers and non-Iranian viewers) of the artworks was designed to help me identify elements and strategies which indicate the ideological restrictions in representations of the Iranian society, as well as the traits which have more possibilities to free Iranian ethnic identities from those restraints. The viewers' interpretations consequently have helped the development of my art-making practice in the process of thinking about the subjects and creatively representing the themes.

Focus-group discussions have been used in the social sciences as a method for generating new questions which could in turn be used to develop new quantitative strategies or to complement the more quantitative results of their research (Merton & Kendall, 1946; Madriz, 2000). Focus-groups³³ have been used historically by three waves of feminist scholar-activists, literacy activists, and Marxist researchers in order to raise the consciousness of oppressed people. With the influence of feminist research and increased movement towards qualitative research methods, focus-groups have now become very visible in different research related to social sciences and social constructive projects (Madriz, 2000; Munday, 2006). While sometimes used with visitors to museums and art galleries, focus-group research is rarely used in the visual arts (John, 2008) because choices in art-making are considered the realm of the individual artist. However, I have already made it clear that I consider both the social and subjective aspects of art-making to be important and thought it could be useful to see how viewers from different backgrounds interpreted the works. Moreover, one of my supervisors is an active audience researcher (see Hardy et al, 2011) and encouraged me to see what insights this method might provide.

3.4.2.1 Selecting the Samples

At this stage, my understanding is that “the meanings associated with any text are assumed to be generated through interaction with an audience” (Roscoe & Hight 2005, p. 230). Although each person interprets a text differently, these readings are often “shaped by the social circumstances and wider social contexts within

³³ Focus-group method has been used extensively by corporations, as a means of generating data about consumer preferences and behaviour. For this reason, there is also some critical discussion of the ethical validity of how this method has been used historically (Lunt, & Livingstone, 1996).

which a text is received” (Hight, 1997, p. 19). According to Wetherell & Potter, (1992), the social location of each person participating in any group determines her/his socio-cultural context in which that individual has shaped her/his social experiences. Therefore, in this phase of the study, employing different focus-groups from different socio-cultural contexts helped me to observe the similarities and differences of understandings held by people and how such understandings differ by different groups (Conradson, 2005). The reception study in this research involved three different focus-groups: Art experts³⁴, feminists, and diasporic Iranians. These focus-groups “identify the opinions and attitudes of interviewees, who are selected as a purposive sample from the target population” (Weerakkody, 2009, p. 186). The reasons for selection of these three groups are described as below:

Art expert group: to understand how people who are engaged in the art world interpret the visual language and the aesthetic of the works of the Iranian artist participating in this research.

Feminist group: to understand the role of discourses of feminism in the interpretations of Iranian women’s identity through the artworks’ representations.

Diasporic Iranian group: to identify how Iranian people relate to the depictions of Iranian identities, and the construction of meaning through the representation.

The participants in the three groups were drawn from students and staff of the University of Waikato; the only exception was that in the Iranian group discussion an ‘Iranian couple’ attended who did not belong to the university but were residents in Hamilton. I invited the members of the Iranian group through emails. The members of the feminist group, who were women, were invited to participate in the discussion through the feminist Facebook page³⁵; I messaged the administrator of the page and she published a post to announce that. The

³⁴ By ‘art experts’ here I mean participants who have a strong background in art and are actively involved in the art-world; this includes art curators, art critics, and art makers.

³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/feministsatwaikato/>

participants for the art expert group, who were artists, art curators and art critics, were introduced to me by my supervisor, and then I personally invited them through emails.

According to Drew et al. (2008) and Cohen et al. (2000), small sample sizes are adequate for qualitative research, as they can be as effective as large number of participants. The reason is that qualitative research seeks to understand a phenomenon thoroughly rather than simplifications based on large sample sizes (Patton, 2002). Therefore, this stage of study adopts a purposive small number of participants in order to allow an in depth understanding of the viewers' interpretations. The number of participants in Iranians, feminists, and art experts are respectively: Six, three and five.

3.4.2.2 Conducting the Focus-Group Discussions

The focus-group discussions took place between December 2015 and February 2016 at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. I acted as the observer and facilitator for all the sessions. Approximately three weeks before each focus-group discussion I emailed the information sheet and consent form to each participant (see appendices 5 & 6). I started the sessions by explaining that each slide of the PowerPoint was an artwork, and I asked everyone to express their thoughts and opinions about the artworks. Their interpretations of the works flowed as all participants contributed. As the facilitator, I responded to questions but did not give any opinions about the artworks. Each group was engaged in discussion for approximately an hour.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

According to Ritchie (2003) and Orb et al. (2000), studies involving qualitative research often raise ethical considerations. As the present study is mainly focused on qualitative data, to some level risk was inevitable. However, as Flick (2009) explains, "thinking about ethical dilemmas [...] should not prevent you from doing your research but should help you do it in a more reflective way and to take your participants' perspectives on a different level" (p. 43). The importance of the

issues related to the research ethics lead to finding solutions to any possible sensitivity in the study.

This research strictly complies with the University of Waikato's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and related activities Regulations (University of Waikato, 2008). Ethical approval was gained from the University of Waikato Ethics Committee before the research started (Appendix 2). In accordance with the university's guidelines, prior to data collection, all participants received copies of Information sheet and consent forms (see Appendices 3-6) to protect their rights. At the start of each interview, interviewees were given an opportunity to query and illuminate any issues related to the study and their participation.

The potential ethical dilemmas in this research involved subjects related to issues of politics, as the current regime in Iran does not tolerate oppositional opinions towards the authorities and their belief system. During my preparation for the interviews, I was conscious of the need to avoid any potential risks this study might cause to the interviewees. Therefore, all the stages were proceeded to reduce such risks. To avoid any risky conversations on sensitive political subjects I avoided questions which were directly related to the authorities.

3.6 Data Analysis Method

The study of art and cultural representations of Iranian women is a complex subject due to the multiple aspects of the art practice of the artists in my sample. As described in the previous chapter (see 2.2), the British cultural studies model of Circuit of Culture is ideal for this research because it enables me to explore and do justice to the complexity of this study. As the female artists in my sample are located in different contexts, inside and outside Iran, it is crucial to investigate the *representational* context where meaning is produced and furthermore, how *identity* is constructed in the processes of *production*, and *consumption*, as well as the social conduct of *regulation* in regard to the site and context of art productions.

The Circuit of Culture model, with its identification of the different sites and processes in which meanings are produced, is open enough to be applied to my art

practice as well as the data analysis. This model has been used by many scholars as an analytical approach in studying cultural subjects and productions (see Wolf & Tombleson, 2017; Ding & Thompson, 2013; Champ & Brooks, 2010; Han & Zhang, 2009).

Visual Social Semiotics (see 3.6.1.3), an analytical approach, in this study is utilised to engage with the significance of visual language, as the representational system, in the construction of meaning. This method of analysis has been used in the fields of visual language and representations by researchers, such as Tyrer (2012), Thurlow & Aiello (2007), Hunter (2015), and Bezemer & Mavers (2011).

3.6.1 Visual Analysis Method

To produce sociological knowledge, social semiotic analysis of the representations is crucial. While through the Circuit of Culture model, the context of visual art production is studied within different processes, *social semiotics* concentrates on “the syntactic relations between the elements of a visual text (e.g. people, objects, places, editing)” (Aiello, 2006, p. 99). *Visual Social Semiotic* methodology provides an explicit and descriptive framework for applying different critical theories to the visual analysis of the works in this study. This approach “is effective in bringing out hidden meanings” behind the representations by studying the action process, compositional, and conceptual aspects of representations (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 154).

Semiotics, or ‘the study of signs’, is used to investigate the ways in which language operates in the meaning making process and its ‘poetics’ (how language produces meaning) (Hall, 1997, p. 6). Roland Barthes first developed semiotics from linguistics to visual images to analyze the meanings attributed to them through aesthetic and ideological factors (Bouzida, 2014; Leeuwen, 2001). In a semiotic approach, representations are shaped by some forms of expression which are called *signifiers* and meanings, or content created by them are called *signifieds* (Curtin, n.d; Hall, 2006a; Rose, 2007; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001).

According to Aiello (2006), *social semiotics* is an extension of iconography; while “iconological analysis aims to understand what social conventions and ideological goals stand behind given visual motifs, social semiotics aims to systematically

reveal conventions in order to promote social changes” (p. 99). The critical aspect attached to a social semiotic methodological approach makes it a good analytical toolbox for this research for “taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning” (Rose, 2016, p. 106) and “goes on to ask how people use signs to construct the life of a community” (Lemke, 1990, p. 183).

Meanings are seen as social and cultural practices, therefore, they are greatly influenced “by existing cultural norms and power structures” (Aiello, 2006, p. 98). However, social semiotics primarily emphasizes the ways in which the presented visual strategies are circumfused throughout the texts to perform ideological ends. Social semiotics, in this research, can provide a useful explanation of the established structures of the visual artworks’ compositions and to investigate the ways in which they are used to construct meanings by the contemporary artists.

As this study is based on a visual context *visual social semiotics*, a sub-category of social semiotics, provides practical tools for a critical analysis of the artworks. This enables an examination of, firstly, how the meanings are conveyed through the representations; secondly, to explore the process in which the representations are communicated between the artists and the viewers in relation to their values, attitudes, and social, cultural, or political beliefs (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Harrison, 2003).

According to Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) social semiotics in visual analysis “involves the description of semiotic *resources*” (p. 134), which conceive of semiotic mechanism as codes, sets of rules in the process of meaning making through signs. While the term *sign/code* is the fundamental concept of semiotics, the use of the word *resource* in social semiotics is favoured, because “signs may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse ... and cannot exist, as such, without it” (Hodge & Kress, 1988, cited in Van Leeuwen, 2005, p.3-4); whereas semiotic resources have meaning potentials and are socially motivated based on their past uses. In Aiello’s words (2006), “the notion of *resource* accounts for change and power imbalance in the visual signification process, as defined by its two ends: representation (or, encoding) and interpretation (decoding)” (p. 90). Resource implies the active use of signs/codes and the

possibility of using these in a conscious way, in both the theoretical and practical parts of this research.

In the domain of representations of Iranian women artists, the semiotic resources are identified, explained and discussed through a systematic analysis of the works, which is framed by the model of Circuit of Culture, and by the use of other theories derived from gender, social, and political studies. Semiotic resources also allow me, as an artist, “to unlock doors for new semiotic possibilities, whether in the form of new resources...or of new uses of existing resources” (Van Leeuwen, & Jewitt, 2001, p. 140). Therefore, the active use of resources in visual social semiotics also contributes to my art making process and keeps me informed of new possibilities for using different resources through my art-making practice.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the methodological choices made in the present research. An exploratory qualitative methodology was adopted to illustrate the construction of identities through the practice of Iranian women artists, both inside and outside Iran’s regulatory system, and to explore ways to associate art practices with dynamic aspects of subjectivity through a creative practice component to this research.

The methods of collecting data were explained and multiple sets of qualitative data were collected from artists with their selected artwork, and from the focus-group discussions, in order to investigate the research questions. This chapter also introduced the methods of analysing the textual and visual data. Practice-led research, autoethnography, and social semiotics as the methodological framework for the process of my art-making were also explained along with ethical considerations. The next chapter provides the analysis of the data gathered from the interviews with the artist participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a discussion of extracts from semi-structured interviews with nine Iranian female artists whose works address questions of gendered identity. This chapter includes explanations about the ways in which artists in my sample outline the positioning of identities through their art-making practice in relation to the key themes that I found in the interview data. My objective here is to understand what the main influences are on my participant artists' productions, and the ways in which these artists engage with social, political, ethnic, and the female subjects.

The initial section provides a brief biography of each artist and an outline of her background, preferred media, and techniques. Based on the interviewees' responses to the interview questions, the second section outlines and explores the pre-eminent themes that emerged from the interview data. The social, cultural, and political positions of the artists are then explored. Other issues considered include the means by which the artists became involved with creative production, and their engagement with a range of influences that affect their practice.

4.2 Section One: Introducing the Research Participants

i. Local Artists

Shadi Ghadirian, born in 1974 in Tehran, is a well-known contemporary female photographer in Iran. She gained a degree in photography and started her art activities professionally from 1998. Her first set of works, the *Qajar* series was inspired by the historical images of women of the Qajar dynasty and the beginning of the influence of Western modernism in Iran in that period. In this series she explored the contrast between tradition and modernity in Iranian society (Amirsadeghi, 2009). Since 2000, she has been exhibiting her works in different countries, including Iran. Ghadirian's photographs are mostly staged and inspired by social subjects and events; women are ever-present elements in her works, whether literally or symbolically.

Newsha Tavakolian, born in Iran in 1981, is a self-taught photographer. She began her career as a professional photographer at the age of 16 by working in Tehran for the Iranian press at a women's daily newspaper named *Zan*. At 18 years of age, she was the youngest photographer to cover the 1999 student uprising which was a turning point for Iran's blossoming reformist movement and also for herself as a photojournalist. At the age of 19, based in Iran, she started to work with the New York agency Polaris Images and from there her international work began. During these years, she was doing freelance documentary photography, along with her work in photojournalism. Since 2001, Tavakolian's works have been exhibited in many of international exhibitions, galleries, and museums. She explains that in 2009, when the riots and chaos of the presidential election³⁶ happened, photojournalism became very challenging and all photographers had personal safety issues. At that time, Tavakolian started to work on two series of photographs in which she combined her photographic abilities with her artistic values. One of them is the *Listen* series which was exhibited in 2009. This series inaugurated a new path in her career because it placed more emphasis on artistic values. Tavakolian says that her type of work is situated in the middle of two worlds: photojournalism and art. In her words "I like to add creativity to the news and come up with an artistic combination of these two worlds" (2 July, 2015). She also states that, because of her own life experience as a woman, her works feature women to a greater degree than men (ibid).

Yalda Moaiery, born in 1981, is also a freelance photographer. She started her career as a photographer at the age of 19 with a social documentary series about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moaiery's works have been published in global publications such as *Time* magazine, *Newsweek*, *Le Monde*, *El Pais*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Mail on Sunday*, and *Le Figaro*. She explains "As anyone uses a tool to express him/herself, my medium is the camera. It is my passion to do this. I actually think what I do is somehow social awareness. The techniques that I use depend on the concept that I want to transfer through the picture" (25 May, 2015).

³⁶ The chaos related to the street demonstrations and the Green Movement, which was explained in the second chapter.

She further explains that the subjects of her works go back to her personal concerns with social themes, such as the phenomenon of war in different parts of the Middle East region and its effects on people's lives. Society, therefore, plays a central role in Moaiey's works. She also acknowledges that women are the main feature in her works, although representing women in her photographs often happens incidentally, and is not intentional (ibid).

Farzaneh Khademian was born in 1972 and again is a freelance photographer based in Iran. She started her photographic activities in 1995 when she entered Tehran's Azad University to study photography. She started exhibiting her works in 1997 when she was still a student. Her photojournalism career started in 1999 with a daily newspaper called *Sobh-e Emrouz* (Today's Morning) and continued with another reformist newspaper named *Aftab-e Emrouz* (Today's Sun). Both publications were run by intellectuals supporting the reformist political party. When these newspapers were banned by Iran's judiciary in 2000 Khademian began to work as a freelance photographer. She was a board member of the *Iranian Photojournalists Association* from 2000 to 2004. Her pictures are distributed by ABACA Press photo agency, and have appeared in publications like *Focus*, *Paris Match*, *Stern*, *View*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Le Figaro* magazines and *Daily Telegraph*, *La Presse*, *Liberation*, *L'Equipe*, *Il Giornale* and other daily newspapers. The majority of the subjects of Khademian's photographs are women, although she declares that representing women is not a particular project of hers.

Haleh Anvari was born in 1962 in Tehran and is a self-taught photographer who studied Politics and Philosophy in the England. She left before the Islamic revolution, when she was 12 years old, and went back to Iran at the age of 30. Anvari is categorised as a local artist, because she asserts that at the time of her initial art activities she was completely disconnected from the West (23 July, 2015). However, she now has multiple descriptions for herself; she describes herself as an exile, diasporic and also domestic. About this statement Anvari explains:

In 1976, I went to the UK and in 1979 I went back to Iran the summer after the revolution, and after that, because my father

was a journalist [he supported the opposition political party in his career as a journalist], he became a political refugee in the UK; I could not go back to Iran for 15 years. In age 30 I applied to go back to Iran and [after getting the permission of entering the country from the government] I lived there in Tehran for 20 years. Now it has been few years that I'm going to the UK and Iran regularly (23 July, 2015).

Anvari calls herself 'an accidental artist' because at the time she started making artworks in 2003 she was banned from working as a journalist in Iran. "Because I was very depressed for not being able to work so more than anything it [art practice] was therapeutic"; and it was obtaining a digital camera that enabled her to respond to her situation. In 2005 she presented her first series of artworks called *Chador Nama*. Anvari explains her motivations for becoming an artist:

When I was working as a fixer for foreign reporters, for any news about Iran that we were providing them, at the end of it we had to add a photo of an Iranian woman with the veil as they wanted us to; it was their indicator, marker or shorthand for them about Iran (23 July, 2015).

In journalism, a 'fixer' is a local journalist hired by a foreign correspondent to assist in arranging a story. Fixers mostly act as translators and guides, who have access to local interviews that otherwise, would not be accessible to the correspondent. Therefore, under the influence of her experience as a fixer, Anvari believes that her works are situated somewhere between journalism and art.

Simin Keramati, born in 1970, is a mixed-media artist. She holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Fine Arts from the Art University in Tehran, Iran. She started exhibiting her artworks in Iran in 1993 and since then Keramati's works have been exhibited in many countries, such as Germany, England, America, China, and Japan. She frequently travels to Canada and lives both in Iran and Canada. Keramati describes herself as a 'multi-disciplinary artist'. About this, she says "I do not limit myself to a certain technique. For any idea that crosses my mind I find the most expressive method and medium. For example, some ideas and concepts could be reflected better through performance and for some it is photography or painting" (28 June, 2018). She says that the technique she chooses to use depends on the message she wishes to communicate. Her works are often

self-portraits and her online archive shows that the majority are videos, rather than paintings and photographs.

ii. Diasporic Artists

Aphrodite Desiree Navab was born in 1971 in Iran. Her mother is Greek, and her father Iranian. Navab's family migrated to America at the time of the Islamic revolution when she was eight years old. She grew up trilingual and became interested in photography in her high school years. Navab had planned to be a doctor like her father, but her passion for photography led to her dropping out of the medical course at Harvard University to pursue her enthusiasm for photography and fine art. In 1999, she chose art over science and photography as her medium in order to connect with socio-political themes. Navab's sources of inspiration are Iranian and International artists and writers before her. She explains that Western women photographers like Cindy Sherman and Francesca Woodman who were feminist and political, were her early influences. Later on, when she discovered the works of Shirin Neshat, Navab says she was very moved by Neshat's works, describing them as very powerful. Navab also says that social, political, emotional, and intellectual events, and also her own life experiences as a multi-cultural person are sources of inspiration for her works. Her works have been featured in over one hundred exhibitions and are included in a number of permanent collections including: the Lowe Art Museum, the Harn Museum of Fine Arts, Casoria Contemporary Art Museum, Naples, Italy, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Arkansas State University. She lives and works in America now.

Soody Sharifi was born in Iran in 1955 and is now based in Houston. She left Iran in 1972 when she was 17 years old to study in America. She studied engineering initially but changed her educational path to photography as she had always been interested in it. In 1999, while doing research about Western feminism in relation to the portrayal of women in art history, Sharifi started her art activities. She then became particularly interested in photographing female subjects.

After 21 years, she went back to Iran for a trip as a photographer and found that social life in Iran had changed considerably, particularly women's appearance

since the dress code had been instituted and Sharifi had to follow it while she was there. She explains that she became interested in how, in Iran, the female body had become a politicised subject, and how the camera's lens resembles the male gaze in photographic images. She then started with self-portraits to explore the subject of hijab and women in the Iranian society; to do this she has continued to travel back to Iran. About hijab in Iran Sharifi maintains:

I now understand the issue of hijab is not a very important one to people in Iran, especially the young generation. I realised that [...] people had not changed; the government of course wants the society to conform to the Islamic dress code (1 December, 2015).

Sharifi mentioned in the interview that she became interested in showing the West/America that the narrow vision which the media is representing of Iranian lives is not accurate. She believes that the media shows Iran and Iranian society acting as if they support the government, especially through the images of Iranian women in their chador.

As a mixed-media artist, Sharifi has been exhibiting her works nationally and internationally since 2004 with some of her works being collected by the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, the Museum of Fine Arts Portland, and the Farjam Collection, United Arab Emirates. She primarily deals with the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in living between two cultures. In many of her series, she has explored notions of identity and what it means to participate in two cultures from both an outsider's and an insider's perspective. In relation to women subjects in her works, Sharifi maintains "women's issues in Iran are way more complex than [those of] men; therefore, women are the subjects of the majority of my works" (1 December, 2015). She is particularly interested in representing the identity of the young and teenage generation of Iranian society. Through her different series of works, she investigates this subject as it applies to Muslim youth in Iran and the US and their emerging concept of self-identity, specifically how they accommodate modernity and the exploration specific to youth within a very traditional society (see the analysis of her work in the next chapter).

Roxana Manouchehri was born in Iran in 1974. She has a Master's degree and a Bachelor's degree in Painting from the Art University, Tehran. While

Manouchehri was exhibiting her artworks inside and outside Iran, the first time she left Iran was in 2007, having been awarded a 6-month Asian Artists Fellowship program in Seoul, South Korea. There she exhibited her work in her *Feel the Expanse* series. She also had several other solo and group shows during her time in South Korea. In 2010, she received another award of a two months residency in Co. Offaly, Ireland, and in 2011, she was awarded a 4-week residency in Rauma, Finland.

Since 2010, Manouchehri has lived and worked in Dublin, Ireland. Her works include paintings, installation, photography and drawing. Her inspiration is derived from her environment, childhood memories, her hometown and Persian miniatures. The main ideas of her works address oppositional concepts such as modern and traditional, East and West, and new and old.

4.3 Section Two: Interview Data Analysis

A recurrent theme in the interviews with the artists was the emphasis the majority placed on having a ‘concept’ or a message encoded into their works which they hoped their viewers would grasp. The emphasis on the importance of concept/an encoded message is most strongly expressed in Anvari’s case where she mentions that in creating her photographic series she has “only 10% of technical abilities in photography aspects” and that the concepts mainly constitute her works (July 23, 2015). However, some of the other artists, such as Manouchehri, believe that concept and aesthetic techniques complement each other.

4.3.1 The Artists’ Engagement with Feminist Ideas

In Chapter Two, I discussed feminist artists’ engagement in different subjects concerning women in the visual arts, in which the artists deployed different media and different strategies. The history of feminist art shows that Euro-American women artists often represent gender in complex ways, and that the subject of identity is an ever-evolving concept (Chadwick, 1996; Heartney et al., 2013). Five of my participating artists’ works (Tavakolian, Moaiery, Keramati, Khademian, Anvari) represent a small range of identities that are mostly associated with either Islamic ideologies, or melancholic modes (see Chapter Six).

Since I intended to explore the representation of identity by women artists, I limited my selection of the artists to women. Consequently, the interview data also reveals that the artists in my sample tend to represent women more than men in their works. Some of them clearly make a deliberate choice to work with female subjects, for example: Ghadirian, Tavakolian, Navab and Keramati. However, for some others, depicting women has been described as an unintentional objective. For example, Manouchehri says this about the abundance of female representations in her works:

Except for my Persian women, I never thought about selecting women subjects. But while ago I was reading one of the criticisms about me and my works which was really interesting, it was saying that most of the figures in my works are women. Then I noticed that it was right, most of my works are women. I know that this has happened unconsciously, and I have no plan for it but I won't control myself not to do it. Because it is a part of me and comes from me (4 April, 2015)

Representing predominantly women in their works is what unites all the artists in this research, although, the ways in which they deal with women subjects differs. In their practice, they engage with a wide range of issues about gender and its relation to social, political, and cultural themes.

Most of my participating artists expressed the view that Iranian society since the Islamic revolution has gradually transformed from a dogmatic Islamic state to a more secular society. Nevertheless, some of my participating artists, such as Anvari, Khademian, and Moaiery, still represent Islamic ideological aspects of identities in relation to Iranian female subjects. In the artworks of Tavakolian and Keramati, both examples of video art, identities are represented in passive, victimised or regressive stances. However, passive and melancholic modes in visual art can possibly be read as a form of resistance; for example, Fitzpatrick (2013), drawing on Butler, explains a melancholic aesthetic tone in the representations of Iranian women artists as a stance of resistance against the dominant power in society. However, this form of resistance in representations positions female identity as a passive subject in power relations; therefore, my understanding is that the subjective identities become docile bodies facilitating the

reproduction of cultural orthodoxy (see my analysis of such strategies in the next chapter: 5.3.3 & 5.3.4).

While feminism is influenced by specific political and cultural movements, from a postcolonial point of view, the artists in my research sample are subjected to power and regulations in their choice of aesthetic language and therefore their capacities for autonomous expressions are inevitably limited. However, according to Foucault (1987) individuals are not necessarily restricted to running counter to power; instead they can alter power relationships in ways which increase their possibilities for action (in Fernet-betancourt, 1987, p. 114). Thus, power relations could be felt as flexible and changeable in the productions of women artists even in the regulatory systems of Iran. The domination of Islamic ideology in the regulatory system of Iran affects artists' visual production; therefore, can potentially influence the strategies for representing resistance against the Islamicisation of the female identity in the artworks in less effective ways. However, as a solution I refer to Foucault's suggestion for minimising the dominant power in different forms of practices in order to facilitate the exercise of freedom at individual/subjective levels. In the case of representations of identities, Iranian artists therefore, might be able to minimize the domination of regulatory power in their practice through their use of visual language in more subjective ways.

It might also be argued that the artists have engaged with the subjects from their personal stances and therefore their productions are subjective expressions. Foucault (1987) encourages individuals to establish new ways of using cultural forms which have the potential of empowering the vulnerable and ultimately, constructing challenging relations of power which do not solidify the domination of the state's power (in Fernet-betancourt, 1987). Aligned with Foucault, I believe that liberating visual ways of expression by artists from dominant power encoding is a feminist act. However, the use of Islamic religious codes is common in the artworks of my research participants in both categories, local and diasporic artists, which I believe maintains the power relations in favour of the Islamic regime.

While some of the local Iranian artists in my sample are ambiguous about their own positioning in relation to gender politics, the diasporic artists participating in

my research (Sharifi, Manouchehri, and Navab) clearly state that they are feminists. Navab and Sharifi describe their artworks as feminist practices, Navab says: “I have been a feminist since I first used language [my voice] to protest and say if something was unfair. I’m always an active feminist agent through my works and my publications. I’m a feminist critic in writing too” (8 July, 2015). Sharifi also states: “I was an activist feminist before becoming an artist and now I’m a feminist artist” (1 December, 2015). However, except for Moaiery and Tavakolian, the domestic artists participating in my research (Ghadirian, Khademian, Keramati, and Anvari) state that they have feminist tendencies and elements in their practice, although some do not recognize themselves as ‘activist’ feminists. For example, Ghadirian states: “I may not have an especial act of a feminist, but I have the same point of view as a feminist and it is very important to me” (22 May, 2015). Keramati also mentions: “I have feminist tendencies and I like feminists and respect them. I have not been a feminist activist. I have a feminist perspective, and it has been reflected in my artworks. I always support feminism ideas” (28 June, 2015). Unlike Sharifi who defines her art practice as feminist, Ghadirian, and Khademian describe their outlook as close to feminism, but they do not believe they employ activist feminist approaches through their art-making. Nevertheless, while Keramati believes that her feminist perspective has affected her works, however, her video-art *Self-Portrait* does not comply with the objectives of good feminist art characterised by Mullin (2003) as critical, optimistic, liberal, and progressive (see 5.3.4).

Anvari says that she is exploring her feminist concerns through her practice of art-making; she states: “I am a feminist, because I want to know why the Iranian female body has become a site of propaganda and political policy” (23 July, 2015). Anvari’s quest for exploring this issue might be related to her previous job as a journalist, and her position as a ‘fixer’ for foreign reporters, in which she was required to add photos of an Iranian woman wearing the veil for news about Iran that she was providing them with as an indicator, marker or shorthand about Iran. However, while she wishes to deconstruct the political aspect of Iranian female identity, she still uses the veil as the main element in her practice. By this, she intends to depart from the political attribution of the veil and address it to the identity of Iranian women in a cultural and traditional sense (see 5.3.5).

My research participants' responses indicate that the majority of them believe in a common ground of feminist principles, whether they are reflected in their art-making practice or not. While the interview data does not provide a solid working-out of an alternative form of feminism here, based on the interviewees' statements I conclude that feminist implications exist through their representations. Therefore, exploring the influence of feminism in the art practice of artists in my sample will continue by examining feminist aesthetics in Chapter Five as I analyse the artworks.

4.3.2 Artists' Relation to Their Regulatory Environments

As discussed in Chapter Two, art activities in the Iranian context are under the continual surveillance of the Islamic authorities undertaking their role in "standardizing the conventional patterns and paradigms in all cultural and artistic moods" (Keshmirshekan, 2013, p. 146). The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance controls artistic and cultural production in order to formulate a hegemonic Islamic identity for the nation. The domestic artists in my sample mostly think that the government's rules affect their works to a great extent. For example, Moaiery says: "the barriers and limitations start from the work and doing the practice until finalising and exhibiting or publishing them. Our religion is preventive of women and as the government is based on religious rules, this makes barriers for women's activities" (25 May, 2015). Ghadirian says "It [the] government's limitation over the visual language] changes the type of visual language of my idea. I have to search to present it in an acceptable form. It is not like I can do whatever I want to and use whatever" (22 May, 2015).

Such declarations from the local Iranian artists suggest that the cultural collective identities in the art and cultural productions formed in Iran's regulatory system are influenced by restrictions over the type of visual elements that can be used by the artists in creating their artworks. A possible outcome of dealing with an active censorship is a homogeneous representation of identity which can lead to the decline of expressions of subjective identity.

While the interview data reveals that the majority of the local artists in my research sample find themselves constantly struggling with active censorship in Iran, a diasporic artist, Navab states, "I never exhibited in Iran, but in here [in

America] there is no barrier for my art activities” (8 July, 2015). As she explains, Navab clearly feels free about her use of visual language in her artistic activities because she does not exhibit her works in Iran. Therefore, it would appear that benefiting from a broader/freer span of visual language is only possible if the processes of production and consumption are happening outside Iran. For example, sometimes artists create works outside Iran and then they aim to exhibit them in Iran or vice-versa. In such cases, the artists in my sample find themselves struggling with the Iranian government’s limitations on art and cultural productions. For instance, the diasporic artist Manouchehri, who exhibits her works inside as well as outside Iran, admits that she is very cautious about the government’s sensitivity on the subject of religion. She found this sensitivity to be a limitation in her practice when she wanted to exhibit a series of works named *Encounter* (2010) in Iran. About the *Encounter* series Manouchehri says:

When I created this project was at the time that I went from Seoul to Dublin. The first thing that I noticed was that how religious people were there; so many churches everywhere and people were presenting their religion and insisting on being a Catholic. Spontaneously I compared this religious context with what I had seen in Iran and then I created this project from this idea. I took this project to Iran for an exhibition, but a day before the opening day they, I realised that I was asked to explain about my works in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. And after a long interview they decided not to exhibit half of my works because of using Christian elements next to Islamic features (4 April, 2015).

Manouchehri explains that after what happened in exhibiting her *Encounter* project in Iran, she is careful not to play with a sensitive subject and put herself in trouble. She continues: “I wish there were no such barriers and limitations, because I’m still affiliated with Iran and I want to keep this link. My gallery is in Iran and I travel there a lot” (4 April, 2015). What Roxana Manouchehri experienced in exhibiting her *Encounter* series is an example of how artists from outside Iran find a limiting framework comes into play when they wish to exhibit their works in Iran.

Sharifi, in her *Maxiature* (2010) series, aimed to represent the transformation of fashion in the context of Iran after the Islamic revolution. For this series, she photographed people inside Iran and collaged images onto historical Iranian

paintings. About the effects of the Iranian government surveillance on her art-making practice Sharifi says: “I definitely have to be careful about not putting my models at risk. Although I’m very conscious about the risks, I know that I’ll be alright as long as you do not have subversive intentions towards the government” (1 December 2015). Sharifi tries to keep her photographic models anonymous by not showing their faces.

4.3.3 Artists’ Relation to Religion

Religion is a fundamental root of the complexities existing in Iran. Islam as a framework is accepted by the society, but the credibility of religious institutions has declined amongst people in Iranian society (Ali Abazari, et al., 2008). The use of Islamic ideological signifiers in the artworks of some of the artists participating in this study, including Khademian, Moaiery, Navab, and Anvari, appears to manifest a religious view of Iranian society. However, most of my interviewees describe their relation to religion from a neutral rather than an affiliated position; this is particularly the case for the artists working within Iran.

The fact is that religion, after the Islamic revolution, became a very sensitive, and at times a high risk, subject to deal with in Iran, so these artists in my sample were reluctant to talk about it and deal with it directly. During the interviews, I observed uneasiness from most of the participants when the subject of religion was brought up. They were very cautious about opening up about their view point on religion. For example, when I asked Tavakolian if the concept of Islam informs her works in any way, she responded “not at all”. I received several of these kinds of short decisive answers, which were indications of the artists’ desire to move to another subject without answering more questions about religion. For instance, Ghadirian said that the concept of Islam does not affect her works, because she does not know much about it and therefore, she has no desire to get her works involved with this concept. Furthermore, Anvari says that, although Iranian works are viewed as Islamic, she does not tend to address Islam in her works.

However, among the diasporic artists, Sharifi says that she explores Islam in her art practice culturally but not politically: “[...] for example if the chador is a religious symbol I show the transformation of the fashion in the Islamicised context of Iran by showing the colourful scarves” (1 December, 2015). About the

influence of Islam on her artworks, Navab says: “I would say it is not the theme or the issue I wish to tackle” (8 July, 2015). Manouchehri also states that some of her works are informed by Islam. In her *Encounter* series (2010) she juxtaposes Muslim and Christian elements, although, as noted earlier the Iranian government did not approve the idea of exhibiting Islam next to Christianity inside Iran (see 4.3.3).

So, although in my view, many of the works of the local artists in my sample are visually informed by Islam, the artists have little to say about the influence of religion on their practice. According to the interview data, this is related to the governing system of Iran which seeks to control religious thoughts and expressions in political and civic aspects of the society and therefore artists hesitate to engage with this kind of territory.

The diasporic artists Sharifi and Manouchehri, however, state that Islam does inform their practice. Although outside Iran, artists have fewer limitations on their choice of visual language in their art practice, for them to publicly exhibit in Iran, the works would have to conform to the religious authorities’ requirements. Conforming to acceptable codes for representing religion in relation to any subjects, therefore, is the boundary or limit which should not be crossed for artists who want to exhibit and sell their works in Iran, and the result is a tendency to avoid the subject of religion in order not to fall into error. Interestingly, religion or religious signifiers can be sources of inspiration for diasporic artists who do not exhibit their works in Iran. Navab acknowledges that she has no limitations or barriers on her choice of visual language in the US and that Islam is not the subject that she wishes to tackle. But her *Super East-West Woman* series still features herself wearing the veil, which is the most recognizable fundamental index of Islam in gendered representations in Iran.

By looking at the background of the topic of ‘religion’ and its influence on the art production of Iranian artists, it is possible to consider that artists think they might be punished by the Iranian government because of the ways they engage with religion. Shirin Neshat represents an example of the government’s sensitivity about Islam as the legitimate religion and source of sacred concepts. Neshat’s portrayal of the ideological fanaticism of the Islamic Revolution in her first few

sets of work resulted in her being forbidden to re-enter Iran in 1996. If other artists bear this in mind as a possibility, it becomes a potential explanation as to why the representations of some of the artists in my sample comply with the Islamic framework, especially those from inside Iran who are more exposed to the risks of punishment.

According to Echchaibi (2013), Muslim representations tend to be representations of Islam; this is an evident feature of most artworks by Iranian artists that I interviewed. This is the case for those working in Iran, because of the limitations on acceptable visual language, and also for those outside Iran where no external limitations apply. However, although during the interviews the Iranian women artists were reluctant to explicitly discuss the influence of religion on their practice, hardly any of their artworks are devoid of religion and religious signifiers; there is thus a gap between their verbal silence on the issue and their practice. Despite the artists' claims that religion is not something they wish to articulate in their works, the answer to the question of why and how religion has become such a significant component in the art practice of these women remains unclear. The answer probably lies with a consideration of the cultural enactment of religious norms and practices rather than their own beliefs. Therefore, it is important to consider the contexts in which artists produce their works and exhibit them (see 4.3.3).

4.3.4 Artists' Engagement with Social Issues

The idea that the art production of Iranian women artists deals with social issues, such as the subject of women and their activities, is confirmed by the majority of the interviewees. All the artists in my sample agreed that Iranian society since the Islamic revolution has transformed from a dogmatic Islamic state to a comparatively more secular society, where surface compliance is more important than strong personal beliefs. About this transformation in the society, Tavakolian maintains: "it was really closed and suffocated before. I cannot explain how much it has changed; the difference is like the distance from the earth to the sky" (2 July, 2015). As quoted earlier, Tavakolian clearly states that she is representing society through her works. While she expresses her thoughts about the transformation of the society in a positive way, the visual emphasis in her works

is, however, according to my interpretation, mostly on the stagnation and stillness of the represented lives (see 5.3.3). This is the case for the majority of the artists participating in this research, which is probably the result of my interest in studying representations of ethnic identity of the Iranian society, and the influence of this interest on selecting my sample. Khademian also discusses the transformation of society in today's Iran:

I feel pity that I've lost a period of my life in suffocation and I think my generation has lost its venture for doing many things because we grew up with fear and I'm sure that it has been reflected in my works too. But look at today's situation! I can't say there are any barriers compared to the past (15 June 2017).

Here Khademian tacitly points to a stance in which her longing for the irreparable/wasted past dominates her engagement with the progressive situation of the contemporary social life in Iran.

Navab left Iran at the age of eight and at the time of the Islamic revolution with her family. She travelled back to Iran for a visit at the age of 30 in 2001; about this visit she says that life inside the homes seemed no different from that of the pre-revolutionary times in terms of cultural traditions of food, drinking and dancing for instance, but that life in public was very different in terms of norms and behaviours, because drinking, dancing and freedom of choice in dressing did not exist outside homes. During her trip to Iran in 2001, Navab also observed less fear in people about the government and moral police in the public sphere; for example, there was less control over the hijab compared to the strictness of the Iranian government in the first decade after the revolution. She explains:

When I travelled to Iran after 20 years, when I was 30, I visited my relatives. Iranian women have been extremely important, powerful, and active, whether there is a hijab or not. They become doctors, engineers and they are my relatives. They are active and significant part of the society in the workforce in the academia (8 July, 2015).

The interview data suggests that all the artists participating in this research are trying to communicate with the audience about social themes in their works, such as the nature of women's everyday lives and their identity performances as

members of Iranian society. With the exception of Sharifi, who tries to deconstruct the religiously dogmatic image of Iranian identity by the use of clothing as a means of representing the transformation of the society, the majority of artists in my sample depict a society with normative, integrative, and unifying dynamics. I believe the lives of the people living in Iranian society are, as I have previously asserted, more complex than what the artists' representations in my sample suggest. As Sharifi says "[the] hijab is something political in Iran; it is an obligation, but unlike the government's desire, you can do almost anything you want with your appearance and this has been reflected in my works" (1 December, 2015). This statement shows some of the paradox of the life of the Iranian society living under the surveillance of the Islamic regime.

Female identity, a prominent theme in the art of Iranian women, is often depicted by these artists as despairing and depressed in a way that expresses passive social criticism. These attitudes are, in most cases, the opposite of reality for the women dealing with gender issues in Iran; for example, the most recent fatwa by which Iranian women were prohibited from riding bicycles was challenged by women immediately after it was issued (see 1.4.1). Women's reactions in such instances can clarify the contradictions between the dynamic aspects of identity in Iranian social environments, and the ideologically unified aspects of identity which the artists participating in this research mostly represent in their art practice.

4.3.5 Artists' Engagement with Politics

The majority of artists participating in this research agreed that their works contain political references. Tavakolian says: "I'm not a political person, but once you are representing a society your works are political anyway [...] I like to show the effects of politics on people's lives and the society" (2 July, 2015). Ghadirian also says "conceptual art cannot be neutral" (22 May, 2015). These statements show that the artists are aware of their engagement with political themes in their practice whether they are addressing this theme intentionally or unintentionally.

While the majority of the artists admit to their engagement with political themes, there seems to be another internalised 'red line' which makes them vigilant in their choice of visual language. To directly address the critical issues and

problems of the government's ideological goals would be to take a rebellious approach of which even diasporic artists often remain very wary. In this regard, Manouchehri also says:

I believe anyone who is doing works with political themes, has to be careful not to present it in a very obvious way. The ideal way is to hide the concept in a way that viewers can understand it. This stage is the most difficult and important stage. It takes a lot of thinking and planning (4 April, 2015).

Manouchehri here establishes the existence of strategic challenges in engaging with political representations. Such complications in the processes of art practice can be a major challenge for artists in relation to the politics of identity, as on many occasions the identities represented under such censorship become similar to the government's own formulations (Keshmirshakan, 2013). However, as Sharifi mentions, Iranian society does not behave in accordance with the government's desire; but, in my view, oddly some of the artists' representations do. This is a point of conflict between the government's expectations and artists' intentions which rarely align. While the members of Iranian society experience a level of secularism and freedom in their daily lives, some of the artists typically remain in a limited space confined with rules and limitations for their artistic expressions.

The diasporic artists' engagement with politics also mirrors the cultural politics of the local artists. According to Keshmirshakan (2013), such "general cultural attitudes" or "clichés of cultural authenticity" are clearly [mis] recognized in cultural and artistic events "particularly Islamic or so-called Iranian-Islamic traditions as an integral part of the authentic culture" (p. 150). The hegemonic approach to positioning identities and subjects in the representations marginalizes contrary approaches which openly critique or offer radical alternatives to the dominant establishment in other social environments such as cyberspace. A prominent example in this case is the campaign of *My Stealthy Freedom*; as explained in Chapter One (1.4.2), this campaign aims to challenge the Islamic structure of the government in relation to the compulsory wearing of the hijab and limitations on women's activities.

4.3.6 Artists' Relation to Audiences

As mentioned earlier, one of the most important motivations for the artists in my sample was to communicate with audiences, particularly about the concepts they hoped they had encoded in their works. The majority of artists in my sample (Navab, Sharifi, Manouchehri, Keramati, Anvari, and Moaiery) believe that their art and cultural production might shape international perceptions about Iran. For example, diasporic artist Navab states:

I think artists are agent and ambassador of their nation whether they know it or not. I think artists cannot be slaves of their audiences or their collectors. But at the same time, they have to be really responsible as people in this world; because to me artists cannot be separated from teachers, or a mother or father, they are increasingly global in internet connected world [...]. With any production [...] including art, comes responsibility; sending ignorant, uneducated and uninformed [messages] makes people not only look ridiculous but it has also harmful effects on the audiences (8 July, 2015).

Sharifi also says, in responding to whether or how her art might shape international perceptions of Iran, that she hopes her works “[will] be informative to the Westerners [Euro-Americans] and to un-stereotype their vision [of Iran]” (1 December, 2015). Anvari’s response to this question is: “I think artists have a responsibility to the truth, but everyone’s truth is different, and everyone’s motivation is different; unfortunately, at the moment a lot of Iranian artists work for the market and for the money” (23 July, 2015). These responses, particularly Anvari’s, suggest that these artists are not happy with the current image of Iranian society and that they want to improve it; this quote also suggests that Anvari is very aware of the influence of commercial possibilities upon the artists.

However, domestic artists Khademian, Ghadirian, and Tavakolian believe that artists should not think about the influence of their works on the viewers’ perceptions about Iran. For example, Khademian says:

What I do is just recording the events from my angle. It is neither for satisfying nor for dissatisfying anyone. It is the truth from my view. My preference is to make my collection in the best way based on my own criteria, not to think of satisfying a group of people. I do not exaggerate or slander in my works. It is not my duty to represent either a utopia or a

hell of Iran. I just want to represent the reality of the society through my own point of view (19 June, 2015).

While the majority of the artists believe that their works can influence viewers' minds about Iran/Iranian society, they claim that non-Iranian viewers' reading of the works is not a driving force for their practice. For example, Tavakolian says: "I do not change my work [...] just to prove to some people whose knowledge is low, that their thoughts about my country are wrong" (2 July, 2015). Navab says that clearing people's assumptions towards Iran has never been her primary mission. Sharifi also states: "I think in the creative process you start something and whether you are aware of it or not the intention is already there. I don't think that can be the driving force of the art practice" (1 December, 2015).

It can be argued that "audiences are ignored because many see the primacy of meaning and pleasure in the artwork as residing in a supposed unmediated understanding of the specific work or in the artist's intention" (Zangwill, 1999, p. 316). But when the purpose of art productions is to communicate concepts through social themes about a particular context, discounting the audience in the process of production is probably not wise, since the realm of the production expands from the individual to the social/public realm, and the art is therefore going to be critiqued and judged by the viewers.

According to the interviewees, the ways in which Iranian and non-Iranian viewers relate to the works differ. Khademian says:

Foreign viewers are more curious about Iranian women than the works that we exhibit. They wonder and want to know how we have been doing all these activities and they think Iranian women are like Arab women, forbidden to do most activities. [...] non-Iranians only see what the [news / press] media shows them which is all about negativity (15 June, 2015).

Ghadirian says:

Europeans always ask cliché and irrelevant questions about Iran; it is although not their fault, because they know nothing about Iran. They always ask if we wear hijab and in all the interviews with me they ask many questions about it (22 May, 2015).

Almost all my interviewee artists talked about most non-Iranians having a low level of knowledge about Iran. This was a mutual source of frustration for them in many cases. Tavakolian, for example, expressed her sense of annoyance by what she calls very ordinary questions such as:

[...] they ask: isn't it difficult to take pictures with hijab?! I answer them; but I try to behave in a way not to let them ask such questions from me. I just try to tell them that I'm not a representative of Iranian women. Just ask me questions in regard to my works (2 July, 2015).

Such reactions from the viewers, in particular foreigners, are partly derived from the visual representations of Iran they have been exposed to. Many researchers have argued that art can be considered as a social process, therefore, also as a communicative practice which involves the producer, production, and reception in this process (Luhmann 2000; Holquist 2004; Dewey 1958; Tolstoy 1960; Williams 1989). Still, there seems to be little connection between the public viewers' reactions to the works and the artists' aesthetic decisions in the process of art and cultural productions. When art and cultural productions represent certain identity positions, whether they are victimised, ideological / Islamic, passive, or rebellious, it would not be sensible for artists to expect viewers to have a different understanding from what they have learnt from other mediated productions, such as photography, artworks, and audio-visual texts.

My point here is that while communicating with the audience through an encoded representational message is the ultimate goal of artists in my sample, the majority of them argue that considering viewers' opinions when making their artworks is not something they typically do. Manouchehri, Navab, Moaiery, Sharifi, Keramati and Anvari, all believe that their works might shape international perceptions about Iranian society, but still, they insist on not seeking the viewer's reactions to influence their production process. My interviewees expressed the view that an artist's role is not to satisfy or dissatisfy viewers and that considering possible readings of the works during the encoding process would lead to confusion for them and a lack of fidelity to their original idea. In short, my participant artists claim they aim to engage the audience with social, political, and feminist messages through their works; however, they mostly prefer to stay away from any

reciprocal influence and avoid thinking about how members of the public might interpret and react to their works. Therefore, there is a gap between the artists' emphasis on the significance of encoding concepts into their works, and their disinterest in the involvement of actual audience members or viewers as the decoders of the works during the production process.

4.3.7 Artists' Use of Digital Media

The use of digital media is widespread amongst the interviewees in this research; in fact, among the participating artists in this research, only Manouchehri's work is made through a different medium, which is mixed-material work. However, the artists' use of the camera as a medium in their practice differs. In photographic works, Anvari's and Navab's images are performative³⁷, Ghadirian's work is staged, Sharifi's work collages digital photographs, and Moaiery's and Khademian's images are documentary. Keramati's and Tavakolian's works are both in video, but their approaches are different; Keramati's work is self-portrait video art while Tavakolian's video depicts the lives of others in her surrounding environment.

The abundance of photographic works among the artists in my sample is another feature that the interview data demonstrates; the commonality of the use of a camera could, however, be a result of my sample selection as the professional background of the three of my participant artists to photojournalism (Tavakolian, Khademian, and Moaiery); therefore, they continued to use the camera as a medium for their art-making practice. For Tavakolian the aftermath of rebellion around the presidential election in 2009 was a turning point because the public sphere was suffocated and fearful for photographers. Therefore, Tavakolian started to build her proficiency in art production. Khademian, who was working as a photographer for two reformist daily newspapers, lost her job due to the government's banning of both publications from publishing news; she then decided to freelance and work for overseas media press as well. Anvari, who is an exception amongst the other artists in this research for not having an art education,

³⁷ Performative here refers to "making a photograph of a human subject and the sorts of artistic performances and aesthetic experiences that process [of photography] involves" (Shusterman, 2012. P. 67).

was banned from working as a journalist; as a response to her situation she practiced her art activities through the use of her digital camera.

Photography has become a popular medium in Iranian women artists' productions in the last few decades as a means of constructing identity, not only in the scale of this research sample but also worldwide. The history of feminist art shows that women, globally, have managed to use photography as a form of 'self-expression and visual consciousness' in divergent ways (Beadle, 2016; Wells, 2004). For example, the diasporic artist, Navab, explains her use of the camera as enabling her to connect with socio-political themes.

The photographic practices of my research subjects can be classified into two categories:

1- Staged photography: In staged photography, the images are captured in directed or elaborate fabrications, whether manually or digitally constructed settings for the purpose of photographer / artists. In the process of staged photography, the image makers, based on the purpose of their practice, consciously control the composition (Garcia, 2010). By this definition, I include performative works in this category. The works of Ghadirian, Sharifi, Navab, and Anvari are in this category.

2- Documentary photography: While the nature of staged photography in the art world is fluid, the art world has often included journalistic and documentary images in the same canon (Carrabine, 2012). The balance between artistic values and social record in the works of Moaiery and Khademian situates them in the documentary category.

Staged photography enables artists to construct different versions of reality through representation and the manipulation / fabrication of reality in the interest of artists' ideas (Marien, n.d.). However, my participant artists do not approach staged photography in consistent ways; while Ghadirian's work is a composition of objects, Sharifi's, Navab's, and Anvari's works feature figures which embody gender performance in different settings. The relationship between the concept of gender as a performance and the chador finds cohesion in both the staging of

female subjects in these artists' photographic works and their construction of identity. Using the chador in relation to gender as a performance is a representational strategy in the artworks by some of my participating artists. The use of the chador as an ideological resource in the works of Navab and Anvari is a common feature in the works of the participant artists in the documentary photography category.

Documentary photography bridges press photography and artistic photography, and one of its abilities is to tell stories to viewers about certain subjects.

Documentary photography is specifically regarded as a method which draws on the social consciousness of the photographer in the form of visual imagery (Mullen, 1998). According to Howard S. Becker (1995), "visual sociology, documentary photography, and photojournalism" are intimately linked as they live in social contexts and therefore are socially constructed (p. 5). However, Becker explains that none of these three forms of photography have a fixed meaning, and that in different contexts, people's interpretations of the work may differ. Unlike the association of these forms of photography with reality and truth to the context, Becker argues:

[...] they seldom provide any more context than date and place; they withhold the minimal social data we ordinarily use to orient ourselves to others and leave viewers to interpret the images as best they can from the clues of clothing, stance, demeanour and household furnishing they contain (p. 7).

What stands out in Becker's argument is the significance of context and that insufficient resources are provided in these forms of photography to represent an idea from the photographer. However, in its active form, documentary photography can be reformist, which means the photographers "play an active role in social change, [want to] be socially responsible, worry about its effects on the society" (Becker, 1995, p. 7). Considering subjective perspectives on the works, staged photography carries a heavier weight of subjectivity in comparison to documentary photography and other forms of photography in social contexts. This is because in staged photography the artists can construct / reconstruct / deconstruct the subjects' relations to reality based on their own idea and intention of the representations. However, there is much debate about the capacity of

documentarians to stage their representations. According to Bill Nichols (2001), whilst documentary films and photographs often maintain the codified appearance of not being staged, it is understood by documentary theorists that staging is commonplace in documentary production.

The prominent use of digital media, particularly photography, by Iranian artists has been observed by Allerstorfer (2013) as entwined with the subjects of gender, identity and self-expression. While photography, historically, developed in Iran at the same pace as Europe and the United States, has become a popular form of expression for constructing identity amongst Iranian women artists “due to its indexical constitution ‘to capture’ and fix rays of objects on a photosensitive surface” (p. 176). Video art is a rather young medium in the practice of women artists in Iran, but one that expands a “range of expressive possibilities” (Habib & Darabi, 2007, p. 3).

Referring to Western feminist art history, Allerstorfer explains the use of video as a medium by Iranian women artists. Referring to Jean Fisher (1990), Allerstorfer asserts that “video and time-based media” allow the artists to represent the dynamic concept of identity and their subjective perspectives in relation to different subjects (cited in Allerstorfer, 2013, p. 177). However, in the video art of Tavakolian and Keramati, although shaped through the artists’ subjectivity, the melancholic representations of identities are passive and convey stasis rather than the concept of dynamicity (see 5.3.3 & 5.3.4). Such melancholic representations have been associated with subtle methods of resistance in many cases in contexts where the expressions of identities are subjected to censorship (see Allerstorfer, 2013 & Fitzpatrick, 2013). Nevertheless, the majority of my participating artists seem to be committed to some aspects of the existing Islamic ideological structure while they have access to other resources, even outside the regulatory system of Iran. It seems that the motifs and motivations behind the works of my participant artists are similar and ideologically hegemonic, although the techniques and media may differ (see 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.5, & 5.4.1).

4.3.8 Artists' Relation to Nostalgia

Nostalgia about the past was an unexpected theme that emerged from studying the interview data. I did not ask any questions related to this subject, but it emerged anyway. According to Pickering and Keightley (2006), nostalgia has been viewed as “the conceptual opposite of progress, against which it is negatively viewed as reactionary, sentimental or melancholic” (p. 919).

During the interviews, certain moments made me think of the influences of the artists' memories and information from the past on their works. I particularly observed the theme of nostalgia in the interview with Anvari. In her *Chador* series, Anvari uses the chador as an element that associates her to the past with nostalgic significations. About her first trip back to Iran, 15 years after the Islamic revolution, Anvari explains:

When I first came back to Iran all the chadors were black in Tehran, whereas in my hometown, Isfahan, chadors were floral. I become very aware of the fact that the black chador had become an icon and also, I could not understand my sense of antagonism toward the black chador. Because, one day after being banned from my work a woman in black chador passed in front of my car, and she was really... she had an attitude, I hated her! When I went back home I realised that something really seriously had fucked up my head; because I grew up with women who nurtured me and who wore the chador, my family and my relatives were chadori; so, what was it and where was that coming from? Therefore, in my own head, I decided that Chador is a political uniform and that it was being used as a divisive method. And if I let myself go that way, I would have let them succeed in separating Iranian women from one another, whereas we all suffer from shit laws. So, I decided to recreate the floral chadors of my childhood; although there had never been such colourful and big flowery patterns chadors, not only in Iran, but anywhere else in the world, as I have represented in my artworks. Maybe it was my little scale as a child to see my auntie's chador's flowers as bigger and see the colours sharper (23 July, 2015).

This (reactionary) state of nostalgia, in which Anvari's practice is engaged, is a response to both the sense of antagonism towards the black chador and a nostalgic longing for an idealised past. Anvari, who felt alienated within her home-country, found herself in need of identifying and domesticating herself within an

Islamicised Iran. As a result, in a state of nostalgia, she tries to introduce and put some of her own identifiable cultural history and taste into the representation of Muslim Iranian women. The chador as a symbol of domestic peace and tranquillity, which she experienced as a child, made her use the past as a resource in her artwork for resisting the black chador as an imposed and politicised format for representing Iranian woman. While Anvari intends to liberate the chador from the political burdens imposed upon it, the connection of nostalgia to the past undermines her ability to provide inspirational alternatives to her socio-cultural stance. This is a consequence of “the negative components of nostalgia’ which confine ‘its identification to [certain] cultural tendencies as surface style, stereotype, kitsch, and pastiche” (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 924). Since Anvari relates to the chador through her past memories of it, the concept of cultural memory (MacDonald, 2006) is useful in discussing this work. Her work, then, involves notions of connectivity (with a past personal memory), transmission (embodying her memory in visual forms), and interpretation (transferring the real elements to a personal / emotional forms) (Velicu, 2011, p.1). This will be further discussed in analysing Anvari’s work in Chapter Five.

Using the past as a resource for creating art and cultural production is also an important feature of my practice, as I believe there are available resources in my personal life experience in connection to the past which have the potential to relate the representation of identities in more active, dynamic, and subjective ways (see Chapter Seven).

4.4 Summary

When I recruited artists from inside and outside Iran, who work in different contexts, I had expected there would be a significant difference between the artists in local and diasporic categories, in terms of their operations in the art world. I was surprised when, through the interviews, I realised that the majority of artists in my sample in both categories, local and diasporic, seem to have similar techniques, visual languages, traits, and concerns in their art practices.

The art and cultural productions of Iranian women artists in my research sample seem to be greatly influenced by the regulatory system of Iran, which is based on

Islamic principles. While my diasporic participant artists do not face the same limitations in their ways of expressions and choice of visual language as those artists inside Iran, they use a similar visual language to the artists based in Iran. Although Navab brings in Western elements to her work, the use of chador is still the ever-repeating element in her *Super East-West Woman* series; therefore, the female identities invoked are kept in ideological references to a similar frame, which is not as relevant outside Iran in relation to Iranian women's identity in most cases.

Due to the surveillance of the Islamic government of Iran over cultural and artistic productions, representations of identity in relation to female subjects are tied to Islamic ideologies. In other words, the causal chain of ideological identities in the representations of the artists in my research sample references Islam, which is the most prominent orienting framework in the artists' engagement with social, political and gender issues in their practices. As a result, the constrained modes of artistic expression go back to, and bring forward the topic of religion in Iran. Because I observed tension amongst my interviewees in opening up about the topic of religion, I argue that the use of religious motifs, such as the veil, in the works of the majority of my research subjects, does not seem to be derived from an intention to represent the artists' faith in Islam as their personal belief system. Consequently, the encounter between secular sections of society and social transformation in Iran has resulted in propaganda-like representations of identity. It has created a ground in which contradictions about power relations and gender identities arise.

CHAPTER FIVE: VISUAL DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the analysis of the visual data, which are the artworks of my participant artists. At the end of each interview, I asked each artist to choose one artwork³⁸ that best represented the current socio-political direction of their body of work. It is worth mentioning that the artists' choices of works in most cases were similar to their other artworks in terms of dealing with the subjects of gender and identity. The purposes for requesting these works was, firstly, so I could to analyse them using the visual social semiotics method, to investigate how the works represent identities in relation to the subjects of gender, politics, religion, ethnic, and culture, dominant themes in the visual art and cultural productions of Iran. Secondly, I asked the artists if I could show their artworks to focus-groups in New Zealand in pursuance of understanding how people from certain social backgrounds would interpret the works out of their original context.

5.2 Visual Data Analysis

The visual data at this stage is presented within local and diasporic categories. The reason for this division is to investigate whether there are similarities and differences between the art making of women artists inside and outside of Iran. Another reason for this classification is to understand the extent of the influence of the regulatory system of Iran, in contrast with different regulatory systems in the context of the artists working outside Iran. In other words, to examine the level and type of restrictions in the use of visual language by women artists inside and outside Iran and to understand how context informs the practice of these two groups of artists.

The structure of the critical analysis in this chapter is based on the content of my theoretical framework, outlined in Chapter Three. Some of the key concepts in the theoretical framework, which I have frequently referred to throughout this chapter, are postcolonialism, religion and its relation to the representations of

³⁸ Artists' statements of their selected work for this study can be found in appendix 10.

Iranians, Islamic propaganda, and strategies of representations and their modes of address. I investigate how representations reveal current conventions as well as suggesting possibilities for representing more dynamic and fluid identities.

Therefore, my analysis is mainly influenced by the formulations of politics of identity, gender, culture, and ethnicity as developed in the theoretical framework.

Based on Bilgrami's (2006) definition of 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' as important aspects of identity (see 2.2.4), the artworks of both local and diasporic groups of artists are arranged in an order which starts from those representations with more objectivity and moves towards those which reflect more subjectivity.

While subjective and objective aspects of identity are often closely linked, Bilgrami's vocabulary for analysing identity is applied in order to explore the positioning of identities in these two stances, or their moving between these two forms of identities.

By looking at the artworks of my research subjects, it becomes evident that the representation of women's identities is one of the dominant aspects of content in their practice. Erlewein (2014) maintains that "audio-visual representations influence the identity and continuity of practices within particular groups and communities" (p. 143). Relevantly, Moscovici (1984) states: "social representations conventionalize objects, persons, and events we encounter" (p. 22). Therefore, the representations of identity through the Iranians' art and cultural production can be understood as visions of contemporary Iran and Iranian society.

In this chapter, I first investigate 'the social conventions' of the practice of the women artists participating in my research and ideological goals behind the visual motifs. Secondly, I have provided space to "systematically reveal conventions" in order to promote a dynamic change of visual language towards the objective of my research which affects the practical part of my research (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 41). In other words, my analysis is on the basis of renegotiating meanings that are prone to be articulated "as fixed, irrevocable and natural" (Iedema, 2001, p. 201) and also, to promote the accommodation of other resources as tools for designs promoting social change (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001).

In this phase of analysis, “the syntactic relations between the elements of the visual text (e.g. people, objects, places, editing)” are studied (Aiello, 2006, p. 99), in order to investigate the constructions of identity in the visual practice of domestic and diasporic Iranian women artists, particularly in relation to gendered forms of identity. The analysis is focused on whether, or to what extent, the representations made by the women artists reflect the agency of female subjects and the contemporary lives of Iranians in relation to cultural, social, and political themes, embodied in different modes and mediums.

The analysis of the artworks at this stage communicates my personal vision, arguments, and critique on the representations, and provides critical responses to the addressed issues in the art practice of my participating artists; my critical analysis at this stage influences the process of my art-making practice (this is further discussed in Chapter Seven). The analysis provides me with a better understanding of how the use of codes / signs can activate new/alternative ways of engaging with identities of Iranian society through visual representations, particularly in women subjects. In other words, the outcomes of my visual art practice, ‘are grounded in an authentic research practice that constructs new knowledge that is individually empowering and culturally relevant’ (Sullivan, 2010, p. 84).

5.3 Local Artists’ works

As introduced in the interview chapter, there are five participating artists who are based in Iran; in this chapter they are, in order, Yalda Moaiery, Farzaneh Khademian, Niousha Tavakolian, Simin Keramati, and Shadi Ghadirian. The works they put forward for this research all contain references to women, although their use of language and medium differs. There are two audio-video artworks, two documentary photographs, and one staged photograph. The analysis of the artworks in this category will be discussed in comparison with the analysis of the art and cultural productions of the artists working outside Iran.

5.3.1 Yalda Moaiery’s Work

Figure 5.1 is from Moaiery’s series of photographs called *Under the Shadow of Imam Khomeini*. In this case, she asked me to choose the image for analysis. My

reason for selecting this work is that I think it represents the disproportionate amount of power in the hands of Islamic clergy in Iran, which is shown through the scale of the portrait posters of the leaders of the Islamic regime in contrast with the presence of women.

This black and white series of works consists of documentary photographs which represent Iranian society, in particular images of Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, who died in 1989. The series shows images of Ayatollah Khomeini in different public places, symbolising Khomeini's continuing iconic and ideological presence in today's Iran. The phrase 'under the shadow of someone' in Iranian language is a saying which is used to express veneration and appreciation of an important and influential patron / protector in people's lives, and in this case, that person is Ayatollah Khomeini.



Figure 5.1: Yalda Moaiery, From the *Under the Shadow of Iman Khomeini* series, 2013

This photograph shows a group of women in black chadors, all looking almost identical, with three big posters containing references to the Islamic regime.

From the left, the first poster is an Iranian calligraphy text of the Islamic Revolution's motto, which in English means "*Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic*". The calligraphy's background depicts a large crowd of people, which could represent the widespread support the Islamic revolution received from the people in Iran and which the current government wishes to remind people of. There is a little patch of plain writing in the bottom left corner of this poster which is Persian for 'entrance' in English, and in the second line which is written in a small font: 'The exhibition of publishing institution of disseminating and regulating Imam Khomeini's works'. This poster gives some information about

the context, which is featuring and honouring the achievements of the leading figure of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini.

The central poster shows a mid-shot image of the supreme leader of the 1979 revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, with his right hand raised up, as a sign of blessing. In the background of his image is the Iranian flag hoisted in the sky. Khomeini is shot from a lower angle, which turns his blessing hand gesture to an almost intimidating tone. This intimidation, in my view, is intensified by his serious expression. On the right, the poster shows the face of Ayatollah Khamenei who has been the leader of the Islamic government since Khomeini's death. Khamenei's portrait shows him from a gentler / softer position since the image is taken at a straight angle, and there are some soft linear patterns in the background of his portrait; however, his facial expression is somehow similar to that of Khomeini's.

The magnified portraits of the two leaders with beards and in cloaks and turbans, positioned as superior to the onlookers in the context, are dominant components of the overall image. They are positioned above the women, and where the activities of their daily lives are taking place. The composition of the image, then, emphasizes the extent of political and religious surveillance in the patriarchal Islamic context of Iran.

As the context of this image is an exhibition to celebrate Khomeini's cultural heritage, it is not surprising that the women visitors are all in black chador, because of the specificity of the event and its relevance to religious and political beliefs of the Islamic regime. Iranians are familiar with such propagandistic events held by the government or its supporters for promoting the Islamic regime, or what Khomeini called '*the ideals of the revolution*'.

One might argue that Moaiery is taking a strategic critical stance toward the hegemonic Islamic representation, by emphasising the power dynamic of Khomeini and the women in the chador. However, I assert that these kinds of representations derive from the Islamic regime's desire to produce and maintain a hegemonic Islamic representation of Iranian society. This is particularly the case for representing the ideal place of women in Iranian society.

The women, shown as a group, connote the ‘cultural hegemony’ of the Islamic ideology in Iranian society (Bullock & Trombley, 1999). While Moaiery may be deliberately making use of cliché imagery to make a point about the visibility of power dynamics in Iran, and therefore implicitly critiquing it, this image also fulfils expectations for the provision of a cliché subject of women, religion, and the Middle-East. Therefore, in some ways, it can be said that this image resembles the Orientalist representation of ‘the other’ from within an Iranian context (Tikhonova, 2010). The women, who seem to be walking and therefore become active elements of the text, also appear to be reconciled to having the authorities’ surveillance upon their activities. In my view, Moaiery’s way of approaching the subject is that she positions the complex identity of Iranian women as aligned with Islamic propaganda. Like most visual representations however, this image is multiply coded. On one hand, as mentioned before, this image demonstrates the disproportionate amount of power in the hands of religious authorities. On the other hand, the image is reflective, which means the intertextual relationship between the sign in this work refers to the objective aspects of Iranian society. The image draws attention to a conservative articulation of signs of obedience in these representations of Iranian society; the overall affect, in my assessment, is Moaiery’s commentary on the absurdity of the state’s power.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Moaiery’s works are in the photojournalism and documentary photography realms. She describes this series of photographs as documentary. I am aligned with Stephen Spencer’s definition of documentary photography which “includes an emphasis on the validity of personal experience as well as self-reflexivity, to attempt to convey the differing views of the world” (2010, p. 172). However, Moaiery’s approach to her subjects seem to be more influenced by her experience in photojournalism which is explained best by Wells (2004) as an approach to satisfy the news media demands. Although she might be intending commentary, critical, or other purposes for her photographs, Moaiery’s portrayal of Iranian society, particularly women, in my view, is the portrayal of ‘Muslim women’; it is not only the preferred representation of Iranian women by the Islamic regime but also aligns with that of the Western media. I believe that Moaiery’s approach faces the difficulty that Grundberg (1990) identifies: “for the documentary photographer today, there are at least two problems: to find a subject

matter that has not already been exhausted by previous photographs; and to find a style that can maintain at least a medium of documentary authority without merely repeating the conventions of the documentary tradition” (cited in Spencer, 2010, p. 173).

The iconic image of Iranian women covered in the black veil is a popular way of representing Iranian woman, not only by media inside and outside Iran, but also is the favourite template of many art and cultural producers such as Shirin Neshat. Moaiery’s photograph, in my view, essentialises political Islamic codes, which maintain an inherent hegemony of Islamic identities for viewers wherever they are located.

5.3.2 Farzaneh Khademian’s Work

Figure 5.2 is Khademian’s choice of work for this research. This photograph is entitled *Election* and she took it in 2013 on Presidential Election Day.



Figure 5.2: Farzaneh Khademian, *Election*, 2013

With a background in photojournalism, Khademian uses documentary photography to capture her socio-political thoughts and ideas within real-life contexts. In explaining her photographs, she says that she has her photographic ideas in mind, and when she finds her subjects, she captures them. Her works are mostly created spontaneously, and her photo-shoots are done without arrangement with the subjects. Therefore, her photographs are both intentional and prone to the accidental.

The photo shows three women in black chador. Since the heads are cut off the frame, the reading is all on the bodies. The women's hands look extremely white against the black, directing the focus of the image to the hands that are holding different objects. From left to right, the first woman is holding a Tasbih³⁹. The middle woman is clutching her birth certificate⁴⁰ and the figure of her other hand, which in my view, make her look nervous. The woman on the right has her ID firmly in one hand, and in the other hand a wallet with red hearts on it. Although the wallet is small and the heart shapes on it might seem insignificant in the frame of the photo, it looks ironic and romantic against the strictness and blackness of the veils as politically formatted female bodies.

The resonance of the rhythmic and expressive elegance of the shape of the veils with the drapery of other art forms such as ancient Greek sculptures could be interpreted as celebrating an Islamic notion of femininity. It is also the drapery forms which link the photograph to a poetic mode. On the other hand, as already mentioned, women represented in veils are usually understood, especially overseas, as subject to gendered oppression by fundamentalist Islamic ideologies (Alexander, 2016). In addition, the correlation between cropping the heads off the frame and the three women in chador, suggests an emphasis on a unified religious identity in Iranian society. The representation of identity in this image, then, suppresses rather than animates the dynamicity of democratic patterns in Iranian society.

According to Ali Abazari et al. (2008) and Milani (2005), Iran after the Islamic revolution has become a paradoxical society in which religiosity is challenged by the secularised actions/reactions of the society in multiple ways. However, Khademian's photograph tends to hold on to the simplest aspects of representing an Islamic society by avoiding other elements that reveal contradictions and complexities.

³⁹ The prayer beads, which are used for chanting short sentences in the praise and glorification of Allah, in Islam.

⁴⁰ Having a birth certificate is essential for those who vote in Iran.

While Khademian's representation illustrates Iranian women in a homogenised Islamic format, other photojournalists provided other views of the same election, which are closer to showing how Iranian women actually appear in public.



Figure 5.3: Presidential election polling station (Source: Behrouz Mehri, 2009)



Figure 5.4: Presidential election polling station (Source: Atta Kenare, 2009)

The images above represent individual Iranian women voting in the presidential election of 2009. They show women in colourful, bright, and loose scarves, allowing their hair to be visible. In image 5.5 the contrast between the photo on the woman's ID, and her appearance on that day reveals the conflict between the official Islamic authorities requiring women to wear Islamic hejab in their photos, and how she 'does' and 'does not' follow the veiling rule.

Concerning Khademian's representations, one might argue that such photographs represent values that sustain Islamic reserve and determination, compassion, civility, and responsibility for instance. However, I contend that repeating elements of a single facet of society through visual representations turns it into a dominant representation, and that this is how the 'Muslim woman' has become the master trope for Iranian women in visual art and cultural productions. As Ngozi Adichie (2009) says:

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. . . . I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar (p. 3).

While documentary photographs capture aspects of reality, or in Grierson's words are "the creative treatment of reality" (as cited in Hall, 2013, p. 64). They do not equate to historical proof; they are artistic narratives from individuals' points of view. In other words, documentary photographs are visions of reality, not the whole truth of events or stories. According to Wenders (1997):

The most politically indoctrinating thing you can do to a human being is to show him, every day, that there can be no change. But by showing that something is open to change; you keep the idea of change alive (p. 52).

The Islamic regime after the revolution has been trying to create a democratic society; however, this struggle has often been neglected in the art and cultural representations of Iranian women. The idea of 'openness to change' in Wenders' statement is what I have tried to reflect in my art practice. This is further discussed in Chapter Seven along with the process of my art making practice.

The idea that the Islamic government of Iran is dominated by Islamic values is reflected in images of Iranian society (Milani, 2015), and also is the preferred mode in which the Western media represent an Islamic Iran (Roushanzamir, 2004). It is clearly an influential factor in photojournalists' works in Iran. According to Barthes (1981), individual photographers attach themselves to certain aesthetic styles. It seems that Khademian's point of view has been strongly influenced by her career in photojournalism for Iranian and foreign press agencies in the sense that her works might essentialise propagandistic / stereotypical codes associated with an Orientalist vision of Muslim women.

5.3.3 Newsha Tavakolian's Work

Tavakolian selected a two minute 19-second-long video art called *Look* (2013) for this research. The video depicts a number of people in their apartments framed

against a view of other concrete condominium buildings (see Figure 5.5). Throughout the video, in different shots, a cold and greyish tone imbues the images with a frozen stillness. I begin my analysis of this work by describing the video, and then I discuss it through the social semiotics methodology.



Figure 5.5: Newsha Tavakolian, Still image of *Look* (video art), 2013

The video starts with a slow sombre soundtrack of music accompanied by a black screen. A view of high-rise buildings from a window frame gradually appears. The camera is hand-held, it moves slightly, and this gives the video a documentary-like sense. The view of the buildings fades into black and from black, in close-up; a young woman's face comes into view (see Figure 5.6). She is wearing make-up, although her eyes are full of tear. She is wearing a black headscarf with her dark brown hair exposed around her face. While the woman gently shakes her head from side to side, which in an Iranian context indicates an expression of disappointment and regret, her tears fall down her face.

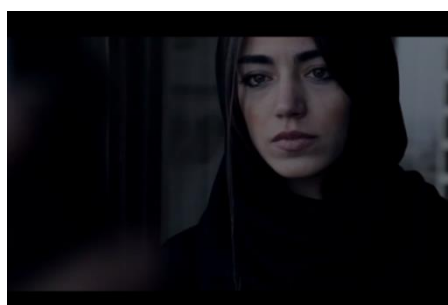


Figure 5.6: Newsha Tavakolian, Still image of *Look* (video art), 2013

Other than the woman in the above picture, the video depicts nine other people, men and women. Both the male and female representations throughout the video have similar characteristics of sadness, stillness, and melancholia. In addition, the shots look similar, as most of them contain the grid-like views of apartment buildings, and even the interiors of the houses are similar in terms of the colours and objects used. There is a sense of heaviness, depression, and passiveness

throughout the entire video conveyed by the people's facial expressions, music, gestures, as well as the colours used (Figure 5.7).



Figure 5.7: Newsha Tavakolian, Still images of *Look* (video art), 2013

The black make-up marks around the eyes of one of the women in the video, the wet face of one of the men, and the teary eyes of the first woman in the video, all indicate sadness and could be read as signs of crying. A young, heavily-built man with shaving foam on his face sitting on a chair at a little square table with papers / newspapers some of which are crumpled, a pale woman wearing a black head scarf and outfit sitting and staring at a little square table in front of her with a set of Tarot cards laid on the table; the portrayal of almost all the characters in the video implies a community of individuals that is static and lacks hope.

Even a birthday celebration, referenced by a birthday cake with candles on it, in this video, is not a celebration of life; instead, it is an inauspicious event lacking celebratory associations. Some of the shots in the video are played in slow motion which maximizes the sense of stillness and depression. Other shots are blurred, suggesting vagueness and turmoil and reinforcing the melancholic sense of the video.

Unlike the other people depicted in this video, who are all located in apartments, one of the male characters is seated in a parked car, smoking a cigarette (Figure

5.8). While the car, as an icon, is mostly associated with movement and departure, in the context of this video the car remains as immobile as the buildings.



Figure 5.8: Newsha Tavakolian, Still image of *Look* (video art), 2013

The use of video as a medium offers possibilities for capturing movements and dynamic aspects of the subject matter, particularly in relation to the representations of identity as a fluid concept (Fisher, 1990, p. 164). However, Tavakolian's video works against those possibilities since the subjects appear passive and static throughout. It seems that all the elements and components of the video, including soundtrack and camera movements, are used to exaggerate and overstate the static condition of identity in the lives of young Iranians.

The artist ultimately represents a 'frozen' or 'immobile' form of identity in relation to the context. This is especially evident in the shots showing a man with shaving foam on his face and the birthday cake scenes, as they illustrate stagnation portrayed through incomplete actions that evince no desire to carry on with life nor to be as active individuals / agents.

This work features both male and female characters with similar attitudes. Although Tavakolian points out in her statement that the work depicts individual stories of people living in the same apartment building, there is a sense of sameness in the shots which homogenizes the individuals' stories. The uniformity of identities evokes experiences of isolation, depression, desperation, and inactivity for people living in the Iranian society, even in the space of their own homes. This uniform collection of sensations and behaviours is emphasised by the ever-present view of the identical buildings' structure through different windows and shots.

As the artist's statement about this work (see Appendix 10) suggests, the video is a portrayal of young middle-class people living in Iran who lack hope for their future, feeling that living daily life is a battle that has already been lost. According to Fitzpatrick (2013), the melancholic mode of expression in contemporary Iranian art and cultural productions intends to communicate an oppositional stance to the oppressive power of the Iranian government without being overtly critical, and therefore is subversive (p. 159). It can also be argued that the video *Look* represents experiences of anxiety and depression that almost anybody can endure during their lives and therefore it is easy for all viewers to connect to it. I acknowledge that Iranian society is dealing with problems such as economic pressure resulting from the actions of foreign powers as well as Islamic rules and restrictions limiting the lives of people in Iran. The affective intensity of such hardships has been strongly reflected in this work by Tavakolian. However, in my view, the melancholic mode of expression in Tavakolian's representation undermines the potential for change in the Iranian society, in implying that young people lack any sense of determination.

In response to the dominant sense of stagnancy of this video, in my art-making practice for this study, I have tried to depict the struggles and the sense of determination in Iranian society.

5.3.4 Keramati's Work

Figure 5.9 shows a number of still images of Keramati's selection of artwork for this study, which is a video called *Self-portrait* (2008).



Figure 5.9: Simin Keramati, still images of video art *Self-portrait*, 2008

This work is a 7 minute and 20-second-long video of the artist (Keramati) who looks sorrowful and is wearing a black scarf, in a close up against a black background. The video's theme is about the artist in her hometown, Tehran, with a sound component of her footsteps outdoors along with her breathing and the rustling of leaves under her steps. According to Ettehad (2012), in self-portraits, "the use of artist's 'self' as a context is to re-create a civic story. The representation of 'I', in spite of being subjective and unique, 'is fully connected to the land that 'I' is rooted" (p. 45). As Keramati inserts the theme 'self' into her work, her work inevitably becomes related to her homeland and its surroundings. Therefore, the representation of "self" becomes a narrative about the women in Iranian society.

In this work, Keramati illustrates a staged process of losing her face / identity behind a layer of animated black colour, which is dribbled on the uppermost layer in the video. Her handwriting, both in Persian and English, is another component to this work. The hand-written texts are Keramati's thoughts and emotions while walking in the streets of Tehran.

The video starts with the title '*Self-Portrait*' in white on a black background. Then the diary-like writing of her thoughts, along with the start of the sound, appears on black (Figure 5.10).

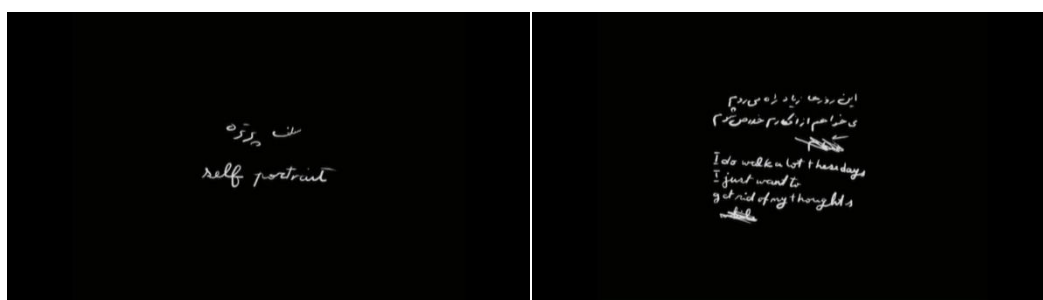


Figure 5.10: Simin Keramati, still images of the beginning of video art *Self-portrait*, 2008

There are several times during the video when the artist crosses out some of the words, which creates the impression of spontaneous emotions / thinking and more diary-like. The hand-written texts, visible before the artist's face appears on the video, are:

I do walk a lot these days
I just want to get rid of my thoughts
~~While~~
While walking
I somehow put my mind under my feet

~~And with~~ and with
Any step
I feel a piece of it
Remaining between
Fingers of my feet

(See the complete writing on Keramati's video in Appendix 11).

The artist's full face comes to view at 1:20 along with the sound of a siren, her breathing and the rustling of leaves. The right side of her face is shaded, and the left side of the face has more visibility (Figure 5.11). She is fixedly looking at the eye of the camera throughout the video, which creates the illusion of making eye contact with the viewers. This direct address is sometimes used as a strategy for suggesting certain types of power relations.



Figure 5.11: Simin Keramati, still images of the beginning of video art *Self-portrait*, 2008

The process of her face getting covered by the blackness starts from the right side. The black colour resembles the streams of blood after serious injuries. This resemblance is embodied when the liquid-like black drips down from her lips, then, her nostrils like a nosebleed, and then her crown, until the whole face is covered in dark blackness, except for her scarf which is in a lighter shade of black (Figure 5.12).



Figure 5.12: Simin Keramati, the process of artist losing her face in video art *Self-portrait*, 2008

Similar to Tavakolian’s video art, the melancholic mode of the video is dominant. This is evoked through the facial expression of the artist, the black colour, which in Iran represents mourning and sorrow; the blood-like effect of the black colour covering / suffocating the artist’s face; the sigh-like sound of her breathing, and the texts. These components illustrate and communicate creeping melancholia, in a manner similar to Tavakolian’s work, *Look*.

Keramati makes direct eye contact to create an imaginary relation with the viewers. By using the strategy of direct address, the artist in such works symbolically “demands” something from the viewers (Kress and & Leeuwen, 1996, cited in Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, p. 145). However, the artist’s face covered by the black colour can be read as the artist concealing her identity and as her self-expression being censored; these implications both convey connotations of oppression and suffocation. The text also suggests the concealment of identity, as it finishes by saying ‘*And at the end I find myself walking on the streets of this*

city while I am faceless'. Some viewers could find these words powerful and moving, however, the transformation of identity from sad and sorrowful to becoming anonymous, and the scarf as the only remaining visible element of the end of the video, in a similar manner as the works of Anvari and Khademian, can be interpreted as a further demonstration and ontological assertion that Iranian women are an oppressed class.

According to Pyke (2010), "[...] homogeneous identity rooted in a unified experience of oppression is central to identity politics" (p. 262). Referring to Mohanty (2002), Pyke explains that "the assumption is that being oppressed is sufficient ground to assume a politicized oppositional identity... I am, therefore, I resist. The agency of the subjugated is reduced to resistance: to act is to resist" (p. 562). While the melancholic aesthetic tone in Keramati's work insists on 'self-beratement', it could also be read "as a form of conflicted subjectivity, suspended between the agency of self-expression and the social prohibition on certain modes of speech" (Butler, cited in Fitzpatrick, 2013, p. 159). Therefore, it can be said that there are possible different readings of the video and it might be multiply coded. However, in line with Pyke, writing about what she calls the "model resistor stereotype" (p. 562), I believe the 'romanticised' representation of the notion of oppression can preclude effective resistance, turning discontent into internalised ethnic oppression. As a result, such representations are left with an 'undermined' identity.

As discussed in relation to Tavakolian's video, oppressed and melancholic representations of Iranian society, particularly those of women, created by female Iranian artists have sometimes been associated with resistance. An example of this kind of association is the analysis of Keramati's work by Allerstorfer (2013):

Keramati challenges several normative characteristics that are closely linked to her allocation and determination of identity. In addition to the sounds in the video, it is her writing that suggests that she has not been silenced. The script as the carrier of messages can also be interpreted as a sign of resistance and agency (p. 184).

While the video can be interpreted as subversive and resistant in terms of gender and power relations, Keramati's representation of identity can also be read as a passive and depressed representation of women in Iran (Koester, 2015).

Drawing on Jean Fisher (1990), Allerstorfer (2013) asserts that "video and the time-based media" allow artists to represent dynamic concepts of identity and their subjective perspectives in relation to different subjects (p. 177). However, in Keramati's work, although it has been created through her own subjectivity and does represent an individual to a certain extent, the representation of identity is once again passive conveying stasis rather than dynamicity.

While the sound of the footsteps offers possibility for movements and dynamicity, the overall implication of the video suggests a still and stagnant identity which can only observe/comment and suffer. This video also represents Islamic identity by showing the headscarf as the only remaining element of the video, an iconographic choice that again falls into Orientalism and exoticism. Using both Persian and English languages in this video-audio work shows that the artist has foreseen the engagement of both local and international viewers, showing that the artist intends to communicate with the viewers, including perhaps the international art market.

5.3.5 Anvari's Work

The following image (Figure 5.13) is from Anvari's *Chador Dadar* series (2006). As with Moaiery, Anvari asked me to choose an image from this particular series. This work interested me because it depicts a contrast between Occidental and Oriental representations of women at their extreme forms. I selected the work because it offers possibilities to expand the discussion of the representation of Iranian women in comparison with the Western representation of identity.



Figure 5.13: Haleh Anvari, from the *Chador Dadar* series, 2006

The word ‘Dadar’, used in the title of the work, is a Persian word meaning ‘outdoors’, and it is used for children when they are sent to play outside. In the *Chador Dadar* series, Anvari uses colourful flowery chador, which in fact are not used in Iran or any other Muslim countries. These chador have been designed by the artist as a means of subverting the dominance of the black veil, which she, like me, believes is the overly- dominant iconic device for representing Iranian women.

To create this series of works, Anvari took her distinctive chador and travelled around the world, to different locations including, London, Paris, Dubai, India and Turkey. She describes her works in this series as ‘live performance photographs’; by this she means that her models wore the chadors and visited certain places. Then, without a plan about the positions and the compositions of the elements of the photos, she captured images of them.

This image shows two women in flowery chador somewhere in France, standing next to a kiosk, which has big posters on each side. The women in chador are looking at the poster of the topless woman on the kiosk. These two elements of this image (the poster and women in chador) are the foci of the image, so much so that the other elements, including the motorbike and trolley, have become insignificant components of the photograph. Therefore, and in line with my research objectives, the main analysis of this work is around the representation of women. However, before analysing the image, in order to discuss the significance of Anvari’s version of chador in this work, it is important to briefly explain the styles of the chador and their use and traditions in Iran.

There are two types of chador in Iran; the plain black chador, which sometimes has a textural pattern on it, and is mostly worn in public. Figure 5.14, which is Forouhar's work, is an example of this type of chador.

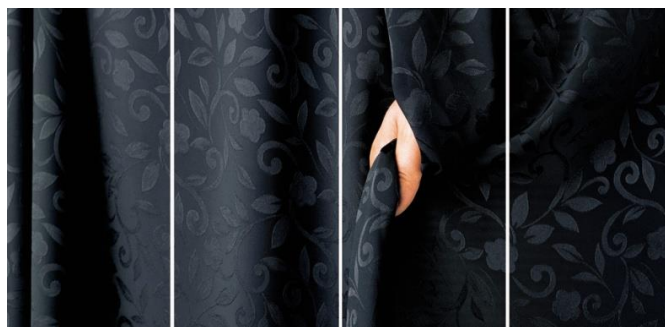


Figure 5.14: Parastou Forouhar, *Friday*, 2003

Another style of chador, which is made from light-coloured and printed fabrics, is worn in indoor situations such as at mosques and in-homes⁴¹.

While the shape of the veil, in Anvari's chador, does not differ from the traditional form, the patterns and colours are unusual in relation to typical styles and the contexts in which they are normally used. As discussed in the interview data analysis chapter, the use of chador in Anvari's work is from a nostalgic point of view, related to her childhood memories associated with the chador and chadori women. Anvari's childhood memories connect to the chador as a symbol of peace and tranquillity, since she had been loved and nurtured by chadori women, even before the Islamic revolution, when wearing the veil was not legalised. At that time, chadori women would wear the black chador only for funerals and mourning periods, while the light, printed chadors were used for everyday wear.

Anvari's works in this series are responses to her sense of alienation and antagonism to the black chador in today's Iran, which has become the symbol of the Islamic revolution since 1979. To resist the black chador as a politicised format for representing Iranian woman, Anvari draws on her memory of the light coloured and printed chadors in her childhood and liberate it from its political burden. Therefore, it can be said that she has consciously used the chador to

⁴¹ Traditionally, at home women cover themselves in chadors when male visitors, who are not family members, are present in domestic environments.

deconstruct this politically and artistically clichéd element of the representation of Iranian women.

The photograph shows the woman on the poster standing at a beach, wearing only a bikini bottom, in a stretching pose with her hands behind her profile head, looking upwards at the sky. In the poster, the location, the woman's pose, the sunshine on her body, and her topless bosom suggest a free careless identity with minimal constraints. This reading of the poster becomes more intense against the presence of the two women in chador who are looking at the poster.

The representation of the Western woman in this work, on one hand, can be associated with the female gender as having control over her own body and sexuality, and the freedom to make her own decisions. On the other hand, her image can be read as commercial; the use of a women's body as a marketing commodity as well as to satisfy the desires of those who wish to look at a naked female body. The juxtaposition of Western and Middle-Eastern women could then provoke debates about different representations of women, and the irony created by bringing these images together in this image.

Nevertheless, the representations of Orient and Occident in this work are stereotypical and one-sided, in that they both represent extreme forms of representations of women. However, it is the irony generated by these stereotypical images coming face to face with each other (West and East) that is an effective strategy of subversion.

The East's stereotype of Western women is that they are all morally loose (i.e. going semi-naked at the beach) and the West's stereotype of the Middle-Eastern women is of extreme constriction by traditions and religious norms (Salbi, 2015, para 7). The representation of the Oriental female gender, in contrast with the Western woman in the poster, shows that those women are sexually constrained by traditional and religious beliefs, because they opt to perform their roles as if they are still in the regulatory system of Iran even when outside the country.

This image, then, can be read as subversive of dominant and familiar visual codes in relation to Iranian female ethnic identity, such as the veil, when they are viewed through the strategy of irony. Nevertheless, the binary representation of women

covered in veils contrasted with the nudity of the Western woman in Anvari's work also arguably resembles the Hijab billboards advertised in Iran by the Islamic government (see 1.4.1).

The fact that this series of works of women in the floral chador has been produced outside Iran raises the question as to why Anvari chooses to represent an Islamic ideological image of Iranian women outside the Islamic regime's sphere of coercion. The answer to this question can perhaps be located in post-colonial tendencies in Anvari's art-making practices and her resistance to Western influence on Iranian culture and identities. This characteristic is particularly evident in her 21-minute-video entitled *power of a cliché*⁴² where she uses her voice over different images to explain how the black veil has become the iconic image of the Iranian society. About the black chador, in the video, she says:

[...] this is the preferred icon of the Western media and the rulers of Iran. Both camps want you to see me Iranian, Muslim, woman, as an anonymous, monolithic tower of blackness; both use me as an icon for the clash of civilization; one wants to protect my soul, the other wants to liberate me. So, they show you me in my total blackness on TV, in books, and in magazines (minute 2:08- 2:44).

Anvari shares my view about the dynamic aspects of the life of women in Iranian society, and she critiques Western/non-Iranian views on Iranian women identities. Although Anvari's intention is to deconstruct the black chador, the women in chador construct 'the other' in the Western context of this work, and, I believe, the colourful version of the chador does not prevent the representation from contributing to the exotic / foreign allure in contexts outside Iran. The representation of Iranian women shows little realistic agency attached to paradoxical and complex female identities, nor is there a shift in power dynamics in relation to the subject of woman in Iranian society. The reason lies in the fact that the representations of women in such visuals are carried by stereotypical Islamic visual references, even if they are intended as a means of subversion and resistance. Therefore, the representation of the Iranian women, once again, becomes confined to the representation of Muslim women in relation to their

⁴² This video was a source of inspiration for me. I also used some of her words for presenting my research in a competition for PhD students called 'Three Minute Thesis'.

Islamic traditions. This is, as I have noted, what Echchaibi (2013) calls the ‘burden’ of Muslim representations, and the fact that the representations of Muslims tend to be representations of Islam (see 2.2.1.2).

As mentioned in Chapter Four (see 4.3.9), Anvari’s artwork is related to the concept of cultural memory (MacDonald, 2006) and involves notions of connectivity, transmission, and interpretation (Velicu, 2011, p.1). The concept of cultural memory in relation to Anvari’s work allows the artist to approach her narrative related to a past in an alternative way, which in her work is the exploration of the chador in an emotional dimension and form. In other words, Anvari has characterised the representation of her female subjects by “the transcending of boundaries” (Erlil, 2008, p. 4), by “the interplay of present and past” in a socio-cultural context (Erlil, 2008, p. 2), as well as the interplay of the chodor as a material and her mental phenomenon relating to it.

Anvari’s recollections of the chador, through this representation, can be understood as part of a struggle for representing a non-political identity for Iranian women, and therefore, as a means of resistance against the imposed black veil over the identity of women. Retaining the Islamicised identity in representing Iranian women, particularly outside Iran, exposes the readings of the work to the naturalisation of the female gender and power relations in the Islamic regime.

In this series, Anvari might mobilise nostalgia for the past in a way that is subversive or unsettling of power relations between the Orient and Occident, however, the mobilisation of nostalgia for the past undermines the present socio-cultural stance of the Iranian society. Nostalgia, in this case, is linked with the concept of collective, cultural memories and a longing for an idealised past, and a sense of hope for the future. Nevertheless, Anvari with her ironic treatment of the chador, triggers a new way of considering the past which may mobilise a sense of anger and determination for the representation of Iranian women.

In addition, Anvari mentioned that the viewers of this series of her works also have similar shared memories of the chador, and this may enrich their understanding of the work. However, the manifestation of Anvari’s memory through her work, which involves her private recollection and positive

associations with the chador, might not convey itself to non-Iranian viewers; its subversive implication, then, might be unlikely to be shared with others (see Chapter Six).

5.3.6 Shadi Ghadirian's Work

Ghadirian's choice of work for this research is from her *Nil, Nil* series (2008). This body of work consists of staged photographs based on the theme of 'war'.

Ghadirian uses signifiers of military objects, such as helmets, military boots, and ammunition belts within domestic contexts to illustrate the presence, threat, and effects of war as a fearful phenomenon in Iranian lives. This topic and approach are clearly shown in another image in this series, such as the image #10 (Figure 5.15) which depicts a hand grenade in a crystal fruit bowl. However, in some other images the theme of war is expanded and complicated by symbolic indexical representations of gender, by juxtaposing connotative codes of female and male gender.



Figure 5.15: Shadi Ghadirian, # 10 from the *Nil, Nil* series, 2008

Figure 5.16, which is Ghadirian's selected work, shows two pairs of footwear positioned facing each other next to a doorway. In this work, although the bodies are absent, the shoes stand in for sentient beings. The juxtaposition of the shiny red high-heeled shoes with the worn, soiled, and bloody soldier's boots suggests the presence of both the woman and the man, feminine and masculine in the context, whilst at the same time emphasising the absence of the shoe's wearers.



Figure 5.16: Shadi Ghadirian, # 1 from the *Nil,Nil* series, 2008

The woman's shoes are positioned in the light coming from the doorway. While the light illuminates the toe of one of the boots, the rest of the footwear is in the shade. It looks like the woman is ready to go out, while the man is resting; this is because the boots' laces are untied. The worn condition of the man's shoes and the soil and blood on them (the service of the nation represented by the 'earth' of Iran); this combination evokes meanings of bravery, sacrifice, and diligence in relation to men. By contrast, however, the woman's shoes, which are metropolitan and feminine, look brand new. The characteristics attributed to man and woman, here, assign different roles to the two genders involved in this binary relationship. Woman and man in this work seem to be coming from two different worlds; for the man the world is a battleground, a place of conflict, and probably of pain while for the woman the world is a fancy place to party and have fun. The man seems to be carrying big responsibilities; being protective, assertive, and brave in the representation, however, the woman has been ascribed only her femininity. However, it does look like she is ready to step out and therefore become somehow active, but for her, there is not a heavy duty to undertake, because the menace has been taken care of by the man.

At the time of the Iran and Iraq war (1980-1988) women directly (by having roles in military scenes) and indirectly (by supporting and supplying military forces with foods, goods and equipment) participated along with men in defending the country against invasion (Koolae, 2014, p. 281). Ghadirian represents the man as the epic gender, the guardian of the domestic peace, and the one who tries hard to keep the woman's world safe from the aggression of the war.

Although I mentioned before that the direction of the woman's shoes and their exposure to the light might create a sense of momentum in the presence of woman in this work, in relation to the theme of war woman appears to be the inactive gender and at distance from it. In my reading, the woman in this context and in relation to the topic of war in this work has a similar position as the fruits in the crystal bowl with the hand grenade next to them showed in Figure 5.15. The hand grenade signifies the potential of exploding at any moment, so it is associated with danger. While the fruits in the bowl appear static, the hand grenade nestled amongst them is like an interloper, signifying the potential that it may at any moment blow up the fruit.

Concerning Figure 5.16, there is some implied dynamism in the red shoes, because the colour red is often considered to be a dynamic colour, associated with passion, love, aggression, danger, blood and power. In addition, red shoes have associations with dancing and sexualised clothing. In the context of Iran, my reading of the red colour of the woman's shoes is associated with vitality, partying, and cheerfulness for the female gender; however, in the non-Iranian views, the reading of the red shoes may be commonly related to the sexual implications of the labour of women as prostitutes, which is not a dominant reading in Iran (see discussion in Chapter Six).

In her interview, Ghadirian mentioned that although she is not an active feminist, she has feminist tendencies in her thinking, yet this does not necessarily influence her works. While the implied presence of a woman is equally significant to that of the man, this work again highlights both genders in terms of extreme, simplistic, and heteronormative characteristics: the masculine man and the feminine woman. As both a man's and a woman's shoes are at the door, the image could also imply that a couple have gone into the bedroom and thus the meaning could be associated with women comforting and rewarding soldiers who come home safely.

An important observation about this work is that there are hardly any overt references to the Iranian cultural context in this representation. Thus, the symbolic mode of this representation may provide a more widely applicable representation of the theme of war and its effects in a domestic environment in different cultural contexts, not only in Iran. The woman's presence, however, is mainly depicted via

attractive feminine elements which in this case are the ‘red shoes’. In my view, this is especially manifested in this context in relation to the symbolic representation of man as a saviour, which makes the woman seem to be addressed only in terms of feminine attractiveness.

5.4 Diasporic Artists’ works

There are three diasporic artists participating in this study who have been introduced in the interview chapter. These artists’ works are analysed in the following order: Aphrodite Désirée Navab, Roxana Manouchehri, and Soody Sharifi. As with the local artists’ category, the selected works for these diasporic artists contain references to female identity, however, they have a more diverse range of iconographic means for approaching the subjects. Navab’s works are photographs of herself performing in her ‘Superman’ persona as well as the chador; Manouchehri and Sharifi’s works are mixed media. The analysis of the diasporic artists’ works will be discussed in contrast to the art and cultural productions of the artists working inside Iran.

5.4.1 Navab’s Work

The following images are Aphrodite Desiree Navab’s works from the *Super East-West Woman* series (2002-ongoing). This Iranian-Greek-American artist describes this series of works as ‘photographic performance’. This body of works began in 2002 and is an ongoing project in which the artist wears an outfit which is a combination of the Superman character as well as the chador (Figures 5.17 & 5.18).



Figure 5.17: Désirée Navab, *Super East-West Woman* from the *Super East-West Woman* series, 2002-2008



Figure 5.18: Désirée Navab, *Passing by* from the *Super East-West Woman* series, 2002-2008

In creating this series, Navab wears the outfit and takes photos of herself in different locations, situations, and positions in her city of residency, New York City. In this series, she associates her Iranian identity to the American fictional male superhero, ‘Superman’.

When I asked Navab to select one of her works for using in this research, she suggested that I first use *Super East-West Woman*, which is a photo of her torso wearing the Superman top as an introduction to the character, and then use her work entitled as *Passing by*; both works from her *Super East-West Woman* series.

Figure 5.17 shows the artist, whose face is cut off the frame, wearing a Superman top, showing her hair on two sides of the Superman logo on the top. She is

wearing gold jewellery; the top necklace is the Persian / historical icon of the Great Cyrus (the emperor). The lower necklace is a red agate stone, a popular stone used in jewellery in Iran. She is wearing rings and bracelets as well, some of which are bejewelled with turquoise stones, also popular in Iran. As an Iranian, seeing the necklace, although very small (in size), provides me with a historical / cultural sign of Persian-ness, however, the dominant cultural code of the photo remains the Superman sign on the tee-shirt.

In her interview, Navab explained that she has used the chador in Superman-blue in all the works in this series. In this photo (Figure 5.17), she is wearing the chador as a cape around her shoulders which is covering her arms. The chador/cape is not easily discerned, since the Superman cape is red, and his outfit is long sleeved and blue. She has her arms crossed; while this gesture could be interpreted as a pose of determination, the gesture loses some of the meaning of determination in this work, because the arms are crossed in a relaxed and exhibitiveway.

The artist's use of the Superman outfit / icon in this series, as an American cultural icon, is to empower the female gender. In fact, her use of Oriental-like jewellery, together with the American cultural icon of the Superman, suggests a superhero woman who is 'bicultural' Iranian-American. The hybridity of iconic cultural codes in this work, which involves mixing cultural codes, can be a means of resistance for diasporic subjects (Cordingley, 2013; Bhabha, 1996). According to Anthony Cordingley (2013), "[...] iconic hybridity represents a language variety in order to conjure up negative connotations" (p. 118). While it is not to say that iconic hybridity is always marked as such in different contexts, in Navab's work it portrays her "as departing from the norms of what is considered standard in the narrative" (ibid).

Figure 5.18 shows the artist walking on a busy street along with another pedestrian. She is wearing a blue chador, which was the Superman cape in the first image. However, there is no sign of the Superman character here, and it is only the blue chador, which carries the momentum of this image. The blue colour of the veil, instead, somehow resembles the Afghan version of the veil and clothing worn by the Virgin Mary. I do not intend to go through a discussion

about the association of Afghan chador and the Virgin Mary to this image; however, I emphasize that the chador here has many possible associations and is highly ideological in any forms of reading of this work.

Other than the woman in chador (the artist), the presence of other people on the street, who seem to be from different countries, implies a multicultural context. The man in the suit is looking at his phone, the Asian woman behind the man is taking a photo of something, and the couple who are holding hands are looking in different directions. It seems like nobody is taking any notice of the veiled woman, although she is the only one who is substantially different in appearance, or more to say, she looks like the ‘the Other’ in this context. The implications of ‘biculturalism’ in the first image (Figure 5.17) are eliminated from the identity of the woman, and it is only the context of the photograph which suggests a multicultural environment.

The icon of Superman in the first image of this analysis has a very active connotation, and the woman in the second image, in the blue chador, is outside and walking on the street. Some might attribute agency to Navab because of associating her subjectivity with the Superman character as a “good guy determined to uphold truth and Justice” through his great power of action (Grayling, 2006, para 4). However, the other works in this series are often representations of a religious Muslim woman and depict female identity associated with Orientalist discourses.

According to Keshmirshakan (2010), ‘identity’ and exoticism’ are the chief concerns of the art practice of Iranian artists (p. 489). He further explains that “coded forms of typical indigenous elements [in the works of Iranian artists are] based on a subjective exotic view of what is expected to be shown as ‘Iranian’ and as ‘contemporary’” (p. 498-499). In this series, the allegorical representation of American- Iranian identity, Navab still chooses to use the chador in many of her images as the code / icon for her Iranian identity, which is a dominant Islamic ideological element, whereas she represents her American identity with a mythical / fictional icon. This integration of markedly different cultural codes can be viewed as a formal strategy to change this subjective exotic view of identity. Considering that Navab was inspired by the works of Shirin Neshat, whom I

consider to be an Orientalist artist, it is also possible that the use of the chador in her works could be based on what Keshmirshakan refers to as a subjective exotic view of the concept of identity. While Navab's works in this series are navigated by both her Iranian and American identity positionings, her Iranian cultural identity plays out in feminist and postcolonial forms of subjectivity. According to Naficy (2001), the art and cultural works of diasporic producers can be more inclined to affiliate their works with some type of collective identity due to their limited access to resources. The use of the chador in Figure 5.16, then, can be described as Navab's collective code of identification in positioning Iranian women's identities. Consequently, even though Navab's use of hybrid cultural codes in the representation of the Iranian woman introduced in Figure 5.17 can be understood as a form of resistance and depicting a complex diasporic identity, in Figure 5.18 it converts into an identity which illustrates 'otherness' rather than notions of cultural hybridity and transnationality.

5.4.2 Manouchehri's Work

Figure 5.19 is Manouchehri's work, entitled *Power*, a mixed media production created in 2014. Her work shows Queen Victoria and a Qajar Princess, who were both royal characters from the 19th century, facing each other.



Figure 5.19: Roxana Manouchehri, *Power*, 2014

In creating this work, Manouchehri has used acrylic on canvas, perspex sheets, and mirror films. The work is encased in a box-frame, which is almost 12 cm deep. The perspex sheet (the transparent upper layer of the frame), through which we view the painted image of the figures of the Queen and Princess, is adorned with white paisley patterns on both sides of the work, which are filled with the symbol that is found on the power switch of modern electric appliances. There is also a white linear drawing of Queen Elizabeth 1st of England and the lace-like pattern of her dress on the perspex sheet with the power symbol replacing her face. The top part of this line-drawn figure is a magnified version of the Royal Crest, and the artist has used mirror reflective films shining to show it radiating. There are also two strips of mirror film on the left side of the upper surface of this work, which are behind the Princess.

The artist lives in Ireland, and through this work one can see that her living environment has inspired her to focus on ‘power’ as the main concept of this work. As Manouchehri explained in the interview, this work represents the cultural and national identity issues of the Iranian society that arise from colonisation and imperialism dating from the 19th century. She believes that the Iranian society has always been, and still is, mimicking the West in various aspects, including fashion.

The realistic painting of the background, which depicts the standing profile of two women, is in black and white, thus giving the work a historical tone. Queen Victoria is looking towards the ground and the Qajar Princess is turning her head and looking directly towards an unknown place. The portrayal of female characters is hieratic and static, which illustrates a “Victorian influence” (Stein, 2013, p. 25). Both the Queen and Princess are covered from head to toe: Queen’s body, though, is totally covered in heavy garments made from different colours and fabrics, and the Princess is wearing a scarf, which traditionally covers her hair and bosom. However, the shapes of the Princess’s legs are shown, as she is wearing tight white pants/ tights under her skirt. The style of the Princess skirt, which in Iran is called ‘Shaliteh’, became popular amongst the royal women in the late 19th century, when, on his trips to the Europe, Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar attended ballet performances and became fascinated by the ballet tutu. His

fascination with the clothing style of ballerinas led to a declaration that the women of his harem must wear tutus / shaliteh, although, the headscarves had to stay on (Scheiwiller, 2013, p. 54).

Manouchehri depicts power relations between Iran and Britain through these two female characters. She believes that the style of the Qajar Princess is ironic, since her skirt is/looks westernised and the top part of her clothing, including the scarf, is traditional; this is similar to Navab's *Super East-West Woman* in which Eastern and Western outfits are mixed. Discourses of power seek to propagate certain forms of identity (McLeod, 2000, p. 225); however, the cultural hybridity of the Iranian princess, which is shown through her clothing style, can be understood as a resourceful means for negotiating competing versions of constructions of identities (Bhabha, 1996). Nevertheless, the 'mixed-up' look of the princess can be viewed as ironic in comparison with the Queen who is standing in front of her imposingly. The Qajar era was the time at which Iran started adapting to "modern and foreign ideas and technology" (Stein, 2013, p. 23). The irony Manouchehri mentions refers to occurrences over two centuries in which Iranians have imitated the West, whereas, at that time Queen Victoria was a very powerful person who had a leading role in her country and empire.

In terms of agency, the notion of power, emphasised on the upper, diagrammatic level of this work, is to accentuate the powerful position of the British Queen and perhaps to imply the superficiality of the Qajar Princess and her power. However, the use of paisley patterns on the upper level is a very Persian cultural / political element. In a book entitled *The Shah* (2011a), Abbas Milani⁴³ (2011a), by referring to Houshang Golshiri⁴⁴, describes the symbol of paisley as:

It is the quintessential visual metaphor of Iran's bifurcated and tormented identity riven between Arabic Islam and pre-Islamic Persian creed. The paisley is a bent cedar, and the

⁴³ Abbas Milani is an Iranian-American historian and author. Milani is a visiting professor of Political Science and the director of the Iranian Studies program at Stanford University.

⁴⁴ Houshang Golshiri was an Iranian fiction writer, critic, and editor. He was one of the first Iranian writers to use modern literary techniques and is recognised as one of the most influential writers of Persian prose of the 20th century.

cedar is the tree Zarathustra planted in heaven. The heavenly tree “bent” under the weight of the Arab invasion (p. 33).

Therefore, the white-drawn paisley patterns on the top level is a reference to the ancient origins of the Persian identity juxtaposed with a Victorian figurative design. The paisleys, however, are filled with the symbol that is found on the power switch of electrical appliances, which connotes the West and its technological inventions. While the paisley is a motif which, as I will discuss in Chapter Seven (see 7.2.7), represents the resistance and resilience of the Iranian identity, the condensation of the power symbol into a paisley motif serves to make the power dynamics of the West dominant. The metaphorical aspect of this work, then, conveys meanings of ‘Westoxification’⁴⁵ of the Persian / Iranian identity. The concept of ‘Westoxification’, however, grapples with processes of cultural hybridity and globalisation, and imposes cultural essentialism. Therefore, it can be said that Manouchehri narrates the cultural imperialism and political domination of the West in relation to Iran, suggesting a sense of intoxication or obsession of Iranian society with the West, situating Iranian society in a lower position as it perpetuates and increases the power of the West while diminishing the cultural values of Iran or Persia with its profound historical heritage.

This symbolic / metaphoric representation of power relations between Iranian and Western female identities, from a feminist point of view, can also suggest that in Britain women can be powerful; therefore, this representation can challenge Iranian society to imagine stronger identities for women.

⁴⁵ According to the Online Oxford Dictionary of Islam the term Westoxification was “coined by the Iranian secular intellectual Jalal al-e Ahmad to describe the fascination with and dependence upon the West to the detriment of traditional, historical, and cultural ties to Islam and Islamic world. Defined as an indiscriminate borrowing from and imitation of the West, joining the twin dangers of cultural imperialism and political domination. Implies a sense of intoxication or infatuation that impairs rational judgment and confers an inability to see the dangers presented by the toxic substance, that is, the West. The West's inherent dangers are described as moral laxity, social injustice, secularism, devaluation of religion, and obsession with money, all of which are fuelled by capitalism; the common result is cultural alienation. The term was adopted by Ali Shariati, ideologue of the Iranian revolution, to describe the results of Iran's modernization program” (<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2501>).

5.4.3 Sharifi's Work

Figure 5.20 is Sharifi's selection of work for this study called *The feast of ID* from the *Mixiature* series created in 2010.

As the word 'Mixiature' suggests, in this series Sharifi photographs her models and then montages them onto backgrounds of ancient Persian miniatures. This style of miniature painting, called "Herat School", initiated in the 15th century, was mainly used for illustrating manuscripts including Persian poetry and the popular Persian literature books at that time (Javidi, 2012).

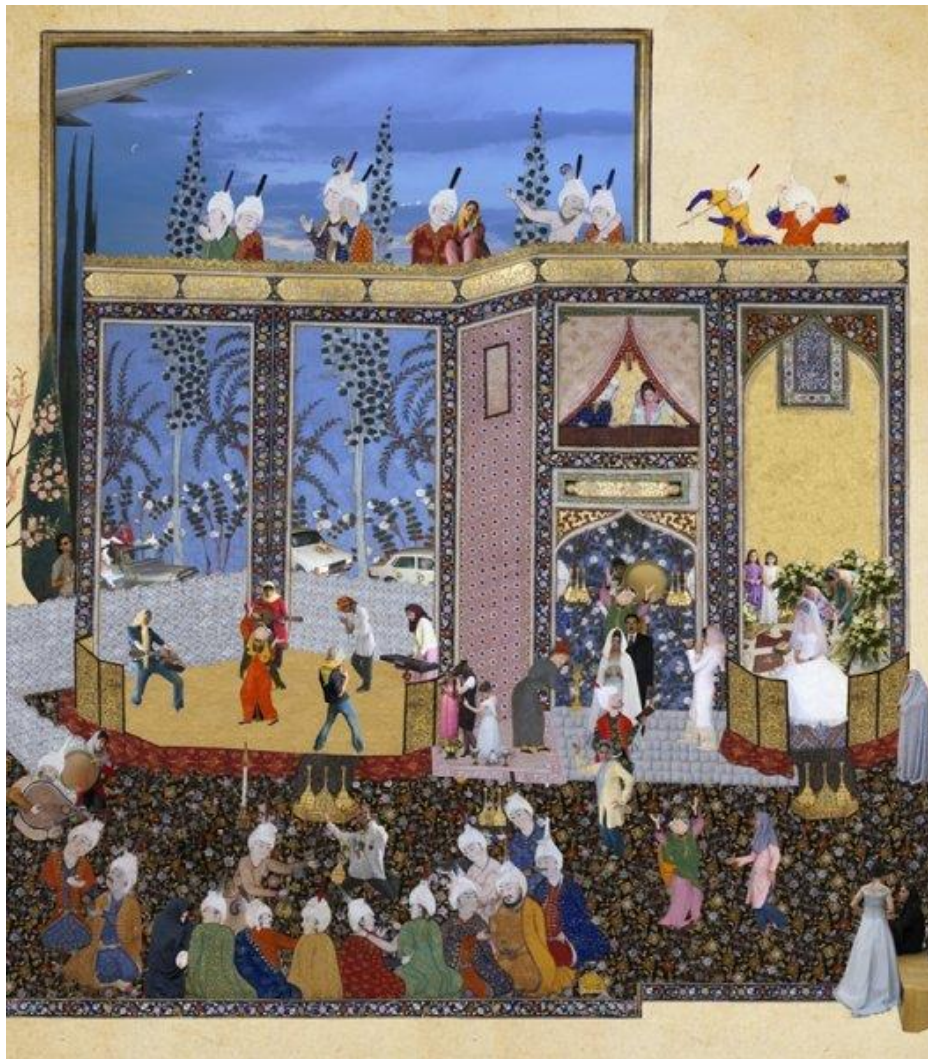


Figure 5.20: Soody Sharifi, *The feast of ID* from the *Mixiature* series, 2010

In this work, Sharifi digitally collages the people from miniatures and the people from her photographs in a way that creates a sense of communication between them. This interaction of the historical people in the painting with the modern

people of Iran denotes the connection of the identity of Iranian society to the past / traditions.

The miniature illustrates the inside and outside of a private courthouse, and the life of the people, which happens in the private sphere. The outside / public area has some modern / technological elements of contemporary life, including cars and a wing of an aeroplane. The inside area of the courthouse is filled with people from both the miniature and the modern people collaged on the background of the miniature painting.

Three women in wedding dresses are collaged at the right bottom part, inside the building in the right-hand arched room, one standing next to the central arched doorway with a groom. Girls wearing scarves and miniature characters are dancing in front of the couple. A group of girls are playing modern musical instruments on the left upper side of yard in the inside area with a miniature man dancing in the middle of this circle (Figure 5.21).

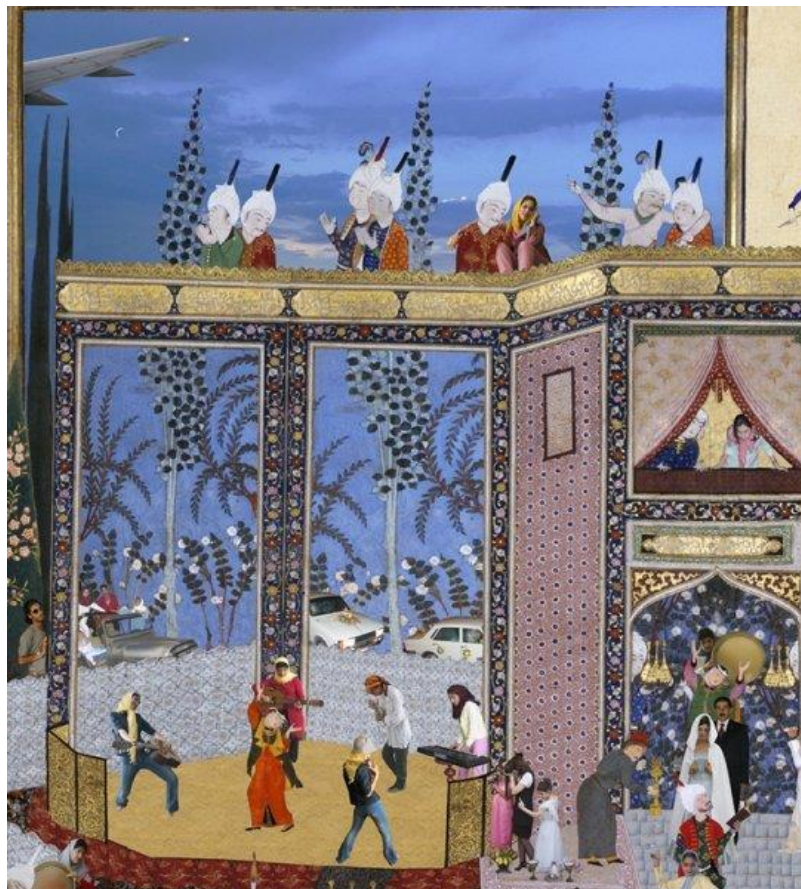


Figure 5.21: Soody Sharifi, a detail of the work 'The feast of ID' from the *Maxiature* series, 2010

A girl and a miniature man are playing traditional musical instruments in the lower part of the yard, with a group of miniature people sitting on the floor; a woman in the black chador is montaged among them. A woman in a light-coloured chador is also standing on the right side of the image next to the entrance of the room. There are also people, of both photographic and miniature forms, looking at the yard through the window and roof, and even behind the wall.

As already mentioned, miniature painting was used to illustrate Persian poetry and literature, therefore, miniature paintings narrate stories. Accordingly, this image is narrating stories of an Iranian society in which traditional values, behaviour, and beliefs are all accommodated and interact with the lives of contemporary people. In other words, a synthesis of the ancient and the modern cultures of Iranian society are reflected in this work and its elements are shown not to be in conflict with each other. This connection is one of the characteristics of today's culture of Iranian society; therefore, the implications of it are the valid points of this representation.

The models are mostly teenagers, and while I consider the two women in chadors to be older than the rest, the majority of the photographic models are rather young, which shows the youthful texture of current Iranian society (Memarian & Nesvaderani, 2015, p. 1). Except for the bride on the bottom right-side, the majority of the women wear scarves, which interrupts the separation of the indoors and outdoors area, as life in private is much more relaxed than public in terms of not following the Islamic rules for women covering their hair. The majority of women in this representation, although still visibly Islamic, are not subject to the iconic use of chador, which emphasizes the unification of Iranian women's identities.

The traditional / ancient patterns of the background and the miniature characters, along with the modern elements of the contemporary life of Iran such as the aeroplane and the cars convey the interaction between the past and present, modern and traditional. Even the use of photography as a medium has helped to emphasize these interactions. As Sharifi's work features the connection of the Iranian society to a historical context, I will also discuss its relation to a nostalgic theme.

Because Sharifi uses the patterns of traditional Iranian art, she links the historical form to the present life of the Iranian society. While depicting the past can be related to the theme of nostalgia, Sharifi does not express any regret for the past and her work does not imply a regressive stance in connecting with the historical form. Instead, the past and present interact with no ambiguity or conflict in her work. Therefore, the bringing together of ‘past’ and ‘present’ in Sharifi’s work and juxtaposing a historical past with a modern version of the life of Iranian society is a strategy for integration rather than engaging with the concept of nostalgia.

Pickering and Keightley (2006) suggest that “the articulation of the past’ in art and cultural production is integral to contemporary temporality” (p. 924). In this sense, the play in reconstructing the relationship between past and present in Sharifi’s work has created possibilities to circumvent the “the temporal emphasis in modernity” (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 920) which in the representation of today’s Iran has often emphasised relentless suppression. Therefore, by articulating the present in the context of a historical past, Sharifi, to an extent, manages to move beyond existing conditions and circumstances of the problematic aspects of the life in today’s Iranian society.

The alternation between the miniature characters and the modern people, vibrant colours, dancing and musical implications, and the wedding celebration, all give a highly dynamic mode to this work. This sense of dynamicity is what I intended to reflect in the practical part of my research.

5.5 Summary

To conclude, this chapter provided my analysis of the artworks of the artists participating in this research. Overall, the analysis suggests a complexity in the ways the artists used codes/signs in developing the representation of identities. The chador was used in the works of five out of nine participant artists, both inside and outside Iran. The photographs by Khademian and Moaiery show the female identity in colonised situations and as compliant to the Islamic regime’s codification of gender. However, Anvari’s representation of women is more related to postcolonial discourses because of her juxtaposition of Iranian women

with an image of a Western woman outside Iran. Similarly, Navab relates the chador to the Superman persona as a means of empowering the female subject which relates her work to the notion of cultural hybridity. Juxtaposing the past and present was the main feature of Sharifi's work, which connoted the appeal of relationships between traditional and modern aspects of Iranian society. Manouchehri explored the concept of power by juxtaposing royal female identities from Iran and Britain, as well as employing the paisley pattern, as an ancient Persian sign, with the modern icon from the power switch of electric appliances. My analysis of the visual data shows that while the use of the chador is a dominant element in the practice of many of my participant artists (Moaiery, Khademian, Anvari, Navab, and Manouchehri), their strategies in using this element of the Islamic visual code differ.

While video as a medium provides opportunities for representing the dynamic characteristics of identities, the video works of Keramati and Tavakolian reflect rather static, melancholic, and depressed images of the Iranian identities which could be strategic. Ghadirian's photography shows that a symbolic way of representing identity can have more potential for avoiding the depiction of ideological representation in relation to the female subjects.

Since this chapter was presented based on my personal interpretations of the artworks, the next chapter, therefore, moves on to other interpretations on the same artworks by three focus-groups: art experts, feminists, and diasporic Iranians.

CHAPTER SIX: RECEPTION STUDY

6.1 Introduction

Another aspect of my research was to examine how New Zealand based respondents engage with the works of my participant artists. This section contains an analysis of the data from three focus-groups discussing their interpretations of the artworks. These three key focus-groups include: art experts, feminists, and Iranians living in New Zealand.

My objective here is to understand the ways in which meanings in relation to the representation of Iranian female ethnic identities are constructed by viewers located outside Iran, and to a certain extent, by viewers operating within other interpretive frameworks, including ethnic Iranians who are no longer constrained by Islamic Republic guidelines for the conduct of their activities.

Furthermore, my intention was that the viewers' interpretations of the artworks would help me identify elements and strategies considered both limiting and liberating outside Iran. In this sense, this part of the research functioned as a translation chamber to help me, a diasporic person newly arrived in New Zealand, to understand if, and how, my concerns and artistic strategies might function within this new environment where my research, especially my creative practice research, would be exhibited and evaluated. The discussions among my focus-group participants consequently helped at the stage of developing my artworks, giving me other parameters for thinking about the subjects and the creative representation of different themes.

Focus-group research, which is a form of audience-research, seems not to be commonly used in the art-world because, to my knowledge, there is no research which seeks to study viewers' interpretations of visual artworks. However, in relation to the overall autoethnographic framework of the thesis, which can have a tendency to over-emphasize the researcher's point-of-view, passions and dislikes, this section functions to triangulate some of my own assertions. It will be seen that, although non-Iranians do not fully share my critical views of current strategies in Iranian women's art, the Iranian members of the focus-groups do also

tend to feel that this kind of image-making gives only a partial and biased view of Iranian lives and society.

6.2 The Focus-Group Data Analysis

Before presenting an analysis of the data, I provide a brief information table about the participants of each group (see Figure 6.1). I have codified each group participant and use these codes during my analysis in order to identify the quotations with the group members.

Group	length	Code	Participants' information
<i>Art Expert</i>	2h	A.a A.b A.c A.d A.e	Male, Art teacher & Art history researcher Female, Artist. Female, postgraduate student in Media & Creative Technologies. Female, Art teacher & Artist Female, Art curator & Artist
<i>Feminist</i>	1h44'	B.a B.b B.c	Female, PhD student at Waikato University (Iranian) Female, Professor at Waikato University (Kiwī) Female, PhD, Lecturer at Waikato University (French)
<i>Diasporic Iranian</i>	2h55'	C.a C.b C.c C.d C.e C.f	Female, PhD student at Waikato University (last visit to Iran: 2011) Male, PhD student at Waikato University (last visit to Iran: 2015) Male, PhD student at Waikato University (last visit to Iran: 2014) Female, PhD student at Waikato University (last visit to Iran: July 2015) Female, housewife (last visit to Iran: December 2015) Male, working in Hamilton (last visit to Iran: December 2015)

Figure 6.1: Members of the focus-groups

I asked the groups to talk about the artworks which each of my research subjects had chosen for discussion (the images of the artworks are in the previous chapter). They were: Anvari's artwork from her *Chador Dadar* series (2006); Moaiery's photograph (2013) from the *Under the Shadow of Iman Khomeini* series; Khademian's photograph *Election* (2013); Ghadirian's photograph, # 1 from *Nil, Nil* series (2008); Tavakolian's video, *Look* (2013); Keramati's video *Self-portrait* (2008); Sharifi's artwork *The feast of ID* (2010) from the *Maxiature* series; Manouchehri's artwork *Power* (2014); and Navab's artworks *Super East-West Woman* and *Passing by* from the *Super East-West Woman* series (2002-2008).

The analysis of the focus-groups data is configured thematically based on the discourses which the respondents drew on to engage with the works of my participating artists, in a manner similar to the interview data in Chapter Four. The most significant themes which the viewers used to discuss the artworks included: social, political, Islamic ideological, ethnic, gender, and cross-cultural themes, which provide different frameworks for the analysis in this chapter.

6.2.1 Islamic Ideological Implications

Not surprisingly, interpretations related to Islamic ideology and the representation of identities were dominant within all three groups. This was especially the case for the artworks which contained the chador as an easily recognised sign for representing Muslim societies/identities.

The close connection between the political system of Iran and Islam as its dominant ideology and the consequent interrelationship of religion and politics was understood by all the research subjects as significant in the artworks. My participant artists mostly assert that their art productions are embedded in political dimensions. According to Smith (1991) and Anderson (1983), definitions of national identity involve some sense of political community. The intersection of the artist's representation of gender identity with political tendencies situates female identity in a political arena, and therefore the identification of the representations ranged over the relevance of 'nation' as a concept. This is an overt point, which stands out in the data from the focus-group discussions; in particular participants in the *Diasporic Iranian* group were very conscious of the 'nation' as a concept in their readings of the works.

– **Khademian's work *Election* and Moaiery's work from the *Under the Shadow of Imam Khomeini*:**

Within the *Diasporic Iranian* group there were strong feelings that they, as Iranians, had been misrepresented through these artworks, particularly by Khademian and Moaiery's photographs. In other words, they thought that the representations were biased and one-sided. Interestingly, some of the diasporic Iranian participants drew connections with misrepresentations of ethnic identities

in the light of real-life in Iranian society. The following extracts from the *Diasporic Iranian* group express their thoughts on Khademian's photograph:

C.b: I think there are women wearing these kinds of covers, in this aspect this image could be real. But a very small and special stratum of the society with a certain ideology is like these women, not most of the society. I remember, the first year I came to New Zealand I travelled to Wellington. I saw a homeless person nearby the city council; he was looking miserable in his dirty clothes. Based on the information that I had about the capital city it was really unlikely to me to see a homeless person there, especially in that area. There could be an agenda behind this which could be creating a mental conflict for other people. It was clear to me that this is not the agent of New Zealand Society. But in this case New Zealand society is lucky that media has never represented such an image from it. Unlike the media's interest in representing Iran and some other societies in negative ways.

C.f: I personally in interacting with non-Iranian people, I have always explained that we are a multi-cultural society, and this is especially more sensible in the border areas and almost all these border areas are bilingual. Therefore, we have to expect seeing any kind of people. Although this artist has worked in a firm Islamic framework, but this [representation] could be true because this picture shows a part of the society anyway. In so much as the number of this type of people, which I think is almost 5%, is very small, the whole weight of this picture is given to this group of people. The fact is that this 5% have got the power in our country.

Such reactions from the *Diasporic Iranian* focus-group participants imply that the representations are viewed as socio-cultural sources for discussing aspects of Iranian identity. Their understanding of how representations function is aligned with Hall's (2006b) definition of representation:

[...] to represent means to faithfully carry the identity of an area or group, to do it honour and to make others aware. To represent is to express and experience social solidarity...
When you represent, you're in charge of how others see you and how they see your group or area (para. 1).

The Iranian focus-group participants, therefore, in their readings, understand that artists are some form of social agent. While according to Khademian her intention in the work *Election* (2013) is to illustrate the activeness of the traditional stratum of the society in political events, her intention did not resonate with the diasporic Iranians; rather they experienced feelings of anger and disappointment, as the following extract demonstrates:

C.a: This is a part of the Iranian society, not all of it, but it seems like women in chador is the only thing that has been represented of Iranian women. I do not like this idea, magnifying a small and certain population and ignoring the majority is not right. When we do not show the whole reality of Iran and keep showing the story from only one angle, it is another way of equivocation which is false.

C.c: This is an extremist image, a stereotype, which is one-sided. I do not know why the heads are not shown! Once in a while, here in New Zealand, people ask me if Iranian women wear burka! They do not know that Iranian women do not wear burka even the religious ones. Only a small number of women in some cities in the south parts of Iran wear it for decorative purpose.

C.e: [...] I endorse everyone else's idea about how small the number of this group of people is, but I respect them, and I admit that they exist in Iran. Although, I do not like this picture to be the dominant picture of Iranian women.

Interpretations of the diasporic Iranian members in the group are associated with the transformation of Iranian society from being obedient to the Islamic regime into a society in which people actively resist, challenge, and privately criticise the imposed Islamic rules. In fact, much as I do myself, the Iranian focus-group disagreed with aligning the society to the ideological structure of the regime.

Some members of the other focus-groups also identified the female identity in Khademian's photograph with religion because of the use of the chador. For instance, a participant from the *Feminist* group said:

B.c: For me this picture is more about the religion. [...] the different kinds of chadors in this picture are interesting. I can also feel insecurity.

The Islamicised identities of the three women in the photograph are homogenised and lack subjectivity in the viewpoint of another participant from the *Art Expert* group:

A.d: Their personality has been taken away by cutting the heads off the frame. They all look exactly the same in my point of view and the slight difference in the style of the veils in this image does not change it. They are waiting in a line to practice something as an individual, but they all look the same. They wear the same colour. So, there is something about this idea of sameness in freedom. There are some tensions around these two ideas.

The uniformity of the representations of Iranian women through association with the chador constructed an internalised Islamic identity in the eyes of many of the focus-group participants.

Moiery's photograph, from *Under the Shadow of Imam Khomeini* series, also evoked feelings of irritation and exasperation in all the diasporic Iranian participants, because it was seen as representing the society in a propagandistic mode in compliance with the Islamic regime. Some of them expressed their frustration in the following extract:

C.b: it is very interesting that two groups are willing to show these thematic representations of Iranian society. One is the foreign media and the second is the government of Iran and they are benefiting from it. This image is black and white and to me it is not showing even a tiny bit of the reality.

C.d: I totally agree with what was said about this image. This picture although it is a part of the reality, but I cannot accept it as real.

The saturation of the representations by the use of Islamic ideological signs, especially the chador, again evoked feelings of frustration and anger in the diasporic Iranian participants. For example, the comments below were made in reaction to Moaiery's photograph:

C.a: Well, this again provokes me, it makes me angry. Because this is the image of the Islamic government in Iran and the preferred image of the foreign media of Iranian society, and we all hate it. I hate it when we are just shown in such manner. This irritates me. I admit that it exists but why this should be the dominant icon of us [Iranians]. It is very interesting how artists use women for such representations. Iranian men seem to look the same in a Western context. And of course, it is the women's look that conflicts with other nationalities. This is abusive.

C.e: [...] The chador in this image has the exact meaning of the ayatollah's turban.

C.f: this is the opposite of what the 'My Stealthy Freedom' movement is showing.

The diasporic Iranian participants invariably considered Moaiery's work as largely one-sided and propagandistic, especially participant C.f whose reference to one of the women's political movements in Iran shows a keen awareness of the actions/reactions of the Iranian women to the Islamic rules imposed on them.

The chador, in Moaiey's photograph was associated with meanings of oppression and subjugation in the life of Iranian women by the members of the *Art Expert* group, as the following exchange shows:

A.d: Well my reading is very literal, when I see the title of the work. There is an acceptance by the people in the image, it looks like such a daily scene, it's like this is how it is.

A.a: Yes, unlike the waiting in the *Election* work, it's been accepted here, and you can see movements which makes it look casual.

A.b: Yes [...] it doesn't seem that people are upset about the situation.

A.c: I think just because the women's movement seems casual, doesn't mean that they are not oppressed.

A.c: It could be that they have simply had to come to terms with this way of life in order to have a basic freedom.

A.d: Yes, exactly. It's about acceptance.

A.a: Yes, resignation to it.

As mentioned earlier, religion and politics in Iran are tightly interrelated at the public level, even if they are not so tightly related in people's everyday lives. From the point of view of the non-Iranian in the *Art Expert* group, the women in the black chador in Moaiey's photograph imply that they have accepted the religious rules legislated by the clergymen in the posters.

Again, the use of the chador was criticised strongly by the diasporic Iranian participants, particularly when the works were created outside Iran. Showing a concern with authenticity in the construction of female identity was brought up among members of the *Diasporic Iranian* group when discussing Navab's work *Passing by* from *Super East-West Woman* series:

C.a: [...] why a woman in chador is the representation of Iranian women? Even if you are a super woman, you still have to wear a chador! It makes it even worse when you promote the same stereotype in other countries. That is why non-Iranian people ask us why we do not wear chador here [in New Zealand]!

C.b: I endorse what [C.a] is saying; in Chicago wherever you go you will see these religious Christian women wearing a long scarf, but you never see their picture, you would never know they exist until you go to this state. You never

see an image of them, all we see is fashion and modernity. Instead we have millions of close up frames of Iranian women in chador, and I'm pretty sure that the number of these images is more than the number of this type of women in Iran.

As the above extracts demonstrate, the diasporic Iranian participants were frustrated that the articulation of Islamic ideological identities drew heavily on the use of the chador as an easily identifiable sign of Islamicity in Iranian women. They themselves could not identify with the assumption that depicting a woman in a chador is the only indicator of a faithful Muslim identity.

– **Anvari's work from the *Chador Dadar* series**

All the diasporic Iranian participants described Anvari's photograph, from the *Chador Dadar* series, as a binary representation of Western woman and Iranian women that is unreal and propagandistic. The following extract clarifies how the representation was understood by the *Diasporic Iranian* group members:

C.d: The first thing that catches my eyes is the type of chador which these two women are wearing. Because I have never seen, such kind of chador in Iran. I think the artist wants them to be seen for their colours are very sharp and conspicuous. The artist wants to highlight these two women in the context. These two women clearly cannot be a representation of Iranian women.

C.e: [...] The environment in this image shows that this picture has not been taken in Iran, I wonder why Iranian women have to appear like that, in these chadors, in a Western country!

The chador in Anvari's work was understood as an exaggeration of a religious and traditional identity associated with ethnicity and gender. The Iranian participants generated an account of the chador which appeared to draw heavily on the articulation of the Iranian ethnic as the 'other', in contrast with the Western context and the woman in the poster. The above extracts about Anvari's photograph imply that the ethnic and cultural 'otherness' represented in the artwork carries the implication of 'exoticism', and what Keshmirshakan (2010) associates with the issue of 'expectation' of the global art market (p. 489).

In my interview with Anvari, she associated warm feelings of nostalgia with the chador as worn by her mother and aunt. Her work from the *Chador Dadar* also

evoked nostalgia from the Iranian participant in the *Feminist* group. This feeling was elicited by the colourful flowery chadors in the artwork (see the following extract).

B.a: [...] the print of the chadors in this picture reminds me of the traditions, our grandmothers, and our background which is a part of our identity. Even though we fight for freedom of hijab and covering rules, chador itself is not all the time negative all the time.

While none of the participants in the *Diasporic Iranian* group mentioned any nostalgic feelings towards this artwork, Anvari's nostalgic feeling for the chador was shared by B.a; however, this Iranian feminist participant acknowledges the efforts of Iranian women in challenging the imposed Islamic dress-code in today's Iran. It is possible then that the *Diasporic Iranian* group members were mainly focused on the current situation of Iran and Iranian women and consequently dismissed any other reading other than frustration of Islamic propaganda through the artworks. In addition, semiotic signs and resources have a set of affordances depending on their usage, and all these take place in a social context with a particular governing system. However, while meanings are not fixed, attributing new possible meanings to the given semiotic resources is confined "by favouring certain interpretations or *readings* over others" (Aiello, 2006, p. 91). The reason is that the concepts attached to certain resources "are immediately available for perception and interpretation" (Aiello, 2006, p. 99). A nostalgic reading was only observed in one Iranian participant; Anvari's artwork was mainly viewed by the diasporic Iranian participants as a representation of a Muslim identity rather than as an example of a nostalgic strategy.

By contrast, the chador as an Islamic element in Anvari's artwork was mainly understood by the *Art Expert* group as related to the oppression of women:

A.c: Well, knowing that there is not a law for women covering themselves in France, and also the fact about this law in Iran for women to cover themselves, makes this image interesting; the juxtaposition of specific countries for the setting of this image. The half-naked person on the poster is Western propaganda; I guess it kind of makes me really wonder what their expressions would be, whether they feel they are allowed to practice their faith as Muslims and they get to wear coverings and they are thankful for that or they are feeling like they should show their skin. [...] from a

Western perspective It is so easy to go ‘oh they are oppressed’ just because they are covered;

A.d: But they are oppressed.

A.b: Yes, they are oppressed.

A.e: It is obvious that they are oppressed.

This exchange shows that the chador in association with Iranian women is interpreted easily by non-Iranian viewers as an indication of an oppressed subjugated identity. Even though the participant A.c mentioned that the woman in the poster was a motif from ‘Western propaganda’ the chador-clad women were understood as either faithful Muslims or as restricted individuals who are envying the freedom of the ‘Western woman’.

6.2.2 Socio-Political Implications

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the artworks of my research sample address socio-political themes. Not surprisingly, these themes were invoked in many of the conversations about the artworks among the three groups of participants. Because the artworks by my research subjects were created in different modes and strategies, the groups’ members constructed multiple accounts in relation to the socio-political aspects of the representations. The participants’ comments sometimes suggested that Iran is an underdeveloped country in relation to women and their rights. For instance, by looking at Khademian’s *Election*, one of the *Art Expert* group members said:

A.a: It gives me a sense of feeling that voting for women in Iran is something revolutionary and something that they have just achieved. This image seems historical because it looks like a moment when democracy comes on top of another cultural history, which is women are not in the position of being publicly in charge of males, I assume the nature of the election is dominantly male. It’s just like the practice of voting for women is a start in political events.

This extract demonstrates an understanding of veiling as a practice which projects the subordination of women to men in a patriarchal Muslim society. While Iranian women gained the right to vote in 1963, the chador in this collective representation of women symbolizes backwardness. The veil here conveys an

Orientalist view about the identity of Iranian women and Iranian society in a regressive way.

– **Moaiey's work from the *Under the Shadow of Imam Khomeini* series**

For participants of the *Feminist* focus-group, Moaiey's photograph from the *Under the Shadow of Imam Khomeini* series evoked meanings of an imprisoned society under the suppressive control of political figures because their portraits are dominant in the image. The following extract suggests the participants think that Iranian society completely accepts religious rule and that women are particularly acquiescent:

B.b: The black silhouette women are very interesting, even though they have taken nearly half of the image, they are very small against the huge faces of the men behind them, and the hands coming down look oppressive to me; it's like 'I'm going to hold you down, control you'. There are some movements with the bodies, back and forth, movement is often tied to the notion of freedom but here, I don't think it is. I would not like to be there I feel.

B.c: To me the image on the right is more controlling and the one in the middle could be seen as like 'I will give you freedom' or 'I will take freedom from you'. It's hard to imagine myself being one of those women because I feel the imposition in this image.

From the feminist participants' viewpoints, veiled women were devoid of agency in that they are depicted as obedient and acting in accordance with the Islamic regime's desire. This is because the construction of female identity in Moaiey's work draws heavily on religious iconography so that the women in their black chador appear to be aligned with the expectations of the Islamic regime of Iran. Interestingly, a participant from the *Feminist* focus-group said at this point:

B.c: So far, the most amazing thing to me is that we have not seen a gun in all these works. I do not even know why I keep thinking that I should see gun in the Iranian society representations, as the symbol of power.

I have stressed the 'gun' in this statement because it foregrounds a semi-conscious assumption by some non-Iranians as to where the power and character of Iranian society is situated. This extract suggests that some conceptions of Iranian society are still based on Orientalist discourse that sees Islam and Muslim society as

regressive, insufficiently-civilised, barbaric, and oppressive to women - a society that can only exert power backed up by a 'gun'.

– **Tavakolian's video, *Look***

Tavakolian's video, *Look*, was ascribed with the meanings of loneliness, isolation, and resignation by all the members of the three groups. The below extract shows some of the non-Iranian participants' reactions to the video:

B.b: I think this video is about being stuck and not wanting to make a change. Like the guy having shaving cream on but he does not shave and is sitting doing something else, somehow being in between jobs, can't finish something. The situation was immobile, even the guy in the car, he was sitting there smoking waiting for something, the door was opened, and he was not going anywhere.

A.a: It's a waiting time, everyone is waiting, pausing. It doesn't seem any of them is having a hell of a lot of joy. Isolation is another word, even the one with the birthday cake felt very ominous.

A.c: It's like being trapped without putting bars up. [...] the freedom was only in the movement of the camera.

Those comments clearly show that the viewers in the *Feminist* and *Art Expert* groups thought that the video offered a configuration of loneliness, depression, passivity and imprisonment. Four out of six diasporic Iranian participants described the video as an exaggeration of a single emotional stance, similar to the non-Iranian participants' impressions of the video. The *Diasporic Iranian* group members mainly believed that the video does not present significant truth about life in the Iranian society:

C.f: It could be true. There are lots of people in Iran who are undecided about their lives.

C.e: There are depressed people everywhere in the world, the same as active and happy people. How come everyone was so depressed in this video? The colours were omitted from this video; even the birthday cake was dark. I think this video was emphasising on this issue that Iranian society is depressed. We have lots of beautiful houses, why does she have to choose that place! I do not think that we are coming from such a depressed and terrible society.

C.a: [...] Iranian culture is a very collective culture; instead Western society seems to be more alone.

All three groups read melancholia, passivity, and resignation into Tavakolian's video, *Look*. However, the majority of the diasporic Iranian participants were actually annoyed by, and dismissive of, their ethnic identity being exposed to other cultures outside Iran as negative, depressed and passive. This type of reaction from diasporic Iranian viewers can be related to Hamid Naficy's (2001) idea of diasporic communities as groups of people who "often demand 'authentic' and corrective representations" of their ethnic identity in the host countries (p. 6).

– **Keramati's video *Self-portrait***

Keramati's video *Self-portrait* was described by the *Feminist* group members as a representation of disappointment and trauma. Three out of five in the *Art Expert* group admired Keramati's video for being deep and powerful in showing melancholia and passiveness. As the use of the pronoun 'You' in the following exchange shows, they felt some kind of personal connection with the state beyond its location in an Iranian situation:

A.a: With the parallel writing we are given the experience of being fractured because you are trying to keep up with the fragment of the texts and then the self-editing and crossing out in the writing and thinking gives the notion of how people become self-censoring when there is enough of role imposed upon them. You don't actually need to impose the role any longer.

A.d: Yes, exactly.

A.a: They get internalised and you create the role that has been imposed on you, and you recreate it each day. The idea of walking and becoming faceless and fragmented because of the memories you have got that you don't want anyways. There was a sense of imprisonment. I'm very disturbed. It's deeply moving.

However, the diasporic Iranian participants did not identify with the video. Instead, they thought it might represent the artist's personal feeling and they were again disappointed that the Iranian ethnic identity was being articulated in such melancholic manner:

C.f: Why do we have to expose such aspect of our society at first place? And then struggle and try to prove that we are not such negative society after that. We make non-Iranians to criticise us and then defend ourselves. Why do not show our strong and powerful point? We have never reflected

our realities, our successful parts of us. It seems like the artists are not honest enough to reflect that side of us.

C.c: It could be happening in a very personal level, but generally it is not acceptable about the society, it is more melancholic.

C.d: Yes, I agree. This is more like a personal problem than a social issue, as it could not be related to the society in my point of view. I think it was showing anxiety more than anything else in this video [...].

C.e: I think the artist wanted to see suffocation in the society.

The comment by the diasporic participant C.f shows his concern with the negative effects of visual representations on viewers' understanding of ethnic identity of Iranians. He and the other members of this group see artists as having a responsibility to consider the possible effects of their work when representing aspects of Iranian society; although, the comment by C.c suggests some exception for works that may depict an artist's personal mood state.

– **Sharifi's work *The feast of ID* from the *Maxiature* series**

The tight relationship between the traditional and modern aspects of life in Iran was understood in Sharifi's *The feast of ID* from the *Maxiature* series by the majority of the three groups' participants. Sharifi's artwork mainly evoked impressions that traditional aspects of life in Iran are still influential. For example, the comment below:

A.a: [...] The tradition has the dominant narrative, and it starts with how we told narratives at that time and those narratives are still being told. It's mostly about the continuity of a huge and deep past.

While the majority of participants enjoyed the skilful technique and vibrant colours of Sharifi's work, a participant in the *Feminist* focus-group and two of the *Art Expert* group members mentioned that the artwork mobilizes the values of a heteronormative and patriarchal society because it contains the figures of three brides and one groom (see 6.2.5).

6.2.3 Cross-Cultural Implications

- Navab's works *Super East-West Woman & Passing by* from the *Super East-West Woman* series

Navab's work, *Super East-West Woman* from the *Super East-West Woman* series, was understood as a cross-cultural representation of identity by almost all participants in the three focus-groups.

C.e: [...] the artist wants to present a mixture of two cultures. She is showing her hair unlike others, and this is showing her freedom by living out of Iran.

A.e: To me immediately at the first glance the image is read as a Western image, then you notice the jewellery and you know that you have to read more from the jewellery.

However, the specific Iranian connotations of the presence of female jewellery in the image were unclear to most non-Iranian participants; instead, they mainly described them as Middle-Eastern jewellery. For instance, a participant from the *Feminist* focus-group said:

B.c: [...] these very feminine jewellery and then the masculine Western symbol and at the same time it is the symbol of an illusionary person. All these make this image as a really powerful person of an illusion and it is from another culture. Although this image is not telling which culture she belongs with. It has no connotation of Iran to me; although, some of the jewellery look like Middle-Eastern patterns.

While the combination of the two cultural elements in *Super East-West Woman* was mainly interpreted by the participants as a means of empowering female identity, the meanings of empowerment and determination reduced significantly in the participants' opinions in the work *Passing by* from the *Super East-West Woman* series:

A.b: If you see them as a series, there is no sign of those jewellery pieces and all those things we saw in the first image of this series. It makes me wonder, is it the same woman?! All the identifying factors are gone.

A.c: It seems like the artist is repeating the theme of the Superman, but here it does not appear strong. The only common point is the blue colour used in the chador. There is a feeling of suffocation about this woman in this picture. [...] it feels a bit different in terms of Western acceptance of

cultural icons. She is hunched and uncomfortable, I'm wondering if she feels as a part of that context or not.

B.b: It feels like she is thinking that 'I will keep myself small and hope no one looks at me'.

C.a: Well, I do not really like this idea, what I see is more cliché. I do not understand why she has to be so different and mysterious while everyone else is out on the street in a normal way. I like to ask her 'so what?'

Perhaps the most significant feature of Navab's *Passing by* from the focus-groups' points of view, was the construction of the 'other' in the Western/American context of the image. The implicit assumption was that the cross-cultural identity illustrated in Navab's first photograph, *Super East-West Woman* from *Super East-West Woman* series, somehow vanished and was superseded by the woman in chador. Instead, she was holding tight to her traditional values, creating the impression of keeping herself separate from any other culture.

– **Anvari's work from the *Chador Dadar* series**

Anvari's work from the *Chador Dadar* series was understood as a dichotomous representation of cultures by some of the *Art Expert* group members:

A.d: [...] the women obviously in the poster that we are assuming is a western woman, and the women covered in chador, but when I think about it, these two women are exposing themselves too by wearing that type of fabric, even though it's the convention; in terms of cultural readings it could have the same effect of the naked woman. I ultimately think that this image is very contrived, and it could be a part of the performative aspect of it. [...] if the two women were wearing the black chador, they would still attract attention, because the way they are dressed is not like what normally women dress in France. So, putting those covers on also attracts attention. So, you have got two [oppositions]; even though they are coming from totally different cultures, putting them into flowers, or in the black, they would both still attract attention from strangers.

The binary positioning of the two cultures in relation to female identity was a shared understanding among the majority of the members of three groups. However, as with the above quote, some participants also implied that the representation of the two women in chador in the Western context of the image is related to the representation of an 'othered' identity.

– **Manouchehri’s work, *Power***

Manouchehri’s figurative artwork, *Power*, had cross-cultural connotations for many of the groups’ participants, because the Iranian Qajar Princess and the British Queen are depicted face-to-face, overlaid by the schematic figure of the English Queen Elizabeth the First. The distribution of power, however, in this work was often understood as non-proportional by the *Art Expert* and *Diasporic Iranian* groups:

A.d: There is a political discourse that underpins this work; there is a cultural clash which is much more powerful than the first image that we saw [*Chador Dadar*]. Taking the power into traditional designs is very clever; the discourse about women, how women reclaim power today. Yes, I think the design draws me into the image and I’m very interested in this image. I think the drawn image in the middle represents the empowerment.

A.c: I think that having these two characters in front of each other and then having the Victorian figure which is empowered even in the design, puffy [sleeves] and narrow in the waist and the power signs all over it, convey the meaning of power within the character.

A.a: Yes, exactly.

C.d: The artist obviously wants to show Victoria the queen as the dominant power in this image. Maybe she wants to say that Iranian women just mimic without thinking about what they do.

C.e: By tracking the white patterns, the attention and emphasis is on the Queen Victoria. I think it is a destructive intention considering the symbol of power.

The viewers associated the quality of power with Queen Victoria mainly because of the upper layer of the artwork which is a linear drawing of Queen Elizabeth’s figure with the sign of a power switch on her head.

6.2.4 Aesthetic Implications

– **Sharifi’s work *The feast of ID* from the *Maxiature* series**

While the technique and colours used, and the concept for Sharifi’s artwork *The feast of ID* from the *Maxiature* series were in most cases admired, some participants pointed out that the image functioned in a tumultuous mode. The below comments are examples of such expressions:

C.e: [...] there is a rhythm in the work, but it is in a chaotic way. The idea is good and valuable but shaping the idea is not so successful. If she [the artist] wanted to say how the culture has evolved, I think she has somehow failed because it is a pell-mell.

B.c: I can hear things by looking at this image, like there are people playing music, and then there are people talking in the front part of the work. There are a lot of different levels and different spaces in this image. The image is talking about different fashions I think and to me this work is linked to the idea of fashion changing during the time. It's too noisy this image.

B.b: A kind of chaotic play of figures is almost super imposed. The image is very noisy and there could be a lot of chatting going on: so some of those patriarchal traditional notions that go with marriage.

The interpretations of the groups' members of Sharifi's artwork were oriented towards the theme of nostalgia because of the depiction of the past and present identity of Iranian society. The following extracts from different groups are exemplary in that respect:

A.a: It might be a nostalgic piece [...], there is an ambiguity in reading this image.

B.a: My reading of this image is [...] the embodiment of identity crossing time. The main background is the traditional face of Iran, and all the new things and the changes are added up to this background [...]. But the main things and traditional things are still preserved, and every new thing without changing the main culture or pushing it away is added to the society.

C.c: I like this picture; wherever I see it I can identify it as an Iranian representation. The background is historical, it is our roots and the montage pictures are showing today's Iran in my view point.

While the participants did not explicitly state any strong nostalgic feelings during the discussion over this work, the historical context of the work was mainly understood as old Iranian traditions.

– **Manouchehri's *Power***

Manouchehri's *Power* was admired for its diorama-like technique by the majority of *Art Expert* group members. While some of the non-Iranian viewers participating in my group discussions interpreted the motorbike as a masculine element in Anvari's photograph from the *Chador Dadar* series, diasporic Iranian participants focused only on human figures in the image.

– **Ghadirian's work # 1 from *Nil, Nil* series**

Hall (2006), Rose (2007), Jewitt and Oyama (2001) and Curtin (n.d) have all agreed that an individual's reading of an image is both based on personal background and the social situation which frames their interpretations. This point is tangible in the reading of Ghadirian's photograph, # 1 from *Nil, Nil* series. The interpretations of the shoes in Ghadirian's work by the diasporic Iranian participants mostly related to meanings about the past and present, hardship and prosperity, and happy times. For instance, a diasporic Iranian commented:

C.f: Those boots are showing the resistance of Iranian society in hard times and the red shoes are showing that how people could be happy in bright times.

In contrast to their reactions to most of the other images, the members of the *Diasporic Iranian* group all admired this artwork and expressed positive interpretations of it. Their positive readings of Ghadirian could be associated with her symbolic use of language, which prevents viewers from affiliating Islamic signs with representation of gendered identities.

Interestingly, the non-Iranian members of the groups interpreted the element of the red high-heels in Ghadirian's artwork differently to the diasporic Iranian members. The red high-heels in the non-Iranians' readings were often associated with women's sexuality, especially female prostitution. The below comments are examples of such readings:

B.b: [...] Red shoes are very evocative of much sexualised, sort of sexual potency, especially because they are shiny ones.

A.a: [...] Red has got the same kind of associations with female and operating as the survival and prostitution role, it's because it's high heels against the boots which are like the motorbike in the *Chador Dadar* work it's like servicing men; the objectification of women in a kind of stylised aesthetic that has been designed by men.

A.c: It makes me think about dirty dates that have to be done and what comes out of them. [...] to me this image is easy to get, that's why it's boring to me, and I mean it's very obvious heteronormative reading. By using the standard convention, there is not a lot to force you to think otherwise.

Different interpretations of the red high-heels among Iranian and non-Iranian participants could be due to what Judith Butler (1988) calls “performative acts and gender constitution” in different cultures, “as gender is instituted through the stylisation of the body”, and that the practice of certain norms in relation to codifications of gender “constitutes the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (p. 519). In Lewin’s words “reality for the individual is, to a high degree, determined by what is socially accepted as reality” (cited in Moscovici, 2001, p. 23). The association of the red high-heels to different meanings by different group members lies in their acceptance of codifications of gender in their cultures.

– **Keramati’s video, *Self-portrait***

While Keramati’s video, *Self-portrait*, was admired for its technique by members of the *Art Expert* group with words such as ‘brilliant’, ‘powerful’ and ‘beautiful’, some of the *Diasporic Iranian* group members were not impressed by the aesthetic aspects of the video as well as its content:

C.a: If I want to talk about the aesthetic of this work, I’d say it is not artistic at all. We have Sadegh Hedayat [an Iranian writer] whose works are all depressive and melancholic, but his powerful way of expression makes his pieces as strong artistic statements. But there is no artistic value in this work. It is so shallow to me.

C.d: [...] I also don’t see any artistic view in it.

The negative assessment of Keramati’s video by the diasporic Iranians was associated with the melancholic content of the artwork which evoked feelings of irritation amongst them.

6.2.5 Feminist Implications

– **Anvari’s work from the *Chador Dadar* series**

Anvari’s photograph from the *Chador Dadar* series was interpreted differently by the members of the Feminist group; one of them (B.b) pointed out that the women in chador are not active because they have their backs to the camera, whereas the woman in the poster embodies all the freedom of supposedly liberated Western women.

B.b: [...] She is free to be topless and needing to be thin because thin is valued in western societies and fit; she is conforming to a very narrow sense of body identity based on so called western values. So, there is a binary working there between women in the chador and the almost nude woman. [...] I'm wondering what these two women are feeling by looking at the poster. Do they wish to have less clothes on? Or do they feel resentment because of disapproving?

This participant describes the performance of gender in the context of the photograph as dichotomous between East and West, yet, because of the use of the chador and not being able to see the facial expression of the chadori women, she thinks they might be envying the freedom of the woman in the poster.

Interestingly, one of the feminist participants (B.c) interpreted the use of the chador as a means of making political statements; for instance, about Anvari's work she said:

B.c: These two women might be revolutionary people in Iran, because everyone has to wear black chador in Iran. So that might be something not accepted in Iran. [...] The colours of the chadors which are the main things, make me think that they might be looking for their pleasure in these colours, or it is a statement to say I am away from the black [...].

About Navab's photograph *Passing by* she said:

B.c: [...] she is a strong person, because she is not wearing the black chador, and the chador has a different colour this time.

It seems that the chador as an identifying symbol for Iranian women's identities can be interpreted both as a state of imprisonment for Iranian women and, with certain modifications, such as colour, also as a sign of their quest for freedom. This extract reinforces the view that representations of Iranian women position them as equivalent to Muslim women. In other words, to express any agency and power, Iranian women need to be clothed in chador. The chador can be viewed as such an inseparable part of Iranian women's identities that simply changing the colour of the chador evokes hints of revolution.

– **Khademian's *Election***

While other participants from the *Feminist* focus-group mainly discussed Khademian's photograph *Election* in relation to socio-political and Islamic ideological themes, an Iranian participant in the *Feminist* group commented:

B.a: I think this image is challenging the idea of Muslim women as domestic people who are not active in political atmosphere.

This quote destabilizes the idea that veiled Muslim women can only be understood as oppressed or obedient. However, from a non-Iranian point of view, even when chadori women are unable to make a change even when they are participating in socio-political events, in this case the presidential election, they are unable to make a change. The following exchange shows a non-Iranian feminist responding to B.a's statement:

B.b: I feel, in this picture, these women disbelieve that there might be a change.

B.a: I also think that this is about the future and they are tired of waiting for a change.

The veiled women in the above exchange, again, become passive bodies incapable of generating any changes; this becomes more significant in the above extract when B.a agrees with B.b's comment.

– **Ghadirian's work # 1 from the *Nil, Nil* series**

Ghadirian's artwork # 1 from the *Nil, Nil* series was understood differently among members of the *Feminist* focus-group:

B.a: I think they are unrelated, the old boots and the red fashionable high-heels; they do not belong to a couple.

B.c: [...] women are empowered in this image. There is not an equal relationship between men and women in this image at all but there is a sense of strength for women in this image, like the woman is in charge here.

B.b: In relation to the war, those shoes with blood on them are military boots but I still keep thinking about sexuality these, women's shoes are disempowering to women in that situation. You cannot run in those shoes. But instead they are a symbol of feminine power, especially sexual power.

The extract demonstrates complex understandings within a feminist discourse of the elements comprising the artwork. While the respondents think that there is an unequal relationship between the male and the female subjects, B.c thinks that women are empowered and in charge in this context, however, B.b sees Ghadirian's indexical representation of women through the red high-heels as

disempowering, in a political sense, because this representation emphasizes sexual power.

– **Manouchehri's work *Power***

The clothing of the two female figures standing face-to-face in Manouchehri's *Power* was the main feature for the groups' participants' interpretations of the artwork. Two participants from the *Feminist* focus-group and one member of the *Art Expert* group interpreted the representation of the Qajar Princess in Manouchehri's artwork as being liberated and mobile. The reason for such interpretations was the exposure of Qajar Princess's legs in contrast with the heavily covered figure of Queen Victoria in front of her. The following extract is one of the feminist members' comments on *Power*:

B.b: [...] by putting up these two queens you immediately expose the social construction of gender through fashion and how it changes through time and place. The wonderful legs shine where Queen Victoria is all surrounded by heavy fabrics metal and corset, she could barely walk with that. [...] It reminds me about clothing practices and how they can liberate women and how they are always the subject of change; they are not static. That might be liberating to have that short skirt and exposing the legs. The Queen in the middle is heavily decorated which shows her power, you can imagine jewellery and diamonds.

While the respondents associated the concept of power with the British Queens - either the linear drawing on the upper layer or the realistic painting in the background of the work - the connection between the viewers' judgment of the identities and clothing is interesting here; this is because it is an indication of how a discourse of power, or the lack of it, can be expressed through clothing, spreading itself over other content, to the extent of blurring other elements. For instance, all the women represented (the Qajar Princess, Queen Victoria, and the schematic Queen Elizabeth 1) were royal personages, not commoners. The two European queens had large amounts of actual power and were long-serving rulers of their nations; the Qajar Princess's executive powers may have been much less, but she probably had privileges that non-aristocratic Iranian women did not possess. It is another of the disadvantages of the over-focus on personal dress in contemporary Iranian art that more wide-ranging discussions of life and power become stifled by dominant discourses.

– **Sharifi’s work, *The feast of ID* from *Maxiature* series**

Sharifi’s artwork, *The Feast of ID* from *Maxiature* series, was mainly understood by the focus-groups participants as a mixture of traditional and modern aspects of life in Iran; however, four out of fourteen participants indicated that the artwork contains references to a heteronormative society:

B.b: It seems that there is more than one wedding here; there are four. This image represents a very strong heteronormative and patriarchal society to me, in sexual representation of male and female relationship. ‘Women being property of men’ is another reading of this image to me. The white veiling is supposed to be related with the concept of being virgin before getting married. It projects very traditional conservative ideas about relationships and gender and sexuality. I get this from dresses, the men and women marriages.

A.a: I think we have got the references of polygamy here in this image

A.c: Yes, we can see few brides and only one groom.

The extract demonstrates an understanding of a heteronormative gender order through Sharifi’s representation.

– **Navab’s work *Super East-West Woman* from the *Super East-West Woman* series**

In addition to its cross-cultural implications, Navab’s *Super East-West Woman* from the *Super East-West Woman* series evoked meanings of empowerment in relation to the representation of Iranian women among a few participants in the different groups. For instance, a feminist participant (B.a) thought that mixing the icon of the Superman with the woman’s hair and jewellery created a sense of empowerment in the representation of woman in this work.

6.3 Summary

This chapter provided brief information about the members of the three focus-groups participating in this study. The analysis of the data from the three groups was thematic, based on the subjects emerging from the discussions about the artworks among the group members. These themes addressed Islamic ideological,

social, political, cross-cultural, feminist, nostalgic, and aesthetic themes, in relation to the representation of Iranian women.

The focus-group data revealed complex interpretations of the artworks of my research sample among the members of different groups. The reading of the chador was by almost all the focus-groups' members was mainly associated with the meanings of subordination, oppression, and women's acceptance of the Islamic religious rules. This is particularly the case in the works of Moaiey (*from Under the Shadow of Iman Khomeini* series) and Khademian (*Election*) in that the female subjects are clothed in compliance with the Islamic regime's codification of gender. Moaiey and Khademian's choice of subject and composition, in her selected work, has simplified the complex realities of women's identities and society in the Iranian society, into an elegant but, nevertheless, stereotypical representation of women as supporters of the Islamic regime.

The representations of female identities created outside Iran in the photographic artworks by Anvari (*from Chador Dadar* series) and Navab (*Passing by* from *Super East-West Woman* series) also featured the chador, thereby directing the focus-groups' members to identify the female subjects as faithful Muslim women. However, surprisingly, Anvari's nostalgic feeling about the flowery chador was shared by one of the diasporic Iranian participants. In Navab's photographs, while the colours and designs of the chador were different and she related the chador in her work *Super East-West Woman* to the Superman cape, the focus-group members still saw the chador as related to a conservative, traditional, faithful form of Muslim identity.

Being 'other' in a foreign context in the works of my research sample is conveyed through the stylisation of the body and clothing. Interestingly, the interpretations of Manouchehri's work *Power* by my focus-group participants concentrated on the clothing style of the female figures. This finding highlights the disadvantages of the over-focus on personal dress in contemporary Iranian art so that more wide-ranging discussions of life and power become stifled by dominant discourses in relation to western cultures.

The diasporic Iranian participants were mainly critical about the artworks which contained the chador, thinking that those types of representation are one-sided, propagandistic, and insufficiently differentiate them and other Iranians from the Islamic Iranian regime.

The next chapter will present the practical part of my research. The process of my art-making practice, from initial ideas to the final pieces, titling, and exhibiting them is explained in detail for each experiment.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

7.1 Introduction

This chapter elaborates on how my autoethnographically informed studies on the representation of identity translate into my art practice. By critically reviewing my research data, particularly the visual analysis data, and relating them to the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two, I build the conceptual structure of my autoethnographic practice. In the process of my art-making practice, I unfold information from the theoretical part of my study and connect it to different themes through my own subjective beliefs and life experiences.

By the use of autoethnography in the process of creating the practical component of my research, I intend to reflect on the positive and dynamic aspects of subjectivity in order to challenge, subvert, detour, and deconstruct restrictive representations of Iranian women by using different strategies in my artworks. The creative practice component of this research then, aims to bridge the gap between the critical theory and the use of visual language in the representations of identities using different media.

Most of my art-practice is inspired by my experience of the real social, cultural, and political environment of Iran, and to a lesser extent by my lived experiences outside my home country from 2010 until the present time; initially in Malaysia, where I acquired my Master's Degree in Visual Arts and, from 2014, in New Zealand.

The trajectory of my art practice, where research and creative practice inform each other from the beginning to the final artworks is explained in this chapter. First, I explain the process of each of my art-making experiments, second, I describe the process of exhibiting my artworks as the end of the practical part of this research; and finally, I explain the restrictions around my art practice.

7.2 My Art-Making Trajectory

This section discusses my position as an artist in relation to different themes which are commonly addressed in the practices of the Iranian women artists participating in my study, such as ethnic, social, cultural, political and gender identities. In the practical stage, my position is not fixed, instead it involves my constant movement back-and-forth, inside-and-outside in the setting of the research to connect me (the artist), my practices (the exhibition), and the regulatory systems of Iran and New Zealand.

As I started to write up the theoretical framework and the data analysis sections of the thesis, I found myself forming the concepts that I wanted to explore through art-making. Different ideas for my own practice came up while analysing the research data; I learnt that the artists participating in my research were often engaged in a similar visual language exploration in their practices of representing identities in relation to the themes of ethnicity, politics, culture, gender, and society. I was then drawn to seek new ways of exploring similar notions through my art-making practice. Therefore, my artworks are dialogues/questions-and-answers between the visual and the contextual aspects of my thesis. For my art-making practice, I first envisioned the concepts and ideas in my mind through the best media/medium that could represent my idea as closely as possible, then I would go and test it. Sometimes I sketched my ideas and other times I used graphical software, such as Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustration. At times I took photographs and then collaged different images to create my desired effect.

According to American artist and author Timothy Van Laar and art researcher Leonard Diepeveen (1998) artists “assume a social role’ [through their art], and consequently ‘become a particular kind of social agent” (p. 52). During my practice, my position as a social agent was always at the forefront of my mind, and I was constantly thinking, choosing, and changing my visual language/strategy in my practice for the purpose of achieving the best way to communicate with viewers.

Some of my initial art-making practices were described as ‘literal’ and ‘didactic’ by those around me, since they left little space for viewer’s explorations. Perhaps

the reason for such interpretations of my initial works was my feelings of exasperation and exhaustion with the Islamic ideological saturation of the construction of Iranian identities, particularly female identities through artistic and cultural representations. This led me to overtly embody those reactions through my art-making practices. Later, I tried to avoid didactic strategies in my art practice and to transform my visual language from literal to more engaging modes. The examples of such practices are included in explaining the process of transforming my artworks from initial to final works. The final works included in the exhibition are seven pieces, entitled:

- i. *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)*
- ii. *Hands of Dissent*
- iii. *One from 1001 (Sand Story)*
- iv. *Fatwa on Kaashi*
- v. *My Paradox*
- vi. *Shrine*
- vii. *Heritage Souvenir Suite*

Since choosing the titles of the works happened at the time of setting the exhibition, I will explain the reasons for choosing the titles later when I explain about the exhibition preparations, because some of the titles might seem to be vague in relation to the actual works.

These works are created in different mediums and contain different themes. The process of making each work, from initial idea to the final artwork is explained individually.

7.2.1 Self Portrait (Key Necklace)

The idea for the work *self portrait (key necklace)* was the result of critically looking at Khademian's work, *Election*, remembering my last experience of voting in the presidential election in 2013. Because the artworks of my research subjects address socio-political themes, especially in relation to female subjects, I decided to deal with this matter through my own subjectivity.

The initial aim of this work was to deconstruct power relations between the representation of the female identity and the Islamic regime's authorities. In other words, in exploring alternative strategies in my art-making experiments I sought to both illustrate the strong sense of subjectivity in the presence of women in Iranian society, without the use of Islamic ideological codes, and to question the problematic structure of the current government in which women's positionings are defined by clergymen.

My first experiment was a portrait of me next to one of a high-ranking clerical figure in Iran, a mullah, which I had named *The Reflection*. This work was installed above a pool filled with water; while the portrait of the mullah was dominant in the printed image, the reflection of the image in the water subverted this relationship. By this experiment I intended to portray a dichotomous power relationship which was revealing two sides of a story, the current situation and a hypothetical inverse power relationship. I also created another series of works based on this relationship portraying the same figures which were all subversive in terms of power relations. While I was interested in including this work in the exhibition, I was advised by an Iranian friend that it might be risky for me to use the portrait of clerical figures in my works; so, I decided to exclude those works from my final exhibition (see 7.4).

Since my first art-making experiment, *The Reflection*, involving the portrait of a clergyman was eventually excluded from my works, I decided to continue my strategy in reversing the relationship between the female subject and the Islamic authorities with a faceless clerical figure (Figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1: Second experiment before creating *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)*.

By fading the cleric face and adding a female element of red lips, I intended to symbolize the tension between the Islamic restrictions on women, and women's response to them. I also aimed to represent the bold presence of the female subject in an Islamic structure, where women typically avoid male religious authorities in order to question the power structure governing gender relations in the Islamic regime. However, after creating this draft and sharing it with people around me, I realised that it might provoke ambiguity in viewers' interpretations.

My next experiment involved a clerical figure in an indirect way. At the time of the presidential election in 2013, a candidate for the Reformist party, Hassan Rouhani, used the symbol of the key, which metaphorically conveyed the meaning of solving problems (Figure 7.2). While many Iranians, including me⁴⁶, voted for him to avoid the election of the conservative party politicians ruling the country⁴⁷, we knew that he could not make the changes that the majority of the society desired. Once the election was over and Rouhani was elected, there were several caricatures and jokes about the key being lost or broken in cyberspace, as there were no positive changes in the situation of the country.



Figure 7.2: An image of the Facebook page of Rouhani's Presidential campaign

Because Rouhani's government did not create the positive changes that he had promised, the majority of Iranian people were disappointed with him⁴⁸. In my

⁴⁶ I was living in Malaysia at that time; my last experience of the presidential election in Iran was in 2009, which had a big impact on me. This is fully explained in relation to my artwork, *The hands of dissent*.

⁴⁷ Rouhani was re-elected in 2017 for the same reason.

⁴⁸ See below Online articles:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/31/protesters-who-spread-fear-and-violence-will-be-confronted-says-iran>

<https://thewire.in/world/iran-deep-state-unhappy-president-hassan-rouhani>

practice, I used the symbol of the key as a resource because of its association with political actions taken by Rouhani (Figure 7.3). My intention was to shift the power dynamics between Iranian women and the regime's authorities to reflect on the 'self' rather than the government, in the hope of making desired changes such as improving women's right and their freedom in Iranian society.

In Khademian's photograph of the Presidential election, the women were compliant with the Islamic regime and thus associated with the hegemonic meanings of the obedience of women to the government of Iran. Khademian's representation of women illustrated them through a wall of chador fabric with a few details of skin, personal belongings, and bureaucratic documents necessary to prove identity so that the women could vote in the election. The women could not be distinguished from one another as their faces were cut out of the frame. To represent the importance of the presence of women for creating positive change in the future of Iran, I decided to go in the other direction, making my skin the main element of the composition. This approach to depicting an Iranian woman appealed to me having seen how Golshifteh Farahani's nude photograph challenged the Islamic regime's restriction on women (see 2.2.1.2). Therefore, unlike Khademian's strategy in representing three similar women, I used the single figure of my body as a tool to address the importance of subjectivity and independent thinking, by provoking a sense of boldness and determination. Although, showing too much skin in most of my art-making practice in relation to representing women could be interpreted as objectifying the self, I intentionally used my body as a resource for actively resisting the repressive power of the Iranian government.



Figure 7.3: *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)*, digital photograph, 1650 x 950mm

The first step in creating this photographic work was making the necklaces, for which I purchased multiple accessories and keys from different places and re-assembled them in two chains; one has the Iranian flag, and the other is the key necklace. Since 1907, the Iranian flag has comprised horizontal bands of green, white and red, with the emblem of the lion and a sun in the middle of the white band. However, after the Islamic revolution in 1980, the flag adopted the sign of 'Allah' to represent the establishment of a theocratic government. In the necklace I made, the flag is slightly altered; instead of having the religious sign in the middle, I chose to use glitter as a sign for both liberating the Iranian state from a uniform Islamic country, and also undermining the Iranian government's preferred ideological identity.

After making the necklaces, I wore them and took over a hundred photographs against a green screen in the university's video production studio with the assistance of a friend (Figure 7.4). I decided not to show any clothing in this work, as I aimed to direct the viewers' eyes to the necklaces.



Figure 7.4: Photo shots for the work *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)*

I also intended to reflect on the subject of femininity. For that reason, in a similar manner to Cindy Sherman’s strategies of styling woman’s body, I took a few photographs with a long hair wig in order to comply with the normalised/traditional gender order and signify a feminine concept of gender (Lindemuth et al. 2011), as my real hair at that time was short (see Figure 7.5).



Figure 7.5: photo shots of me with wig

However, when selecting amongst the photo shots, I realised that the photographs without the wig could be considered as feminine, since the softness of a female body was reflected in the photograph. Consequently, I chose the photograph below (Figure 7.6) as the final work. However, I made some changes to the original photograph to propel it towards my objective for this work



Figure 7.6: The selected photo shot for the work *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)*

In order to direct the attention of the viewers to the necklaces, I cropped the image and cut out the top of my head, so that the necklace would be centred in the image, and then changed the green colour of the background to the green colour of the Iranian flag. I used this colour as a resource in my work because of its association with the Green Movement, which was a political movement that arose in 2009, at the time of the 10th presidential election in Iran (see 1.4.1.1). Green was originally used as the symbol of the reformist candidate's campaign, Mir Hossein Mousavi⁴⁹, but after the election became the symbol of unity and hope in Iran from those asking for invalidation of the fraudulent election. While this particular green is also associated with Islamic religious rituals and beliefs, I used it in my works to project the meanings of hope and resistance to the Islamic autocracy of Iran. After printing the photograph, it was laminated and then mounted on wooden board to be displayed in the final exhibition.

7.2.2 Hands of Dissent

My next experiment was inspired by the subject of election and what I had experienced as a result of my last participation in the presidential election campaigns in 2009, before I left Iran. As explained in Chapter One (see 1.4.1.1), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a conservative political figure, became the president of Iran in 2005 taking a religious hard-line approach during his presidency. In 2009 once again, he became the candidate of the conservative party.

As a person who had never been interested in politics until then, I joined one of the campaigns supporting Mir Hossein Mousavi, because the feelings of suffocation under Ahmadinejad's government were tangible. For example, the numbers of moral police force accusing women on the streets increased, and the previously relaxed social atmosphere had become religiously strict. Mousavi, on the other hand, was the most popular candidate as an open-minded political figure with a background in art and architecture⁵⁰, who I, along with many others,

⁴⁹ Mir Hossein Mousavi is recognised as the leader of the Green Movement.

⁵⁰ Mousavi served as the president of Iranian Academy of Art until 2009, before he was removed by the conservative parties. His wife, Zahra Rahnavard, is also a professor, artist, and politician, who is also known as a women's rights activist. Rahnavard was the political advisor of former president 'Mohammad Khatami'.

thought could help mend the disastrous situation of the country. As Ahmadinejad's popularity had significantly declined, many people were drawn to the polls to try and prevent his re-election. I knew many people who preferred not to vote, as they believed voting would only legitimate the ruling Islamic regime, but they voted regardless, in the hope of putting an end to Ahmadinejad's presidency.

When the result of the election showed that Ahmadinejad had again been elected as president, people were shocked; then, Mousavi claimed that the results were fraudulent, and consequently his supporters began to protest. The protests involved a series of street demonstrations starting from the 14th February 2009. Because Mousavi had chosen green for his campaign colour, his supporters used green as the symbol which united them during the protests; they carried green flags, tied green ribbons on their wrists and arms, or wore green scarves on their head and around their necks.

In Milani's words, "[t]he movement soon embodied the frustrated aspirations of Iran's century-old quest for democracy and desire for peaceful change" (2010, p. 1). The protests were peaceful with the motto of 'Where is my vote?'; but the throng of people were so large that the regime was threatened, and eventually, the movement was suppressed in early 2010, as "the regime had quashed public displays of opposition. The Green Movement [then] retreated into a period of soul-searching and regrouping" (Milani, 2010, p.1).

The Green Movement had a huge impact on me, because it was one of the last outstanding events that happened before I left Iran. As a protestor in the street demonstrations, amongst my friends, I shared the feeling of empowerment; it was the first time that I had actively questioned the Islamic regime; I felt courageous and strong. Although there were security forces around us on the street, the crowds were not afraid of anything. When, eventually, the movement was brutally suppressed, I was interested in depicting the bravery of the protestors and my own involvement in this movement. To recapture my experience of that movement, I decided to use the hand gesture we employed in those protests, which symbolizes peace and the unity of the people (Figure 7.7).



Figure 7.7: The Green Movement in 2009

I was searching for a medium that gives an individual's action the sense of 'monumental' importance that I had felt being a part of the protesting crowds. Therefore, I chose plaster casting as the medium because it depicts the vulnerability of human beings along with their determination in taking action. I initially intended to create a number of casts of my own hand gesture for peace, with all the details of my real hands, in order to convey the meanings of a group action.

After much research into suitable materials, I used dental-grade alginate⁵¹ for making the negative mould and casting plaster for making the replica of my hand. The whole process of making the negative mould with alginate, each time, took less than four minutes: Mixing the alginate powder with water in a cylindrical container for 30 seconds, and then dipping my hand in it for three minutes. However, the plaster casting required more time; I gave my casting process 24 hours each time. The process of moulding and casting was both exciting and frustrating, as the alginate mould can be used only once and if the replica was broken during the casting process, the alginate mould had to be remade.

My first and second trials failed, because the fingers broke during the casting process, which was very frustrating; I came to think that it was impossible to make a perfect/unbroken one (Figure 7.8).

⁵¹ Alginate is one of the most frequently used dental materials. It is a powder which through binding with water it forms a viscous gum.



Figure 7.8: From left to right, my first and second trials in casting my hand

However, the third time gave me the result that I had intended to achieve (Figure 7.9).



Figure 7.9: My third trial in casting my hand with the peace gesture

Now, that I had created a perfect cast hand with all the details, I was anxious about making the rest of the hands as I wanted them all to be unbroken and flawless. I was frustrated and anxious thinking about how difficult this process was going to be. Therefore, I decided not to think about this practice for a while; I placed all three on a shelf in my office for few weeks. After a while, I noticed that there was something about that composition which was intriguing to me; in fact, looking at the three of them got me thinking about the genuine relationship of the hands with the narrative that I wanted to symbolize: The broken fingers of the first hand were telling me the story of the repression of the Green Movement by the Islamic regime; the second trial, with the middle finger up, an obscene hand gesture, was narrating the feelings of anger, adventure, and audacity that we/the protestors shared in the movement; and the perfectly cast ‘peace’ hand

gesture was symbolising the aspirations of our quest for democracy and desire for a peaceful change.

This is how I came to realize that this composition had the active agency I wanted to narrate. I then developed 47 cast hands during three months from both my right and left hands; some were unbroken and some broken but in different ways, then I tied green ribbons around the fingers and wrists (Figure 7.10).



Figure 7.10: *Hands of Dissent*

Both the broken and unbroken hand gestures have the connotations of dynamicity which I had wanted to explore as a result of looking critically at Tavakolian's and Keramati's video-art, which I had mainly read as depressed and passive. As a result, my intention to create the flawless hand gesture turned into a source of inspiration for creating a series of hands, whether broken or intact, as signifiers of real-life endeavours. By this, I mean they refer not only to my experience of the Green Movement as a political event, but also to other situations in life, where with all vulnerability I/we have taken actions, regardless of the eventual outcomes of these actions.

7.2.3 One from 1001 (Sand Story)

As a diasporic artist, I was keen to address my living context through my art-making practice. In this research, I am positioned against Orientalist tropes and the use of exotic elements in relation to the representations of ethnic identities, particularly in the realm of depicting female identity. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge in my meditation on diaspora and trans-nationality was to avoid stereotypical and cliché elements in representing my ethnic identity, especially the

use of chador in representing female identity. I think the reason for using the chador in my first experiment was my frustration with explaining to non-Iranian people around me, here in New Zealand, that not all the women in Iran wear the chador, and the fact that a very small number of women are chadori in comparison with those who undermine the Islamic dress code. In this regard, I created the following work (Figure 7.11)



Figure 7.11: The first experiment before creating *One from 1001 (Sand Story)*

The idea of using the souvenir globe in this experiment originated from the fact that I recognise the Kiwi bird as an icon for New Zealand. When I see an image of an indigenous kiwi, I associate it with New Zealand. However, I have not seen a real one, neither in nature, nor in the zoo. Yet I have learnt what a kiwi bird looks like, and that the New Zealand Ministry of Conservation attempts to protect them. I applied this idea of the representation of Iranian women to ironically imply similar meanings such as: a small population, government protection, and the domination of the visual environment by this iconic representation.

To create this work, I made this image as a draft to share with a few people as a primary idea. I envisioned the final work to be done in a three-dimensional form using real souvenir globes, which I would make later. For this draft, I made the chador out of black fabric, wore it and photographed myself, then I photoshopped my figure into a souvenir globe juxtaposed with an identical globe with kiwi birds in it.

While Orientalist representations, in the works of Iranian women artists, often characterise women through reductive, passive, or subdued signifiers, my intention through this practice was to challenge the dominant narrative of women in my visual art practice. Therefore, through an ironic visual grammar, in which being ‘Other’ does not make the same sense as in the Orientalist apparatus, I aimed to question the mega picture, which most people I met in New Zealand had about Iranian women. While, the respondents to this experiment enjoyed the ironic aspects of this work, I was concerned about what Lau (2009) explains as the term ‘re-Orientalism’ (see 2.4). To avoid the concept of self-Orientalisation, I abandoned the idea of taking this artwork to a next level.

Instead, I decided to address the theme of diaspora through a video and audio practice. My video-art was partially inspired by the movie *Ten* (2002) produced by Abbas Kiarostami (see 1.5.1), since Kiarostami’s representation of Iranian women’s identities is associated with strong subjectivity and I found this inspiring in my practice.

Referring to Jean Fisher (1990), Allerstorfer asserts that ‘video and the time-based media’ allow artists to represent dynamic concepts of identity and their subjective perspectives in relation to different subjects (cited in Allerstorfer, 2013, p. 177). In the practice of two artists participating in my research, video was used to represent stagnation and melancholy rather than aspects of ‘dynamicity’, which was the concept I intended to explore. To shift away from Orientalist tropes and elements, I reflected on my story and experiences to inject more subjective aspects to this experiment, and consequently depict more vibrancy. As a woman who embraces femininity, I intended to visually highlight the traits of femininity by the use of normalised codification of gender (Butler, 1988; Holmes & Marra, 2010). The data analysis of the focus-group discussions showed that the interpretation of the red high-heels in Ghadirian’s artwork was associated with meanings of vitality, partying, and cheerfulness for the Iranian viewers; and, for the Western viewers it was associated with female sensuality and feminine charm and less positively with prostitution. Therefore, I used a red dress and red nail polish for the stylisation of my body to highlight the feminine traits in my art-experiment as

a means of subverting the Islamic gender order in the representation of Iranian women.

Because I had observed that the visual language of the diasporic artists in my research sample is somehow similar to those working in Iran (see Chapter Five), I decided to avoid limiting my representation only to Iranian ethnic signifiers. Since, in comparison with Iran, New Zealand offers me a larger realm of freedom in almost all aspects of my life, I intended to portray this freedom through my video.

By the visual part of this work I aimed to create a grounded setting for the sound component of the experiment which was me talking in a conversational mode. In the summer of 2016, I took a day trip to the coastal area of Tauranga to create the video for this practice. I painted my toenails red, put on the red dress and stepped out on the sandy beach. Walking, pondering, feeling the dried sand crunch between my toes, I silently recorded my path walking towards the water. To make sure that I had enough imagery with sufficient brightness to work with, I recorded myself walking at that beach three times that day; in the morning, at noon, and in the evening.

The audio component of the video was inspired by the conversational mode of the movie *Ten*. For creating the audio track, I recorded a conversation between a second person and me. Then, I edited the audio record of the conversation, and mixed it with the original sound of the video recorded at the beach (see Appendix 12 for the script of my voice over the video).

Some of the words that I say: ‘How can you say stop to someone going like that; patiently’, are a translation of part of one of Forough Farokhzad’s poems called *Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season* (Farokhzad, 1973). The scripts of some of Farokhzad’s poems are written in Shirin Neshat’s photographic artworks in the *Women of Allah* series. Therefore, I decided to include the translation of Farokhzad’s poem as a resource for liberating her writing from the Orientalised mode reflected in the artworks of Neshat.

The ternary composition of the video, which shows my recording from different times of that day, is an emphasis on the ‘self’ and a sense of ‘subjectivity’. Walking with bare feet conveys the feeling of freedom and vibrancy, and the red nail polish and dress, as discussed earlier, are reiterated codes that have come to signify a feminine concept of gender. The combination of these visual elements, and the audio as the complementary layer in this video, aims to create a sense in the viewers that they are accompanying me (Figure 7.12).



Figure 7.12: *One from 1001 (Sand Story)*, video & Audio, 3 minutes & 48 second length

The duration of this video, stored on the DVD attached to the back-cover of this thesis, is three minutes and 48 seconds. The poetic mode of the imagery of the video (as discussed in Chapter Two), along with the grounded conversation in the audio component creates a sense of intimacy, which I believe reinforces the viewers’ connection to my intention, which was to represent my identity as an Iranian woman who lives in diaspora, through this practice.

7.2.4 Fatwa on Kaashi

The theme of ‘religion’ in the works of the artists in my research sample, whether intentionally or unintentionally, manifests through the use of visual codes, often in relation to the subject of female identity, in different strategies. While I often interpreted their works as associated with senses of passivity, subordination, and obedience, I aimed to connect to the subjects of religion, politics, and female identity through depicting the active presence of women in the Iranian society.

The hegemonic process of the construction of gender through the Islamic stylisation of the female body in the current government of Iran is related to Butler's (1988) definition of an institutionalised gender performance: "gender is instituted through the stylisation of the body and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (p. 519).

I started this artwork experiment thinking about the desire of "religious leaders in Iran to see women covered in the chador or deprived from civil rights they have gained over the years" (El Saadawi, 2007, p. xxiv). As explained in Chapter One, while the Islamic regime attempts to restrain certain performances of gender by regulating 'modest' dressing, women in Iran resist the imposition of these rules on their lives on a daily basis. Therefore, I aimed to depict such aspects of resistance through an art-making experiment in a positive light. In my first experiment, I symbolically illustrated the fear of the regime of the non-Islamic gender order (Figure 7.13); I used red lipstick as a code for signifying the active mode of resistance by women to Iranian government edicts.



Figure 7.13: First experiment before creating *Fatwa on Kaashi*

To make this work, I used Photoshop to create lipstick-bullets and collaged them on the image of the gun. Figure 7.14 shows my second experiment in the process of creating my final work; I continued exploring representing resistance to the Islamic gender order in this art-experiment as well. In these works (Figures 7.13 & 7.14) my intention was to overtly challenge the Islamic regime's construction of gender in the society.



Figure 7.14: Second practice before creating *Fatwa on Kaashi*

In Figure 7.14, which shows a knuckle-duster held in a woman's hand, I collaged a red lipstick, hair, and a female symbol to imply normative codes of femininity as a powerful quality. I also included a painting brush to highlight the important collective practices, which in my case is art-making, as a means to liberate identities from the Islamic ideological framework. Since in an Iranian context and also in the scope of my art practice, the green colour symbolizes dynamicity, hope and resistance, I used green on the brush as a tactic for linking this practice with my previous works.

However, in both of the above experiments I failed to address my ethnicity, a significant feature in my practice. Therefore, I decided to re-think my visual language in order to use ethnic resources in developing the core idea in my practice. The idea of the work *Fatwa on Kaashi* came to my mind through browsing my previous artworks, made in Iran while I was studying graphic design towards achieving my Bachelor's Degree. Figure 7.15 was a poster I created for an assignment we were asked to design for *Women's Day*; my lecturer liked the poster, but told me that I could not print it out as the final practical assignment, because it showed a part of the female body and thus was not in line with the visual language criteria of the university. Seeing that poster again after seven years and remembering that event became a source of inspiration for my next work, as it contained both motifs of femininity and traditional Islamic patterns.



Figure 7.15: My Poster for *Women's Day*, 2009

Since I am living in New Zealand and do not have those limitations on my visual language, I decided to re-use that poster design in my practice. In experimenting with the design and the composition of the poster (Figure 7.16), the idea of using ceramic tiles as a medium for this work came to my mind. The pattern on the leg was derived from traditional Iranian Islamic motifs, I had often seen on the tiles used in the constructions of religious places, such as mosques, and shrines.

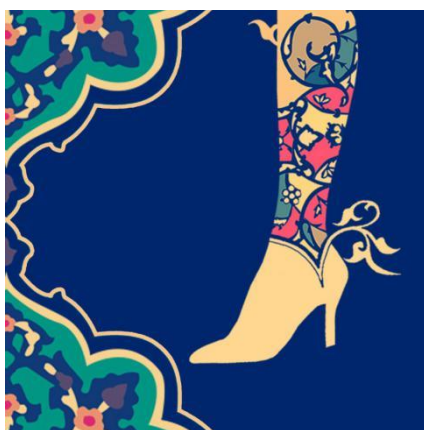


Figure 7.16: Third experiment before creating *Fatwa on Kaashi*

Thinking about the use of ceramics as a possible medium and an element of female body for this work led me to the idea of using the female body (my own figure) on the tiles. The use of tiles in Islamic religious architecture is very popular; however, the embodiment of the human figure in recent Islamic arts is avoided because it has been censured by Muslims (Burgio et al., 2008; Esposito, 2010). About Islamic art Esposito (2010) explains:

Islam's uncompromising belief in the oneness, or unity, of God [...] is reflected in the development of Islamic art, especially in the Arab world. Associating anything else with God is idolatry. To avoid such a sin resulting from the

depiction of human form, for example, Islamic religious art tends to use calligraphy, geometric forms, and arabesque designs and is thus often abstract rather than representational (p. 42-43).

Since Islamic visual arts are mainly decorative, colourful, and non-representational (Clarke & Clarke, 2016), the use of the human figure, particularly the female figure in Islamic art, can be viewed as a rebellious act. In addition, the fact that as a woman I had to be veiled to be allowed in religious/holy places, such as mosques, has always annoyed me, as it evokes feelings of humiliation, shame, and anger when seeing men entering without needing to change anything in their appearance. Because of these two Islamic sensitivities, I intended to ironically confront the religious gender order in the context of Iran by stylising my body by the normalised significations associated with the notion of femininity in my artwork.

Therefore, I decided to incorporate an image of my own body into arabesque designs on ceramic tiles. To do this, I used the red dress as a code of femininity, which I had made for my previous practice *One from 1001 (Sand Story)*, photographed myself with the assistance of a friend, and then digitally mixed my figure into arabesque designs.

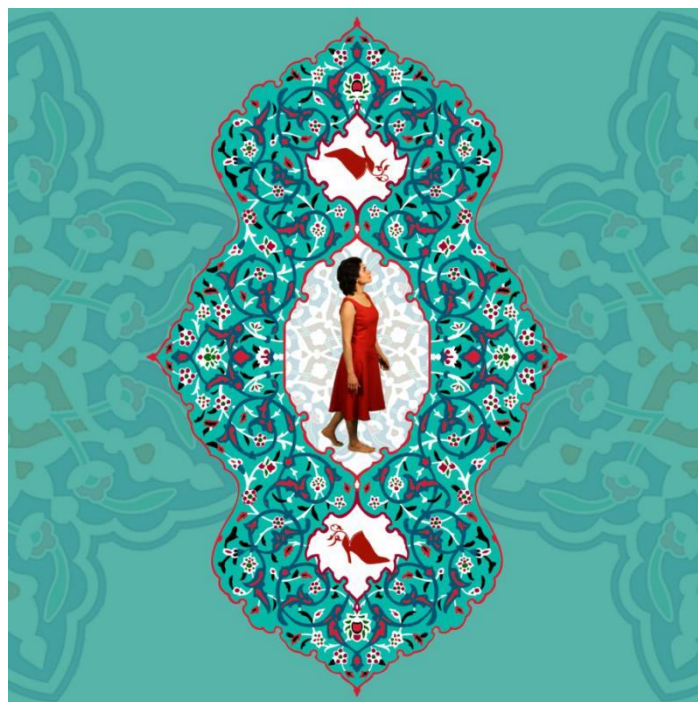


Figure 7.17: Detail of *Fatwa on Kaashi*

Figure 7.17 is my first design in creating the series of ceramic tiles. In this design, I have used a part of the design in the poster I created in 2009 (see Figure 7.15), and my own body.

While creating my first few works, in 2016, the Supreme Leader of Iran issued a fatwa which prohibited Iranian women from riding bicycles. This fatwa was challenged by women immediately after it was issued (see 1.4.1). Women's reaction in cyberspace⁵² became another resource in creating my tile series because I found it a good example of women resisting such repressive rules. Therefore, I photographed myself in the red dress riding a bicycle to incorporate women's reactions to the Supreme Leader's fatwa, as another element in developing my artwork (Figure 7.18).



Figure 7.18: Detail of *Fatwa on Kaashi*

For this practice, I created 63 designs which all contain my figure in either red or green dresses (Figure 7.19). I used the green colour in this practice as well, to harmonize it with my other works, and to make this series of tiles look more vibrant in composition. In most of the designs, the placing of my body, with and without the bicycle, forms patterns following the arabesque motifs, which makes

⁵² Women posted photos and videos of themselves riding bicycles to show that the government cannot limit their activities by issuing fatwas.

my body appear as a part of the arabesque motif, small and not-so-significant. However, in a few of the designs my body has more visibility to highlight my intentions and meanings in this practice.



Figure 7.19: *Fatwa on Kaashi*, digital print on ceramic, each piece 150 x 150mm

Although, because of my use of arabesque patterns, the viewers' understanding of this work might be associated with Orientalist discourses, my intention was to illustrate the Islamic structure of Iran and confront the religious context with aspects of subjectivity in relation to the female subject. Therefore, the stylisation of my body that clashes with Islamicised codifications of gender in Iran is a means of confronting the government with women's resistance to the Islamic restrictions on the embodiment of women.

7.2.5 My Paradox

As mentioned throughout my writing, I believe that the paradoxical nature of the Iranian identities needs to be illustrated more often and more clearly through artistic and cultural representations. This is because of the prominence of Islamic ideological elements associated to representations of identity in simplistic ways, through the international news media as well as many of the artists' works inside and outside the scope of this study. Therefore, I aimed to represent my identity in

a complex and multi-dimensional way in order to subvert the prominent and restrictive representation of women.

My first experiment in creating the work *My Paradox* started with my reaction to Tavakolian's video, which had evoked overwhelming feelings of melancholia and stasis in me (Figure 7.20).



Figure 7.20: First experiment before creating *My Paradox*

Figure 7.20 shows my figure in a white dress held inside a prism with my head down and my body bowed; a Nobel medal in the form of a beam of light hits the prism and my body radiates through the prism creating a rainbow-like effect. My intention was to narrate the state of melancholia by showing my capture in the small space of the prism, and how motivated by an idea, the position of stasis can change to dynamic stances, as is shown through my body movements and colours outside the prism. In other words, by showing myself inactive and dynamic simultaneously, I aimed to represent identity in a more fluid way that changes positions.

The fact that there are two Iranian women who have won the Nobel Prize⁵³ and the Fields Medal⁵⁴ directed me to the use of a Nobel medal in this work as a resource to highlight the outstanding power and determination of some Iranian women. However, the outcome of this idea in practice appeared to be different

⁵³ Shirin Ebadi an Iranian female lawyer was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her efforts for democracy and human rights, particularly the rights of women and children.

⁵⁴ Maryam Mirzakhani, a professor at mathematics, also in 2014 was honoured with the Fields Medal, the most prestigious award in mathematics.

from my previous experiments in terms of the use of colours and forms; in addition, this practice was devoid of any ethnic resources, which I had intended to include in my practice. Therefore, I decided to keep on developing this idea in new forms.

My second and final experiment was created using multiple resources. In my experience of living outside Iran, non-Iranian people after hearing that I am Iranian, immediately think of me as a 'Muslim' and wonder why I am not wearing the hijab. After I explain that with many other Iranian women, I resist the compulsory wearing of the hijab, they express their feelings of pity for the oppressed women in Iran.

As a Muslim born Iranian woman, I have never practiced institutional religion. Instead, I have had spiritual tendencies at a very basic level; for example, for a long period, I was influenced by the spiritual/philosophical poems of Rumi⁵⁵. In other words, being identified, foremost, as a Muslim, was something that never resonated with my identity. Therefore, I decided to depict a spiritual representation of my identity through my practice. For this purpose, I wore a white dress, as a reference to spirituality, because white is the colour of Sufi whirling (or Sufi spinning), a physically active meditation which originated among Sufis (Cakmak et al., 2017).

I took a series of photographs of me in the white dress in static poses. After choosing the right photograph (Figure 7.21), I started to experiment with superimposing different designs on it.

⁵⁵ Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, more popularly known as Rumi (1207-1273) 'has long been recognized as the greatest mystical poet of Islam, and it can well be argued that he is the supreme mystical poet of all mankind' (Arberry, 2004, p. ix).



Figure 7.21: The selected photograph for *My Paradox* practice

Since I began this experiment immediately after the work *Fatwa on Kaashi*, the arabesque patterns inspired the process of making *My Paradox* as well. In order to represent my identity as Iranian, which outside Iran is mostly understood to be Islamic, I used the arabesque pattern on the exposed parts of my skin, which creates the appearance of a tattoo, something that one cannot hide or erase (Figure 7.22).



Figure 7.22: Details of the work *My Paradox*

As mentioned before, outside Iran, as an Iranian I am often identified as a Muslim, and this is shown through this practice as a part of my identity through the tattoo-like pattern on my skin. On the contrary, not being covered in hijab differentiates me from a strong Muslim identity; the flowing white dress which exposes parts of my body, liberates me from Islamic ideological doctrines.

My pose in the photograph was static, however, as Laura Mulvey (1975) explains, the direct gaze towards the camera/viewers creates active power dynamics in the representation of gender. Therefore, it can be said that my static pose, along with the direct address, functions as a form of resistance. I added the element of bicycle riding from my tile series in this work as well to enhance a sense of movement in the work. As shown in figure 7.23, I arranged bikes around my shoulders and arms, which created the dynamic effect I aimed to reflect on this visual. This work might also be viewed as an ironic, even humorous, representation because of its transmedial use of the arabesque pattern, from ceramic to skin, to digital photography, and the use of the bike as the moving image element around my figure.

Iranian women often resist Islamic rules in nuanced ways, which can be complex and incomprehensible to non-Iranians. Through this artwork I have shown that even though I might look static, I am revolving around my existence in search for freedom. The resistance is particularly depicted through the use of the bike as a resource associated with Iranian women challenging the fatwa on banning women from riding bikes, which was explained before in relation to the previous work. In this work, I aimed to deconstruct the inaccuracy of the one-sided images of women, which mainly represent Iranian women identities as either melancholic or religious.



Figure 7.23: *My Paradox*, digitally manipulated photograph, 1060 x 850mm

As a final experiment, I collaged a floral tiara on my hair as a codification of femininity. This work was printed, laminated, and mounted on wooden board for inclusion in the exhibition.

7.2.6 Shrine

The subject of religion / Islam is one of the themes addressed in the practice of most of my research sample. My participant artists, whether intentionally or unintentionally, often bring up the subject of Islam or Muslim identity through their use of visual elements associated with Islamic ideologies. In Chapter Two I discussed the affiliation of Islamic ideologies with artistic practices under what Echchaibi (2013) calls “the double-burden of Muslim representations” (p.1). While Iran is known as an Islamic country, I believe that unlike the regime’s quest for creating an Islamic society, the majority of the society resists the practice of Islamic ideologies. I have observed and experienced how Islamic rules and restrictions frustrate the society in different situations, particularly in women’s lives. The “everyday form of ordinary dissent and the subtle acts of subversion by many ordinary Iranians, who seek a breakthrough to competitive democracy and the formation of a transparent society” (Rahimi, 2008, p. 53) is an important trait showing the contradictory stance of the society in the Islamic context of Iran. This was an intriguing subject I wanted to explore through my art-making practice. However, I wanted to avoid representing this frustration by taking up oppositional stances in relation to religion, since the freedom that Iranian women desire to have does not seek to banish religiosity. For example, in the campaign of *My stealthy freedom*, women have made it clear that their objective is to fight the rule of compulsory hijab and that they do not disrespect women who choose to wear the chador and practise Islam. Iranian women wish to regain control over their own bodies and challenging the Islamic dress-code for them is ‘not a matter of questioning the validity of the hijab itself’ (Siamdoust, 2018).

I was also conscious about not falling into the ‘representational trap’ which Muslim art and cultural producers often encounter; the trap in which representations of identities are often also the representation of Muslims.

My first experiment in exploring the theme of religion originated from my memory of visiting holy places / shrines in Iran. As mentioned earlier, women have to be covered in a veil to enter those places. In one of my trips to Iran I took several photographs of the places I visited; below is the photo of a shrine, which is the tomb of two religious characters, in my hometown, Dezfoul (Figure 7.24).



Figure 7.24: Ali-Malek shrine, Dezfoul-Iran

Through this work, I decided to pose the question: ‘Why does this religion have such a narrow definition of what a woman is?’ I decided to challenge the Islamic gender order by juxtaposing my figure without the veil, next to the shrine. I used the photographs of the shrine as a context, and digitally mixed a photograph of myself, using normalised codes of gender (the red dress and long hair wig) as a means of defying the Islamic rules around gender in Iran. My unveiled presence next to the shrine is a controversial composition because it is not ‘modest’ in accordance with Islamic ritual (Figure 7.25).



Figure 7.25: First experiment before creating *Shrine*

Looking at this experiment, which I ultimately rejected, and thinking more about the elements I used in the making of the image, directed me towards creating the work *Shrine* as it featured in the experiment. The structure of the shrine, as a closed space containing a tomb of a sacred person from hundreds of years ago, was intriguing to me. In addition, the green strips tied to the shrine by pilgrims became another source of inspiration. By tying green strips on shrines visitors hope that the Holy Spirit will make their wishes come true or help them overcome their problems (Figure 7.26).



Figure 7.26: A green strip tied to the shrine

The green colour of the strip in the above image⁵⁶, as mentioned earlier, is associated with Islamic rituals. In my previous experiment, the use of green was codified with the meanings of unity, hope, resistance, and determination in relation to the subject of identity. Therefore, I decided to use the motif of green coloured strips in my next work as a code for reflecting the theme of religion as well.

Echchaibi describes American Muslim art and cultural producers functioning as the defendants of Islam, who practice their faith and try to show they are good Muslims through their productions. In other words, they strive to be the ‘caretakers’ of Islam, and to project these qualities in their productions. However, by referring to my interview data, I believe this is not the case for the majority of Iranian artists in my sample, as they seem to be frustrated with the limitations associated with the rules. In this sense, as discussed in Chapter Two, I believe

⁵⁶ In an Iranian context, the green is known as ‘sabz-e seyyedi’, which means: the green of descendant of the prophet.

Iranian people, instead of being addressed as Muslims, in fact, could be known as ‘Muslim labelled’ or maybe ‘post-Islamic Muslims’.

My intention in creating *Shrine* was to reflect a sense of resilience in Iranian society, where the legal structure of the country is Islamic, but the society acts in rather secular ways, whilst not opposing Islam as the religion of those who have faith in it. To represent aspects of my subjectivity in relation to the subject of religion through this practice, I took the closed construction of the shrine, imbedding a tomb, as a structure to reflect upon my subjectivity and address subjects of my ethnicity, religious resilience, hope, and the aspirations of a non-religious person (myself) in the religious context of Iran.

For this purpose, I formed a square shape using four aluminium tubes (1370 x 1370 mm), as the solid structure for hanging the green strips from it with nylon thread. In this installation, the green strips were unevenly hung from the aluminium bars; the different lengths of the strips were to epitomize a sense of fluidity and the up and down rhythms of life. The different fabrics I used to make the strips were in two shades of green, which, although somehow similar, highlighted the concept of vibrancy and fluidity (Figure 7.27). By tying some knots in the strips randomly in multiple spots, I intended to imply the symbolic concept of hope and wishes, like the tied strips on the real shrines (see Figure 7.26).



Figure 7.27: *Shrine* (Piece 1), fabric, aluminium tube, nylon thread. 1370 x 1370 x 2400h

In contrast with a real shrine which contains bones of a so-called holy person, the empty space in the middle of my shrine accommodates myself (or the viewers) to reflect on my/their own role in wishing a different kind of future. However, the codification of the tied green stripes is not commonly understood by non-Iranian viewers; this is a weak-point in this work. To elucidate the concept of this work I explained the idea of it to the viewers at the exhibition (see 7.3.2).

The making of the 3-dimensional shrine itself was complete by January 2017; however, the two other components of it were created between July and September 2017. In fact, the two painted Persian carpets, which ended up being parts of the shrine installation, were not intentionally created as a part of this project. I painted the first carpet (Figure 7.28), using acrylic on canvas, when I was in an unfavourable situation in my personal life in New Zealand. At that period, I was overwhelmed with feelings of sadness, loneliness, and not belonging. All these feelings made me feel homesick for the first time since I had left Iran; I was drawn to look for things that could connect me to my Iranian roots/home. While browsing my Facebook, I came across a friend's photo at their home in Iran, taken in a living room covered in a Persian carpet of bright colours. I immediately felt the need to have one of those carpets in front of my eyes, as I felt the positive bright colours were the remedy to re-energize my soul.

As I had had a large-scale canvas at my office for a very long time, I started to draw the carpet's pattern on the canvas; it took a week, day and night, to finish the primary stage, but I kept patiently working to finish it as I was so excited to bring the colours on the canvas. During the first week, after the painting stage started, I started remembering my roots and dignity, my personal journey with its ups and downs, and my sense of determination. The process of painting the first carpet lasted three months, averaging 14 hours a day spent working on it (Figure 7.28).



Figure 7.28: *Shrine (Piece 2), Persian Carpet (1)*, acrylic on canvas, 1530 x 1020mm

After finishing *Persian Carpet (1)*, I painted a different carpet design on a smaller canvas (see Figure 7.29).



Figure 7.29: *Shrine (Piece 3), Persian Carpet (2)*, acrylic on canvas, 800 x 800mm

After finishing the paintings of carpets, I decided to include them in my exhibition for three reasons: firstly, there are always carpets in shrine buildings; secondly, I considered the use of the *Persian carpet* paintings as resources to signify my ethnicity through this installation. In addition, because carpet weavers are mainly women in Iran (Choobineh et al., 2004; Motamedzade & Moghimbeigi, 2012), I wanted to symbolically give more value to Iranian women's production by displaying the carpets on the wall rather than having them under people's feet. The paintings of the carpets are, then, transmedia productions as they expand from one medium to another (Kinder & McPherson, 2014; Scolari, 2014); they can shift the viewers' experience of a carpet from a tactile object touched by feet and looked down on, to an ocular experience to look at within the accepted legitimised exhibition context of a painting on a wall. While the term 'transmedia' often coincides with storytelling, Carlos Alberto Scolari (2014) explains "[t]ransmedia experiences are not [...] limited to fictional and non-fictional narratives" (p. 75).

Scolari (2014) says: about the use of transmedia as a strategy in cultural productions 'In the face of audience fragmentation, transmedia storytelling offers a possible strategy to reconstruct an audience niche around a narrative world' (p. 76). While the use of the carpet in this practice comes out of a nostalgic mode, it is not, I hope, associated with reductive or regressive implications. Instead, in juxtaposition with the subjective sense of identity through installation of the

shrine and its connection/disconnection from religious beliefs, I would like them to evoke associations of tradition and dignity in relation to the theme of ethnic identity.

7.2.7 Heritage Souvenir Suite

While making the paintings of *Persian Carpet (1)* and *(2)* I was listening to Iranian audio books which were mostly about the history of Iran; this gave me the inspiration for creating another work for my exhibition entitled *Heritage Souvenir Suite*.

As explained in Chapter Five (see 5.4.2), the paisley motif is the visual metaphor of the resistance of the Iranian people to the imposition of Islam. The cedar or cypress tree “assumed an important symbolic and cosmic significance in the course of the history of Zoroastrianism” (Djamali et al., 2017, p. 139). The evidence of the significance of this tree in the ancient history and culture of Persia/Iran is the frequent use of it on the reliefs of Persepolis (Farrar, 2016).



Figure 7.30: Reliefs of the cedar/cypress tree, Persepolis

Figure 7.30 shows some of the reliefs of cedar/cypress tree in Persepolis⁵⁷.

According to Milani (2011b) the paisley is “the most recurrent image in the Persian iconographic traditions” (p. 64). About the significance of the paisley Milani adds:

⁵⁷ Persepolis or in Persian 'Takht-e Jamshid' was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC). It is situated 60 km northeast of the city of Shiraz in Fars Province, Iran

It represents the cedar tree that Zoroaster⁵⁸ planted in heaven which was bent by the winds of Islamic hegemonic culture. Adapting in this way has been the key to the ability of Iranian culture to survive marauding tribes and invading armies. But Iran and its heavenly cedar bend only to lash back to their upright gait when immediate danger has passed and occasion for reasserting traditional values has arisen (p. 64-65).

Since the importance of the paisley lies in the historical contexts of old-Persia, the reliefs of human figures in Persepolis became another resource in my practice; particularly, the reliefs of the Median delegation's gifts for the king of Persia as brought by Armenians, Scythians, Sagartians, and Lydians (Razmjou, 2005, p. 283).



Figure 7.31: Reliefs of foreign visitors bringing gifts/souvenirs to the Persian king, Persepolis

In a similar manner to Sharifi's use of the patterns of a historical past, I link with historical motifs. The bringing together of 'past' and 'present' in this work refers to the juxtaposition of my identity through a relationship between being Persian (a dignified identity from a historical past), and Iranian (a politicised ideological identity) as a strategy for circumventing the temporal emphasis on problematic discourses around Iranian ethnic representations.

I was intrigued by the sense of dignity, respect, and generosity expressed by those reliefs (see Figure 7.31). I intended to associate similar characteristics of ancient reliefs of the foreign visitor with myself; by this I meant to both celebrate my own culture outside Iran/in New Zealand. This gave me a clear visualisation about the

⁵⁸ Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra, was an ancient Persian prophet whose teachings and innovations on the religious traditions of ancient Persian people developed into the religion of Zoroastrianism.

artwork that I was about to create. I browsed my photo-shoots from my previous works and chose figure 7.32 to be the base for my practice.



Figure 7.32: A photoshoot image

As a transmedial approach, I intended to form a similar composition; I replicated a similar pose in order to tap into the sense of dignity and respect represented by these reliefs. Therefore, as Figure 7.33 shows, using Adobe Photoshop, I created the base of this practice in three separate sheets, in which the base image stays the same, but the patterns are different. While my gaze in the image might be understood as passive, or potentially creates a sense of objectification of my body to viewers (Mulvey, 1975), I looked away from the camera in order to reference the relief's figures.



Figure 7.33: Digital design of *Heritage Souvenir Suite*

Since I was inspired by the ancient reliefs, I envisioned my work as being in a historical mode; therefore, I decided to reflect this historical/ancient mode in my work by making my image colourless and stone-like. I digitally designed three different floral motifs and placed them on different positions on my body. Since in Manouchehri's artwork *Power*, the paisley pattern had lost its agency and

signification in juxtaposition with the British Queen, in my art experiment, I used the paisley on my head and heart to re-contextualise the motif in an act of remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 2000).

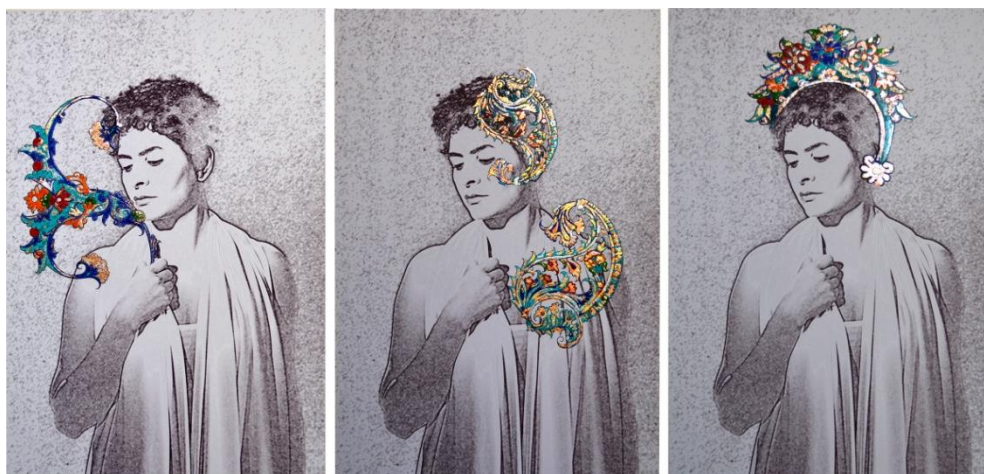


Figure 7.34: *Heritage Souvenir Suite*, mixed media, 590 x 390mm

After printing the three separate sheets in black and white, and mounting them on three wooden boards, I painted only the patterns with acrylic mixed fluid medium (Figure 7.34) in order to bring up the contemporary nature of this experiment. At the end, using gold, silver, and copper flakes I coated some random parts of my designs of the patterns as a means of celebrating these characteristics as a heritage for my identity. These were the final works I made for the exhibition

7.3 The exhibition: Patiently / Insistently / Intensively

The questions of ‘where and how to exhibit the visual part of my study’ were raised towards the end of second year of my research. The context in which my artworks were going to be exhibited was an important matter to me, as I kept visualising my art pieces in the space of a gallery. I visited few different galleries before deciding on Ramp Gallery⁵⁹, which is located in Hamilton City at Wintec’s School of Media Arts. In February 2017 I contacted the manager of the gallery and booked from the 1st to 15th November 2017 for my exhibition.

I stopped creating artworks by September 2017 and started the preparation for exhibiting. I started with thinking about a brochure and a title for the exhibition. I proposed a few titles for it such as ‘Re-Claiming Identity’, however, at the end by

⁵⁹ Ramp Gallery’s website: <http://www.rampgallery.co.nz/>

reviewing my artworks, particularly my video-art, I chose the triplet words of *Patiently/ Insistently / Intensively*, which were part of the voice component in the video *One from 1001 (Sand Story)*. I chose this title because I believe it describes my attitude in my life journey. In the brochure I designed for the exhibition (see Figure 7.35) I explained my journey and motivation for the project (see Appendix 8).



Figure 7.35: The design of the exhibition brochure

The second leaflet for my exhibition contained the map of the gallery showing the locations of the works marked by numbers leading to the artworks' titles (see Appendix 9).

7.3.1 Arranging the Artworks in the Gallery's Space

The preparation of the gallery and installation of the artworks took three days. As shown in Appendix 9, the gallery had three spaces: Gallery 1, Gallery 2, and the corridor which is a big window display facing the street. Beginning the process of decision-making about the right place for displaying each work I decided to display the video art *One from 1001 (Sand Story)* in Gallery 1, because it was darker than the rest of the space. I needed the darkness because the video was projected on a wall using a video projector; therefore, for viewing a clear image I needed the darkness of that gallery (Figure 7.36).



Figure 7.36: The installation of *One from 1001 (Sand Story)*

As Figure 7.36 shows, the projector was placed in a wooden box against the wall and four headsets were placed on the same box for the viewers to individually listen to the audio component of the video while it was played on repeat.

The *Shrine* was also installed in Gallery 1 because it is a relatively big installation and I needed enough space to both display the two Persian carpets and to allow the viewers to interact with the work (Figures 7.37 & 7.38).



Figure 7.37: Gallery 1 with the works *Shrine* and *One from 1001 (Sand Story)*



Figure 7.38: The installation of the *Shrine* in Gallery 1

The next work that was installed was my tile series *Fatwa on Kaashi*, which took almost a day to finish. I installed the tiles in the corridor with the window display as that area could offer a bit of separation from the rest of the works, and the wall was long enough to display the 63 ceramic tiles (Figures 7.39-7.41).

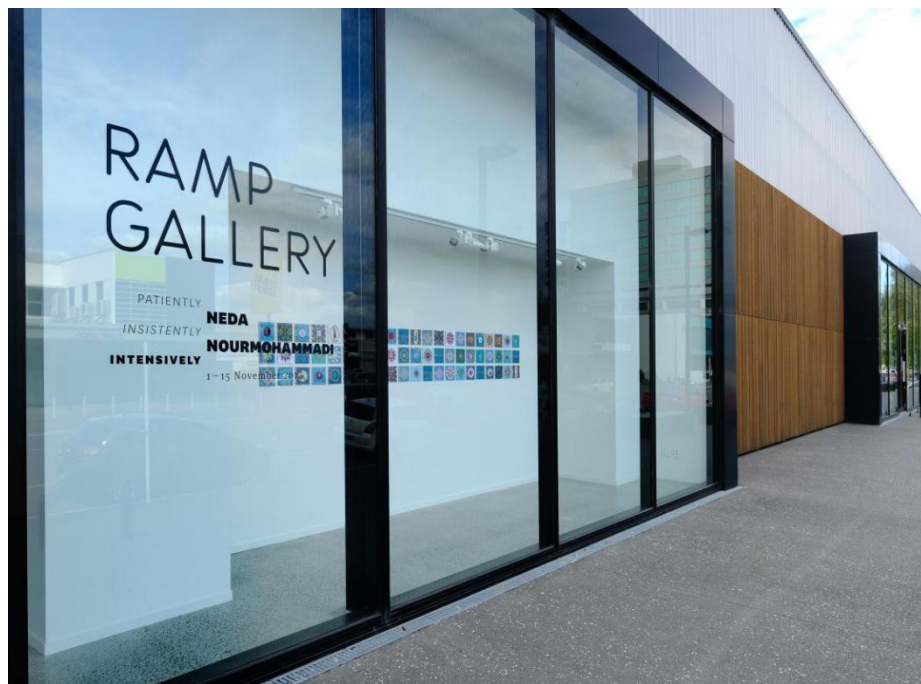


Figure 7.39: A view of the window display of the gallery from Collingwood Street



Figure 7.40: The installation of *Fatwa on Kaashi* in the gallery

The next work I installed was *Hands of Dissent* which was placed on a white cubical plinth in the middle of Gallery 2 (Figure 7.41). I randomly placed each hand on the plinth and put their broken fingers next to them.



Figure 7.41: The installation of *Hands of Dissent* in the gallery

As I kept moving the rest of the works in the space to find the right place for displaying them, I realised that displaying the work *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)* on the wall right in front of the gallery's main entrance door, creates a strong composition as it is viewed right behind *Hands of Dissent*. As the relationship between the two works about the Presidential election in Iran is difficult to discern

without contextual explanation being seen together could create a helpful introduction to the viewers as they enter the gallery (Figures 7.42 & 7.43).

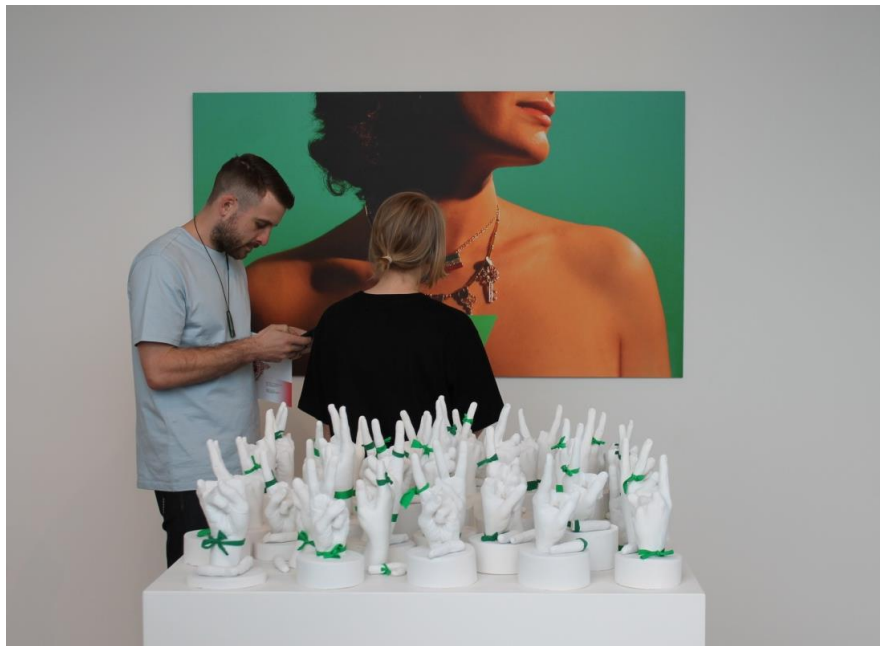


Figure 7.42: Installation of *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)* & *Hands of Dissent*

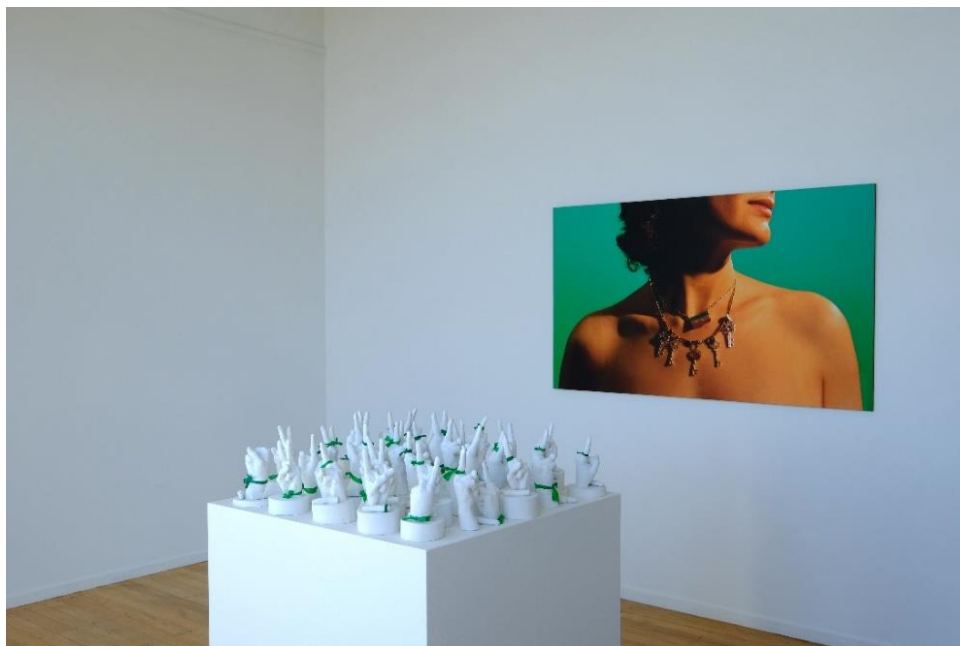


Figure 7.43: Installation of *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)* & *Hands of Dissent*

Finding a place for displaying the work *Heritage Souvenir Suite* was the most difficult choice, since this work looks somewhat different from the rest of my works in terms of the use of colour and medium, and I only realised its lack of harmony with other artworks when I saw it in the context of the exhibition. However, I still wanted to include it because it was a part of the story which I

wanted to narrate. Therefore, I decided to display this work in a place which does not visually interact with the rest of the works as much. As a result, while I always imagined the display of this work to be horizontal, I decided to exhibit them vertically since there was a narrow corner wall in Gallery 2 (Figure 7.44).



Figure 7.44: The display of *Heritage Souvenir Suite* in the gallery

The final work displayed in the gallery was *My Paradox* which I placed in Gallery 1 facing the Persian Carpet 1 (see Figure 7.45).



Figure 7.45: The work *My Paradox* is on the left side of this image

One day before the opening of the exhibition, when all the works were installed, my professional supervisor, Tim Croucher, and I finalised the works' titles. Here I explain the reason for choosing the titles:

- i. *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)*: This title was selected because of the use of my own body, and the 'key necklace' as the significant element in this image.
- ii. *Hands of Dissent*: This refers to the oppositional positioning of identities in relation to the Islamic regime.
- iii. *One from 1001 (Sand Story)*: As explained in Chapter One, the stories of Shahrzad in *One Thousand and One Nights* saved her life from her husband/the king's pessimism and distrust (see 1.6). I used this title as a resource for telling an episodic story about myself in my host country to create the ground for a continuing conversation with the people of New Zealand/Aotearoa.
- iv. *Fatwa on Kaashi*: This title mainly refers to my confrontational and ironic response to the fatwa on banning women from biking, which was challenged by women in Iran (see 1.4.1)

- v. *My Paradox*: As explained earlier, the title of this work implies the paradoxical nature of Iranian identities which I have tried to reflect in this work as well.
- vi. *Shrine*: This title was chosen because I was inspired to create it by the cubical structure of the shrine and the green strips tied to it.
- vii. *Heritage Souvenir Suite*: As mentioned earlier, in creating this work I used the ancient motifs and compositions, and symbolically attributed some characteristic to my identity that are with me anywhere I go, like souvenirs.

One of my objectives in creating my works was to represent the fluidity of identity. As I finished the installation of the works in the gallery, I realised that this intention has been projected even through choices about the variable scale of the works, mediums, and modes of representation. In my work *Fatwa on Kaashi*, for example, I incorporated the notion of ‘unfixity’ into the expression of identity through a transmedial method. The arabesque pattern tiles are used in the Islamic religious structures as fixed elements; however, I transformed the stabilisation of this solemn religious element by adding images of female bodies which are uncompliant with Islamic codifications of gender in an ironic mode.

7.3.2 Viewers’ Feedbacks on the Exhibition

Pre-exhibition, I sought feedback on my practice from a few people who were engaged in the contemporary art world. I received positive reactions when sharing my works with them; for example, an Art Collection Curator’s comment on my practice was: “The imagery is strong and feminine - two things which are often presented as somehow mutually exclusive” (Chalmers, 2017) (see Appendix 13). Such comments from others made me feel confident about exhibiting my practice.

Post-exhibition, since my works are engaged with the concept of ethnic identity, I was feeling both vulnerable, because I had used my own body in my representations, and empowered, because I was not in denial of the culture or ethnic representation or references to my works. I had used Iranian cultural signs, symbols and motifs in relation to the subject of identity.

Throughout the process of my art-making practice, my frustration with passive, one-sided, and Islamic ideological representations of identities in the art and

cultural production of some of the Iranian artists, and negative images of the Iranian society in the international news media had made me always mindful of how viewers might interpret my artwork. I particularly avoided any signifier which could evoke negative and reductive thoughts and ideas in relation to my representations of identity. I found some confidence that even if people could not exactly decode my intentions in creating certain works, they still would not have a reductive interpretation of the work. I considered that there would be a successful outcome from the exhibition since I did not hear any comments in relation to Iranian women being victimised or oppressed. In fact, during the exhibition, I received positive feedback on the works, especially on the opening day, from people who are engaged in the art world and academia, which made me feel confident about my practice.

The exhibition attracted a large number of visitors, including some groups of art students from Waikato Institute of Technology, to which I explained my works⁶⁰ (Figure 7.46).



Figure 7.46: Fashion students visiting the exhibition on the 9th November 2017.

⁶⁰ An example of these visit is: <http://www.mediaarts.ac.nz/ramp-gallery-visit-gives-fashion-students-fresh-perspectives/>

The gallery also hosted a floor talk by me about my exhibition on Monday the 13th November 2017. Around 20 people attended and asked different questions about the works and my country Iran.

During the exhibition, I provided the viewers with information when they had questions about the meanings of works by the use of a pictorial pamphlet that I had made so I could respond to possible questions about my works clearly. The pamphlet included pictures of the Persepolis' reliefs related to *Heritage Souvenir Suite*, protestors of the Green Movement, President Rouhani's symbol of the key, and green strips tied to shrines.

7.4 Summary

In this chapter, I explained my autoethnographic art-making practice in relation to the representation of identities around different areas of life such as culture, politics, and religion. The process of my art practice from the beginning to the final artworks was described. I also explained the positioning of my identity and the strategies I used in creating each artwork.

The process of exhibiting my artworks as the end of the practical part of this research was explained; this included: The exhibition preparation, choosing the exhibition title, making the brochure, titling the artworks, and choosing where to exhibit them in the space of the gallery.

While the viewers' reaction/interpretation was not collected as a form of data, I briefly mentioned the viewers' feedback from my point of view. Finally, I mentioned the restrictions that I faced in the practical part of the research. The next chapter will discuss the results of the research findings and the implication and significance of them.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the results of the different phases of my analysis of the research data - which include interviews with the artists, analysis of their visual artworks, and interpretations of the focus-group discussions- and the creative component of my research. The goal here is to revisit the main research questions with reference to the theoretical framework. I will start with theorising the ideological aspects of the representations of identities. This point is significant because it is related to the main source of motivation for undertaking this research project, as I perceived that Iranian women's identities are disproportionately and dominantly associated with Islamic religious codes. I will then, discuss the strategies of resistance that the artists participating in my research employed in their representations of female identities.

This discussion about different traits and strategies in the artistic productions of my research participants' reviews continues toward the strategies that I developed in the creative component of my research concerning finding new potentials/alternatives ways to associate women's identities with more dynamicity in visual representations. I will discuss the particular types of learning that came for me from undertaking a doctoral project in which the theoretical, empirical and creative aspects complemented each other.

This chapter also concludes the research by acknowledging its limitations, discussing its implications, and making recommendations for future studies related to artistic and cultural representations of identity.

8.2 Theorising the Ideological Aspects of the Representations of Iranian women's Identities

In the artworks of my research sample, the reading of the chador by the focus-groups' members was mainly associated with meanings of subordination, oppression, and women's acceptance of the Islamic religious rules. This is

particularly the case in the works of Moaiery (*from Under the Shadow of Iman Khomeini* series) and Khademian (*Election*), in that the female subjects are clothed in compliance with the Islamic regime's codification of gender in colonised situations.

Moreover, when my participant artists used the veil as a religious motif in representing Iranian women, it was an easy way to mobilize an Oriental background, whether deliberately or incidentally, and thereby to direct the viewer to a familiar and presupposed atmosphere. Therefore, despite the artists' intentions, the use of the veil can mask other potentialities in the process of meaning-making in the representations (Torshizi, 2012, p. 563). Even though artists working outside Iran have fewer limitations in their choice of visual codes/signs than those working in Iran, they seem to be interested in employing a similar visual language as those working within Iran.

The Oriental and religious characterises of these works, condensed into the use of the chador, particularly in the works created outside Iran, can be related to Echchaibi's (2013) theory that Muslims themselves have been trapped in the 'unveiling obsessions' of the West, and what I call the 'multiple burden of the representations of Iranian women' (see 2.2.1.2 & 2.2.4). In this sense, it is possible to say that the representations of female identities in these works are multiply colonised/controlled within their own society by a religiously-mandated patriarchal authority (in Moaiery and Khademian's works), and are constrained (in Anvari and Navab's works) by the residual colonising forces of the relationship between Iranian and non-Iranian entities, and possibly by the international art-market's expectations of ethnic representations. Such representational traps disguise both the complexity of women's lived identities and their active sense of resistance to the religious rules that impinge upon their lives in Iran associating representations of identity too readily with a discourse of 'abject victimhood' (Alexander, 2016; Zine, 2002). Based on the interview data, I believe that Iranian women artists in my research sample, mostly do not intend to advocate for Islam in their works, but the majority of them are exhausted by the regulatory effects of the regime on their every-day lives. It also seems that the use of Islamic motifs in the art and cultural practice of my research subjects is mostly

devoid of personal spirituality because of the need to negotiate the limitations of the visual vocabulary available to them. The ideological aspects of the works of my participant artists are better understood as reflecting the interests of the theocratic state power whose mandate is needed to legitimate the artists' practice (Rose, 2016). In this sense, the word 'Muslim' for referring to Iranian society in relation to representing identities has to be re-defined.

The veil as the signifier of Muslim women is often coincident with the discourse of 'abject victimhood' integrated within the representation of Muslim women (Zine, 2002; Alexander, 2016). Therefore, regardless of the various discursive paradigms that attempt to illustrate the resistance of Iranian women to Islamic laws enabled by the Internet in particular, to audiences outside Iran, the understanding of non-Iranian people about Iranian women identities is also, often associated with representations of veiled women. While members of Iranian society, particularly women, may act in subversive ways in response to over-exigent Islamic regulation, the representations of identities created by artists both in and outside Iran, often express Iranian identities as obedient entities. Moreover, the women artists in my sample seem to prefer working within the domain of ideologies which mostly resonate with the political system of Iran. Therefore, while the regulatory structures for local and diasporic artists differ, my empirical research suggests that some women artists tend to position themselves inside, or close to Iran's structure of regulation or ideological condition. The process of 'self-objectification' (Moscovici, 1984) then, is an active process in Iranian women artists' productions because of the use of the chador as the major visual element for representing Iranian women.

Through different phases of my research, I learnt that being 'other' in a foreign context in the works of my research sample is conveyed through the stylisation of the body and clothing. In making their interpretations of Manouchehri's work *Power*, my focus-group participants concentrated on the clothing style of the female figures. This finding highlights the disadvantages of the over-focus on a personal clothing style in contemporary Iranian art so that more wide-ranging discussions of life and power become stifled by dominant discourses in relation to the Western cultures.

8.3 Strategies of Resistance in the Works of My Participant Artists

The representational strategies that I have observed in the artworks of my participant artists are employed differently in relation to cultural, social, political, and gendered themes. The artworks contained various strategies of resistance some of which were inspiring and influential in my art-making practice; these strategies include irony, hybridity, and juxtaposition.

The strategy of ‘cultural hybridity’ was strongly illustrated in Navab’s works *Super East-West Woman* from the *Super East-West Woman* series because of her use of the American Superman icon and the Middle-Eastern style of jewellery in the same image, which created cross-cultural, and cross-gender, connections for the female identity. The association of biculturality with the representation of identity in this way reinforces the meanings of social inclusion and belonging which are related to Skrbiš’s (2017) conceptualisation of diaspora as a product of a combination of cultural and political factors in the process of globalisation (p. 5).

Manouchehri’s *Power* and Sharifi’s *The Feast of ID* from the *Mixiature* series draw on juxtaposition as their strategy for representing identities. I was specifically influenced by Sharifi’s juxtaposition of past and present. In my work *Heritage Souvenir Suite*, the articulation of a historical past in relation to my own identity is used as a means to avoid the ‘temporal emphasis’ on problematic discourses around Iranian ethnic representations (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 920).

Manouchehri’s use of a Persian paisley motif in her work *Power* is a reference to the ancient origins of the Persian identity and relating it to the symbol on the power switch of electrical appliances, which connotes of the West and its technological inventions, brings together the past and present. The cultural hybridity of the Qajar princess viewed through her clothing style can be understood as utilising resources to negotiate competing versions of constructions of identity (Bhabha, 1996). Irony is another characteristic of that artwork as the ‘mixed-up’ look of the Qajar princess is juxtaposed with the coherent and imposing presence of Queen Victoria.

Anvari's artwork from the *Chador Dadat* series is related to the concept of cultural memory which allows the artist to approach a narrative related to a past in an alternative way. Through the interplay of her emotional and sensual memories of the chador as a material Anvari tries to transcend the boundaries around the politics of representation of Iranian women. Anvari's recollection of her past memory in relation to the chador can be understood as a struggle for representing a non-political identity for Iranian women, against the power structure of Iran, and therefore, as a means of resistance against the imposed black veil over the identity of women.

Butler (1997, p. 190) describes 'melancholia' as a productive and potential tone to strategically express an oppositional position to State power (see also Frosh, 2012, p. 94). Fitzpatrick (2013), referring to Butler, explains that the melancholic aesthetic tone is ambivalent, which in visual representations, illustrates "a form of conflicted subjectivity, suspended between the agency of self-expression and the social prohibition on certain modes of speech" (p. 159). In this light, one might argue that Tavakolian's and Keramati's videos are representations of resistance to hegemonic forms of Iranian identities because of depicting dissatisfaction and sadness at living in a society with strong religious rules and restrictions. However, since I live in New Zealand, and therefore, have very few restrictions on freedom of expression in comparison with the artists working in Iran, in my practice, I have avoided using melancholic modes of expression because these might serve as commentaries on the lack of agency of the Iranian women's identities.

8.4 Theorising Feminism in the Works of My Participant Artists

Western postmodernist women artists engage with female subjects in the ways they reveal how the ideas of womanhood and gender roles in certain cultures are socially constructed (Heartney et al., 2013). An exemplar for articulating this discourse photographically is Cindy Sherman, who represents female persona through divergent identities in order to critique the constructed norms around gender through popular media such as film and photography. Despite Iranian women's awareness of their rights, I believe, gender identity in the art practice of Iranian women artists continues to be an attenuated subject. My point here is that expressions of subjective aspects of Iranian identities are typically subordinated to

the representation of an ideologically over-determined form of objective reality. While the ultimate goal of feminism is to liberate women from the dominant patriarchal norms in societies, the agency of my participant artists has been directed towards acting in accordance with the politically structured identity imposed by the Islamic regime in relation to female gender roles rather than working with the secularised attitudes existing in the society.

From a postcolonial view, the reflection of objective aspects of female identity can be related to the discourses around the colonial forces of the regulatory system of Iran and its influence on the articulation of women artists' voices, their creative activities, and their agency. In this regard Spivak (1988) states: “[i]f, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (p. 28). In this light, the productions of Iranian artists within Iran should be viewed as an attempt at retrieve ‘subaltern consciousness’ through their representations of identities. In other words, in the Islamically colonised context the Iranian artists’ compliancy with Islamic frameworks cannot be viewed as an essentialist strategy because the expressions of subjectivities through art productions are limited in advance by the Iranian government.

While I subscribe to Spivak’s view, concerning my argument about reflecting on subjective aspects of identities, perhaps Iranian artists in diaspora, due to having fewer restrictions on their articulation of women’s voices, can express gendered identities of Iranians in more liberating ways. In other words, artists outside Iran, as postcolonial subjects are exposed to possibilities for acting more autonomously against the colonial power. It is then possible that the subaltern women concealed under the shadow of the colonial power of the Islamic regime can perform more subjectively and have agency. Butler’s (1995) explanation about the relationship between the use of ‘language’ and ‘agency’ is a potential process for liberating identities from subaltern positions and transforming ‘expressions’ of gendered identities from ‘passive’ to ‘dynamic’ and ‘performative’ ones (Butler, 1990).

According to Bilgrami (2006), identities in politics can be instrumental “to mobilize yourself and others similar to you toward certain ends –national independence, racial equality, gender injustice, and so on” (p. 8). In the case of the

Iranian women artists' political responses, although they use allegorical, poetic, and ironic strategies of resistance, they have less instrumental value in comparison to the works of the Euro-American female artists exemplified in Chapter Two (see 2.6.1). This is because the works of my research sample are often engaged with socio-political themes through expressions of loss, grief, and passivity in relation to female subjectivity. Aligned with Bilgrami, who argues that representing political identity to an extent involves an objective basis, I believe that even when relating their political tendencies to representations of identities, artists cannot alienate their works from subjectivity. Therefore, exploring alternative strategies for connecting female subjects to socio-political themes in artistic and cultural representation was my primary goal in the practical part of this research project. In my art-making practice, I explored progressive ways to construct/reinforce the agency of female subjects in relation to political themes and alternative positions.

8.5 Engagement of Diasporic Iranian Viewers with Representations of Iranian Identity

A significant finding from the focus-group discussion data was that the majority of the diasporic Iranian participants were actually annoyed by, and dismissive of, their ethnic identity being exposed as negative, depressed and passive to other cultures outside Iran. Howarth (2011) describes identity as “an individual’s sense of who they are in relation to others around them” (p. 2). Therefore, from a social constructivist point of view, the formation of identity does not take place in isolation; instead, it occurs in social contexts (Vygotsky, 1986). Consequently, the question of identity at an individual level ripples out to a collective level, and the ‘self’ that the artist uncovers is also a ‘social self’ and subsequently a ‘national identity’ on a larger scale as a collective phenomenon (Smith, 1991; Anderson, 1983). According to Vertovec (1999), one of the types of diasporic adoption is a form of consciousness which emphasizes “describing a variety of experiences, a state of mind and a sense of identity” (p. 8). In this sense, the consciousness of the multi-locality of diasporic Iranians “stimulates the need to conceptually connect” themselves with the people of their host country, New Zealand (Vertovec, 1999, p. 8).

As mentioned in Chapter Six, these types of reactions from diasporic Iranian viewers can be partly related to Naficy's (2001) idea of diasporic communities as people who "often demand 'authentic' and corrective representations" of their ethnic identity in the host countries (p. 6). The construction of identities in the artworks of my research sample, except for Ghadirian and Sharifi's works, were described from the viewpoints of my diasporic Iranian participants as either religious, powerless, or depressed identities. They were infuriated by seeing the chador as an ever-lasting sign associated with Iranian women's identities. However, most of them reacted positively to Ghadirian's symbolic representation of gender because it did not contain signs of religiosity.

Comments made by the members of the *Diasporic Iranian* focus-group on the works of my participant artists, suggested that presenting one-sided Islamic representations of identities to the world is a source of agony for diasporic Iranians. While the diasporic Iranian participants were not in denial of the presence of religious people in Iran, many of them mentioned that the religious people form only a small percentage of today's Iranian society, but that these artists' works have focused only on this sector of the society. They then shared an understanding of these works as biased representations of the significance of religiosity in Iranian society. The reflection of the transformative inclination of the 'third-space' (Bhabha, 2004) as a scope for diasporic people to rethink identity in regard to fluidity and hybridity is visible in the viewpoints of my diasporic Iranian focus-group participants. The hegemonic Islamic identity conveyed by the Islamic stylisation of the female body, in this case, does not resonate with the processes of "hybridization" and "cultural diaspora-ization" (Hall, 1996, p. 448)

8.6 Strategies for My Art-Making Practice and Practice-Led Research

Combining the creative practice component of my project with an academic structure was ideal as it allowed a nuanced process of research that supported and went back and forth between two kinds of phase: a critical phase and reflection (a creative phase). As a diasporic artist, living in New Zealand provided me with a degree of freedom for expressing my own subjectivity in relation to my nationality and social, cultural, and political themes. The use of autoethnography in this research enabled me to critically engage with the notions of gender,

politics, ethnicity, and culture through my practice in art-making; by making my own artworks I aimed to understand if I could create hopeful/positive representations for the praxis of change.

Once again drawing on Echchaibi (2013), I believe that “lived experiences” provide a path to shift from a stereotypical, oppressed, victimised, and passive position, to productive, communicative, and informative versions of the challenges, struggles and vibrancy of Iranian woman’s identities. The use of an autoethnographic approach in this research project allowed me to make ‘conscious decisions’ to draw on aspects of both my ‘personal’ and ‘scholarly’ lives (Ings, 2014, p. 683). The use of autoethnography as an approach became my vehicle for enhancing the ethnic representations of Iranian identities in my art-making practice. Autoethnography enabled me to observe and interrogate my own life experiences and beliefs critically (Ellis, 2013, p. 10) to reflect on performative expressions of my subjectivity.

Through critically analysing the visual data of my research I found symbolic representations, such as Ghadirian’s # 1 from *Nil Nil* series and Navab’s *Super East-West Woman*, provided me with more possibilities for approaching female subjects in relation to Iranian social, cultural, and political themes. For instance, I used the hand gesture of the Green Movement which symbolised peace and the unity of the protesters on the streets of Tehran in my work *Hands of Dissent*. Inspired by the poetic mode of Khademian’s photography, I created the work *One from 1001 (Sand Story)* in a poetic mode; however, I used video as a medium to illustrate my movements for highlighting the performative position of the female identity. I also used my voice for conveying more subjectivity in my video.

The choice of medium was another important factor in creating my desired effects in the process of my art-making practice. For example, in creating *Hands of Dissent*, which was inspired by Ghadirian’s symbolic use language, the use of plaster casting as my medium was to generate a heroic mode in this work which implies the bravery of individuals in taking actions. The use of photography, and photo collaging allowed me to depict relationships between the subjects of identity and religion that are not possible in real life.

I used transmediation as a strategy because it “offers a possible strategy to reconstruct an audience niche around a narrative world” (Scolari, 2014, p. 76). For example, with the Persian carpets which were components of my work *Shrine*, changing the medium of carpet-making from weaving to painting, I shifted the viewers’ experience of a carpet from a tactile object touched by feet and looked down on, to an ocular experience within the accepted legitimised exhibition context of a painting on a wall. My paintings of Persian carpets, similar to Anvari’s work, are also related to the concept of cultural memory because I approach my memory recollections of Persian carpets through an interplay of my connections to them in both material and emotional aspects. Juxtaposing the paintings of Persian carpets with the contemporary, abstract structure of the shrine allowed me to depict relationships between people and religious objects in alternative ways that are not possible in real life.

In my own practice, inspired by Navab and Manouchehri, in *My Paradox* and *Fatwa on Kaashi* I used irony as a strategy for resisting the Islamisation of female identity. As mentioned earlier, inspired by Sharifi’s work, the artwork *Heritage Souvenir Suite* juxtaposes ‘past’ and ‘present’ as a strategy for resisting the reinforced relationship between Iranian identities and Islamic ideology. The use of colours in Sharifi’s artwork also appealed to me. The strong positive colours of the background conveyed movement, positivity, liveliness, and dynamism; therefore, I utilised colours in my works for showing more vibrancy in my practice.

I followed Foucault’s suggestion for minimising the dominant power as a means to facilitate the exercise of freedom at the individual/subjective levels. Therefore, trying to avoid Islamic codifications of gender in my practice was a strategy which enabled me, I hope, to challenge, subvert, detour, and deconstruct the prominent and restrictive representation of Iranian women in my art-making experiments.

8.6.1 Mapping My Art Practice

Since addressing my ethnicity was an important feature of my art-making practice, I used elements which incorporated codes of Iranian society in my

representations of identities, the process that Moscovici (1984) calls ‘anchoring’ and Hall (1999) calls ‘mapping’, in order to relate my works to Iranian contexts and themes.

In the light of recent transformations in Iranian society, in which religiosity is challenged by secularised actions / reactions in multiple contexts and women have frequently refused to follow Islamic codifications of gender, exploring ways to depict the complexity of Iranian ethnic identities in relation to female subjects became my main goal in the creative part of my research.

By studying the data gathered in this research, I tried to learn the ways that the use of signs/resources can direct the viewers' interpretations to certain destinations. For example, as mentioned earlier, using the chador mainly results in viewers' interpreting the works as being religious, obedient, and Oriental. Therefore, in the majority of my works, I utilised other resources that could connect me to the themes that I intended to depict in relation to the Iranian female identity. For example, I modified the Iranian flag in *Self Portrait (Key Necklace)*, employed arabesque patterns from mosques and religious architectures in Iran in *Fatwa on Kaashi* and *My Paradox*, incorporated the patterns of Persian carpets in *Shrine*, used the green colour in *Hands of Dissent*, and included the paisley motif in *Heritage Souvenir Suite*.

I acknowledge that my work *One from 1001 (Sand Story)* did not contain visual ethnic codes. Not incorporating a significant ethnic sign was an intentional aspect of this work, as a means of integrating my subjectivity within my present context as a bicultural person in a new geographical location; however, my non-native accent is a sign of foreignness in the audio. This work speaks to the process of adaptation to a new land and is associated with the process of adaptation I have been undergoing during the time it has taken me to do this research project.

8.6.2 Avoiding Representational Traps

In my art-practice, I used the chador in one of my art-making experiments, before creating *One from 1001 (Sand Story)* (see 7.2.3), however, I avoided exhibiting works which contained the sign of the chador to avoid the representational trap of Muslim women.

The use of an autoethnographic approach in my art-making practice enabled me to reflect on my own subjectivity in relation to different themes and consequently I hope I managed to circumvent abiding Orientalist, propagandistic and Islamic ideological signifiers that partly depend on viewers' readings. While some of my works, such as *Fatwa on Kaashi* and *My Paradox*, can be understood as Orientalist representations because of the use of arabesque patterns I did try to strategically use the Oriental codes and the female body in ways that depict active resistance, and construct identities with more complexity, dynamicity, and international irony than in an Islamic Iranian context.

As explained earlier (see 8.6), there are strategies and approaches available that can be used to reinforce agency and performativity in relation to representations of identities, especially for diasporic artists. However, the insight that I learnt through this research project, in both theoretical and practical parts of my study, is that in depicting Iranian women identities it is very easy to slip into representational traps to the extent that it might not be completely possible to avoid them, particularly for artists based in Iran.

8.7 Limitations of the Study

This study was structured carefully and achieved its objective of understanding the ways in which identities are constructed through the works of my participants by exploring their strategies to revitalise the representation of identity with performative and dynamic aspects of female identity. However, as the research reached its practical stage, a number of limitations became obvious.

One of the challenging aspects of my art-making practice was the ethical requirements of the practice, which included not using any identifiable figures without permission in my works. As an instance, for one of my artworks, I had an idea for creating an artwork which would have contained portrayals of a few well-known Iranian women who are powerful and courageous in relation to women's issues in Iran, as a response to the victimised representations of Iranian female identity which I disliked so much. However, the importance of considering potential ethical issues that might arise from such activity led me to using my own

body in works, and also symbolic elements instead of using other people's identities.

Another challenge was not including any explicit political visage in my work, because it could be a risk factor in terms of provoking the Islamic authorities' attention. For example, as explained in Chapter Seven (see 7.2.1), my first experiment, *The Reflection*, which was intended to portray a dichotomous power relationship between the female identity and the regime's authorities had to be excluded from my final exhibition.

As much as I enjoyed creating the artworks, managing my time-frame was a source of anxiety throughout this process. I was conscious of the time as an important restriction of my PhD. However, I had to explore and test out my visual ideas, and this was a very time-consuming process. The idea of each work was tested; therefore, for all of them I had to equip myself with the necessary materials in order to create them. In the above example (*The Reflection*), I spent at least three months testing the idea, which eventually had to be removed from my suite of artworks. My point here is that during the art-making process there were a number of times when I doubted the feasibility of the outcomes. Fortunately, I did not experience periods of being blocked or unfocused in my practical research trajectory. In contrast, even when I was experiencing challenging and difficult times in my personal life, my problems became sources of inspiration and I reflected upon those issues in my artworks. For example, during a period of homesickness, I created the paintings of *Persian Carpets* as components of the *Shrine* using acrylic on canvas (see 7.2.6).

The postcolonial framework used in this research served as a persistent reminder of the Islamically colonised context of Iran in regard to the fact that both repression and resistance informed the works of my participant artists. However, in studying the representations of ethnic identities by diasporic artists, I find the postcolonial framework limiting. Emphasising similarities in the use of visual language by diasporic Iranian artists in relation to the context of Iran, simply because they are ethnically Iranian, negates the critical differences that exist within Iran and other countries in terms of freedom of expressions.

The current study did not present a recorded form of data from the visitors to my exhibition. My supervisors and I discussed this possibility early on but in the process of arranging the exhibition it did not happen. Gathering data from the viewers could have provided useful comments for evaluating my art practice and measuring the extent to which I was able to communicate with the viewers.

8.8 Suggestions for Further Studies

Iranian women artists are active participants in the art-market both inside and outside Iran. Torshizi (2012) explains that the global art-market is attracted to artworks with indicators of ethnic alterity and unexplored localities, most of the time associating them with feminine and gender issues. Keshmirshekan (2010) is also concerned with the tendency of the international art-market to exhibit production from Iranian artists that results in exoticised representations of identities. In other words, there is a western/Euro-American expectation that Iranian artists will exhibit their identities in exotic and Oriental ways that suggests a relatively monolithic/fixed political identity reproduced through different modes of expressions. However, there is not much research about the relevance of the art-market to the aesthetic decision-making of artists and its relation to their choice of themes, modes, and strategies of their practice. Researchers may be interested to choose to study the evaluation of the global art-market of different types of artistic and cultural identities to understand the extent of the art-market's influence on artists' productions.

The purpose of collecting data from the diasporic Iranians in focus-group discussion was to understand their interpretations of the artworks of my research subjects. Yet the diasporic Iranians' expectation of a collective identity and further understandings of their viewpoints in relation to how they perceive their own identities need more exploration. Exploring this matter in diasporic communities could help to understand the fertile space for positioning of identities in art and cultural practices.

8.9 Conclusion

First, it should be clear that the religious intensity somewhat inadvertently conveyed through using the chador in the works of my participant artists has contributed to the conflict between viewers' interpretations of the works and the reality of the life of today's Iranian society. In fact, a lack of subjectivity and agency in positioning identities that resist, challenge, or reform the dominant Islamic identity in the majority of the representations of the artists in my research sample has pictured positions of stasis with few signs of the transformation and complexity in Iranian society. While the regulatory system of Iran may be a factor in reinforcing Islamic visualisation of female subjects in the art-making of woman artists in Iran, diasporic artists with a freer choice of their visual language often inexplicably seem to use similar visual language as those in Iran.

As a diasporic Iranian woman artist, I have long been concerned with one-sided representations of Islamic identities in Iranian society in the global art sphere. I have been keen to explore the reasons for the reiteration of associating Iranian women with Islamicised identities through representation. Doing this research with a creative practice component was a means to discover ways to deconstruct, subvert, and challenge the hegemonic ideological representation of Iranian women in order to express gendered identity with more performativity and subjectivity in Iranian contemporary art. The goal beyond that was to conceptualize progressive and constructive identities of women in relation to social, cultural, and political themes. While I was critical of the ideological aspects of the artworks of my participant artists in my analysis, in my art-making practice I was challenged in trying to avoid similar signs, such as the chador, since they were easily available in my memory and related to female subjects. This made me more empathetic towards the artists' representational language towards the end of my research.

In an attempt to achieve the objectives of disturbing the oppression forces of colonial structure of the Islamic regime on representations of Iranian women, while recognising the process of production through the Circuit of Culture model, this research project explored the ways in which I could engage my practice with postcolonial and autoethnographic frameworks. I identify myself and my practice as postcolonial because of my position in the 'third-space' which allows me to

explore my identity in another geographical context and away from the restrictions of the Iranian government; therefore, my life experiences are best articulated in postcolonial discourses. Using a postcolonial language, I tried to articulate gendered identity in relation to the themes which some of my participant artists addressed through the influences of the colonial forces. In other words, I aimed to re-engage with the themes addressed by my participating artists in an academic structure for the purpose of disturbing the colonial influences on the use of language in the contemporary art of Iran. In this regard, Archana A Pathak (2010) says that “a scholar of color can utilize autoethnography to disturb the false binaries that drive her away from the work that impassions her while holding true to the mandates for ‘rigor’ that pervade the academy and its evaluative bodies” (p. 7). While this research project did not provide sufficient data for examining the extent of the accountability of my own art practice in regard to my objective, it may however, introduce new possibilities and strategies for reconciling the representations of Iranian women in artistic and cultural practices with more subjective and progressive aspects of identities.

Extending the current literature about Iranian gendered identities and their representations, coupled with the creative component of this research hopefully makes a useful contribution to art and cultural studies, particularly about the contemporary art of Iran. It is my greatest ambition and passion to accentuate the depth and beauty of my country Iran and Iranian culture through art.

REFERENCES

- Aagerstoun, M. J. & Auther, E. (2007). Considering feminist activist art. *NWSA Journal*, 19(1), vii-xiv.
- Aghdashloo, T. (2014). *Notes on women in Iranian art: A review*. Retrieved from <https://www.ibraaz.org/reviews/54>
- Aiello, G. (2006). Theoretical advances in critical visual analysis: Perception, ideology, mythologies, and social semiotics. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 26(2), 89-102.
- Albert, M. T. (2006). Culture, heritage and identity. In M. T. Albert, & S. Gauer-Lietz (Eds.), *Perspektiven des Welterbes – Constructing world heritage* (pp. 30-37). Frankfurt, Germany: IKO-Verlag.
- Alexander, K. C. (2016). The motivation behind Westerners' obsession with the Islamic veil. *What all Americans should know about women in the Muslim world*. Retrieved from <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=islamandwomen>
- Allerstorfer, J. (2013). Performing visual strategies: Representational concepts of female Iranian identity in contemporary photography and video art. In S. G. Scheiwiller (Ed.), *Performing the Iranian state: Visual culture and representations of Iranian identity* (pp. 173-192). London, England: Anthem Press.
- Ali Abazari, Y., Varij Kazemi, A., & Faraji, M. (2008). Secularization in Iranian society. In M. Semati (Ed.) *Media, culture and society: Living with globalization and the Islamic state* (pp. 238-254). Manitoba, Canada: Routledge.
- Alipour Harris, A., & Daadvar, A. (2015). فعالیت بر مؤثر فرهنگی و اجتماعی های زمینه [Socio-cultural background affecting the activities of women painters Pahlavi era (1925-1978)]. *و فرهنگ در زن هنر [Woman in Art and Culture]*, 7(2), 171-186. Retrieved from https://jwica.ut.ac.ir/article_57574_69c044f3b87948aa08fc70eed81e2556.pdf
- Altheide, D. L., & Johnson, J. M. (1980). *Bureaucratic propaganda*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Althusser, L. (1968). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. In J. Rivkin & M. Ryan (Eds. 2004), *Literary theory: An anthology* (pp. 693-702). Oxford, England: Blackwell publishing.
- Amirsadeghi, H. (2009). *Different sames: New perspectives in contemporary Iranian art*. London, England: Thames & Hudson.

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities*. London, England: Verso.
- Andrew, G. (2016, September). Remembering Abbas Kiarostami. *Sight & Sound*, 48-52.
- Ang, L. (2005). *On not speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*. London, England: Routledge.
- Arberry, A. J. (2004). *Discourses of Rumi*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007) *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Asheville the Courtyard Gallery & Agency. (2013). *Flood fine art center and UNCA features Iranian poster art, photographs and films from the 1960s and 1970s*. Retrieved from <http://www.ashevillecourtyard.com/exhibits.html>
- Baker, D. J. (2011). Queering practice-led research: Subjectivity, performative research and the creative art. *Creative Industries Journal*, 4(1), 33-51.
- Bal, M., & Bryson, N. (1991). Semiotics and art history. *The Art Bulletin*, 73(2), 174-208. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00043079.1991.10786750?journalCode=rcab20>
- Banerji, D. (2013). Sri Aurobindo, India, and ideological discourse. *International Journal of Dharma Studies*, 1(1), 1-17. Retrieved from <http://internationaljournaldharmastudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/2196-8802-1-1>
- Banerjee, S., & Prasad, A. (2008). Introduction to the special issue on critical reflection on management and organizations: A postcolonial perspective. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, 4(2/3), 90-98.
- Bartleet, B. L. (2013). Artful and embodied methods, modes of inquiry, and forms of representation. In S. J. Holman, T. E. Adams, C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 443-464). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang.
- Batchen, G., Reihana, L., & Davenport, R. (2015). *In Pursuit of Venus*. Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.
- Beadle, M. (2016). *This is what a feminist looks like! Photography and American Feminism, 1968–1987*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum. Retrieved from <https://americanart.si.edu/research/opportunity/fellows/2016/pdfs/Beadle.pdf>

- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2001). *Individualization: Institutional individualism and its social and political consequences*. London, England: Sage.
- Becker, H. S. (1995). Visual sociology, documentary photography, and photojournalism: It's (almost) all a matter of context. *Visual Studies*, 10(1), 5-14. Retrieved from https://monoskop.org/images/1/11/Becker_Visual_sociology_documentary_photography_and_photojournalism_1995.pdf
- Bertucci, L. (1997). Shirin Neshat: Eastern values. *Flash Art*, 30(197), 84.
- Berg, C. R. (2002). *Latino images in film: Stereotypes, subversion, resistance*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bezemer, J., & Mavers, D. (2011). Multimodal transcription as academic practice: A social semiotic perspective. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14(3), 191-206.
- Bhabha, H. K. (2004). *The location of culture*. London, England: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1996). Culture's in-between. In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 53-60). London, England: Sage.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London, England: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1983). The other question. *Screen*, 24(6), 18-36. Retrieved from <http://www19.homepage.villanova.edu/silvia.nagyzekmi/colonial/bhabha%20the%20other%20question.pdf>
- Bilgrami, A. (2006). Notes toward the Definition of 'Identity'. *Daedalus*, 135(4), 5-14.
- Birukou, A., Blanzieri, E., Giorgini, P., & Giunchiglia, F. (2009). *A formal definition of culture*. (Workshop on Modelling Intercultural Collaboration and Negotiation (MICON) at International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence). Retrieved from <http://eprints.biblio.unitn.it/1604/1/021.pdf>
- Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities*. London, England: Routledge.
- Black, E. (2016). *American photographer Cindy Sherman: 'Selfies bug the s... out of me'* (2016, November, 18). Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/86281446/american-photographer-cindy-sherman-selfies-bug-the-s-out-of-me>
- Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. (1996). Talking over ethnography. In C. Ellis & A. P. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing* (pp. 13-45). Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

- Boroujerdi, M. (1996). Other-ness, Orientalism, Orientalism in reverse, and nativism. In M. Boroujerdi (Ed.), *Iranian intellectuals and the West: The tormented triumph of nativism* (pp. 1-19). New York, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Bolter, J. D., & Grusin, R. (2000). *Remediation: Understanding new media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Boulat, A. (2004). *Iranian Islamic Revolution propaganda art*. Retrieved from <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/foreign-policy/middle-east/iran/iran-arms-embargo/>
- Bouzida, F. (2014, September). The semiology analysis in media studies: Ronald Barthes approach. Paper presented at International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities, Istanbul, Turkey. Retrieved from http://www.ocerint.org/Socioint14_ebook/papers/293.pdf
- Brumann, C. (1999). Writing for culture: Why a successful concept should not be discarded. *Current Anthropology*, 40 (1), 1-27.
- Buch, D. J., & Worthen, H. (2007). Ideology in movement and a movement in ideology: The Deutsche Tanzfestspiele 1934 (9-16 December, Berlin). *Theatre Journal*, 59(2), 215-239.
- Buckingham, D. (2008). *The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur foundation series on digital media and learning*. Retrieved from https://mitpress.mit.edu/sites/default/files/titles/content/9780262524834_sch_0001.pdf
- Bullock, A., & Trombley, S. (1999). *The New Fontana dictionary of modern thought*. 3rd ed. London, England: HarperCollins,
- Bunyan, M. (2017). Archive for the 'Cindy Sherman' category. *Art Blart*. Retrieved from <https://artblart.com/category/cindy-sherman/>
- Burgio, L., Clark, R. J. H., Muralha, V. S. F., & Stanley, T. (2008). Pigment analysis by Raman microscopy of the non-figurative illumination in 16th- to 18th-century Islamic manuscripts. *Journal of Raman Spectroscopy*, 39(10), 1482-1493. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jrs.2027>
- Burima, M. (2016). Orientalism, otherness, and the Soviet empire: Travelogues by Latvian writers of the Soviet period. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 47(1), 65-75.
- Busch, K. (2009). Artistic research and poetics of knowledge. *Art & Research: A journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, 2(2), 1-7.

- Butler, K. D. (2001). Defining diaspora, refining a discourse. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 10(2), pp. 189-219. Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/388942/pdf>
- Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Butler, J. (1995). For a careful reading. In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell & N. Fraser, (Eds.), *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange* (pp. 127-145). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble*. London, England: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519-531. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893>
- Cakmak, Y. O., Ekinci, G., Heinecke, A., & Cavdar, S. (2017). A possible role of prolonged whirling episodes on structural plasticity of the cortical networks and altered vertigo perception: The cortex of Sufi whirling dervishes. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 11(3). 1-9. Retrieved from <http://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2017.00003>
- Calas, M., & Smircich, L. (1996). From the women's point of view: Feminist approaches to organization studies. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, W. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of organization studies* (pp. 218-257). London, England: Sage.
- Candy, L. (2006). Practice-based Research: A Guide. *Creativity and Cognition Studios*, 1.0. Retrieved from <https://www.creativityandcognition.com/resources/PBR%20Guide-1.1-2006.pdf>
- Carrabine, E. (2012). Just images aesthetics, ethics and visual criminology. *Advance Access publication*, 52, 463–489. Retrieved from bjc.oxfordjournals.org/content/52/3/463.full.pdf+html
- Chadwick, W. (1996). *Women, art, and society*. London, England: Thames and Hudson.
- Chalipa, K. (1981). *Certitude of belief*. Retrieved from <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/graphics-revolution-and-war-iranian-poster-arts/new-battle-karbala/>
- Champ, J. G., & Brooks, J. J. (2010). The Circuit of Culture: A strategy for understanding the evolving human dimensions of wildland fire. *Society & Natural Resources: An International Journal*, 23(6), 573-582.
- Chelkowski, P. J., & Dabashi, H. (2000). *Staging a revolution: The art of persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. London, England: NYU Press.

- Choobineh A., Lahmi, M., Shahnava, H., Khani Jazani, R., & Hosseini, M. (2004). Musculoskeletal symptoms as related to ergonomic factors in Iranian hand-woven carpet industry and general guidelines for workstation design. *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics*, 10(2), 157-168. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10803548.2004.11076604>
- Chow, R. (1995). *Primitive Passions: Visuality, sexuality, ethnography, and contemporary Chinese cinema*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Clarke, M., & Clarke, D. (2016). Islamic art. In M. Clarke & D. Clarke (Eds.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education*. London, England: Routledge.
- Colmeiro, J. F. (2002). Exorcising exoticism: "Carmen" and the construction of Oriental Spain. *Comparative Literature*, 54(2), 127-144.
- Conradson, D. (2005). Focus groups. In R. Flowerdew & D. Martin (Eds.), *Methods in human geography* (pp. 128-143). Harlow, England: Pearson.
- Cordingley, A. (2013). *Self-translation: Brokering originality in hybrid culture*. London, England: Bloomsbury.
- Coumans, A. (2003). Practice-led research in higher arts education. In T. Ophuysen & L. Ebert (Eds.), *On the move: Sharing experience on the Bologna Process in the arts* (pp. 62-67). Amsterdam, Holland: European League of Institutes of the Arts.
- Curtin, C. (n.d). *Semiotics and visual representations*. Retrieved from <http://www.arch.chula.ac.th/journal/files/article/IJjpgMx2iiSun103202.pdf>
- Custer, D. (2014). Autoethnography as a transformative research method. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(37), 1-13. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss37/3/>
- Danto, C. J. (2010). *Shirin Neshat*. New York, NY: Rizzoli.
- David-Blais, M. (2011, July). *The proceedings of the international history of public relations conference 2011*. Paper presented at Bournemouth University, Bournemouth, England. Retrieved from <https://microsites.bournemouth.ac.uk/historyofpr/files/2010/11/IHPRC-2011-Proceedings.pdf#page=38>
- Ding, Y., & Thompson, L. (2013). Re-evaluating the Beijing Olympic Fuwa mascots in the circuit of culture. *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science*, 2(2), 87-103.

- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. (2001). The seventh moment: Qualitative inquiry and the practice of a more radical consumer research. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(2), 324-330.
- DeBiaso, F. (2012). Judy Chicago: Visions for feminist art. *Student Publications*. Retrieved from http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/6/
- de Certeau, M. (1988). *The practice of everyday life*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Dewey, J. (1958). *Art as experience*. New York, NY: Capricorn Books.
- Dirlik, A. (1996). Chinese history and the question of Orientalism. *History and Theory*, 35(4), 96-118.
- Djamali, M., Askari Chaverdi, A., Balatti, S., Guibal, F., & Santelli, C. (2017). On the chronology and use of timber in the palaces and palace-like structures of the Sasanian Empire in “Persis” (SW Iran). *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*, 12, 134-141.
- Drew, C. J., Hardman, M. L., & Hosp, J. L. (2008). *Designing and conducting research in education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Duarte, F. (2007). Using autoethnography in the scholarship of teaching and learning: Reflective practice from ‘the other side of the mirror.’ *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 1(2). Retrieved from <http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstol/>
- Dube, M. (2002). Postcoloniality, feminist space, and religion. In L. Donaldson & K. Pui-Lan (Eds.), *Postcolonialism, feminism & religious discourse* (pp. 100-122). London, England: Routledge.
- Du Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (1997). *Doing cultural studies: The story of the Sony walkman*. London, England: Sage.
- Du Gay, P. (1997). *Production of culture/cultures of production*. London, England: Sage.
- Dutta, M. J., & Basu, A. (2013). Negotiating our postcolonial selves. In S. J. Holman, T. E. Adams, C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 143-161). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Dyson, M. (2007). My story in a profession of stories: Autoethnography, an empowering methodology for educators. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(1), 36-48.

- Echchaibi, N. (2013). *Unveiling obsessions: Muslims and the trap of representation*. Paper presented at the International Communication Association Conference, London, England. May 17-21.
- Edelstein, S. (n.d.). *Artspeak*. Retrieved from <http://artspeak.ca/women-of-allah/>
- Eldridge, L. (2012). A collaged reflection on my art teaching: A visual autoethnography. *The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, 32, 70-79. Retrieved from <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.co.nz/&httpsredir=1&article=1382&context=jstae>
- Ellis, C. (2013). Carrying the torch for autoethnography. In S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 9-12). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Ellis, C., Adams T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12(1), 1-12. Retrieved from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>
- El Saadawi, N. (2007). *The hidden face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. New York, NY: Zed Books.
- Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution*. London, England: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Esposito, J. L. (2010). *The future of Islam*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Erlewein, N. S. (2014). *Screening intangible heritage media, heritage and representation: The case of Kutiyattam Sanskrit theatre, India* (Doctorate thesis, Brandenburg University of Technology, Heilbronn, Baden-Württemberg, Germany). Retrieved from https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-btu/files/3598/Erlewein_Shina-Nancy.pdf
- Erlil, A. (2008). Cultural memory studies: An introduction. In A. Erlil & A. Nünning (Eds.), *Cultural memory Studies: An international and interdisciplinary handbook*, (pp. 1-18). New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter.
- Ettehad, A. (2012). Self-Portrait as a portrait of Society. *Contemporary practices*, II, 38-45. Retrieved from <http://www.contemporarypractices.net/artistessay/self-portrait.compressed.pdf>
- Fararou. (2015). تصاویر اهدای گل به زنان چادری [Images of donating flowers to the chadori women]. Retrieved from <http://fararu.com/fa/news/224819/%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%DB%8C-%DA%AF%D9%84-%D8%A8%D9%87->

%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-
%DA%86%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C

- Farokhzad, F. (1973). *ایمان بیاوریم به آغاز فصل سرد* [*Believe the beginning of the cold season*]. Tehran, Iran: Pearl Publishers.
- Farrar, L. (2016). *Gardens and gardeners of the ancient world: History, myth and archaeology*. Oxford, England: Windgather Press.
- Fathi, N. (2009). In a death seen around the world, a symbol of Iranian protests. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/world/middleeast/23neda.html>
- Felski, R. (1995). Why feminism doesn't need an aesthetic (and why it can't ignore aesthetics). In P. Z. Brand, & C. Korsmeyer (Eds.), *Feminism and tradition in aesthetics* (pp. 431-445). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Fineman, J. (1980). The structure of allegorical desire. *October*, 12, 46-66. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/778574?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
- Fisher, J. (1990). Reflections on echo: Sound by women artists in Britain. In C. Iles (Ed.), *Signs of the times: A decade of video, film and slide-tape installation in Britain 1980-1990*, pp 161-169. London, England: Oxford.
- Fiske, J. (1990). *Introduction to communication studies*. London, England: Routledge. Retrieved from https://allissemiotics.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/s3_fiske_communicationmeaningand-signs.pdf
- Fitzpatrick, A. D. (2013). Female trouble: Melancholia and allegory in contemporary Iranian art. In S. G. Scheiwiller (Ed), *Performing the Iranian stage: Visual culture and representations of Iranian identity* (pp. 157-169). London, England: Anthem Press.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research* (4th ed.). London, England: Sage.
- Fornet-Betancourt, R., Becker, H., & Gomez, A. (1987). The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom: An interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984. In J. W. Bernauer & D. M. Rasmussen (Eds.), *The final Foucault* (pp. 112-131). London, England: MIT Press
- Forouzanfar, B. (1990). *Speech and speakers*. Tehran, Iran: Kharazmi Publications.
- Forouhar, P. (n.d.). *Parastou Forouhar*. Retrieved from <http://parastou-forouhar.de/>

- Frosh, S. (2012). Melancholic subjectivity. In R. Tafarodi (Ed.), *Subjectivity in the 21st century: Psychological, sociological and political perspectives* (pp. 87-110). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Garcia, E. C. (2010). *Photography as fiction*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lense for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 25, 99-125.
- Gerges, M. (2017). *Shirin Neshat on exile and feminism*. Retrieved from: <https://canadianart.ca/features/shirin-neshat/>
- Ghadirian, S. (n.d.). *Artist's website: Shadi Gharirian*. Retrieved from <http://shadighadirian.com/index.php?do=photography#item-5>
- Gilroy, P. (1997). Diaspora and the detours of identity. In K. Woodward (Ed.), *Identity and difference* (pp. 299–343). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Golnaraghi, G., & Mills, A. J. (2013). Unveiling the myth of the Muslim woman: A postcolonial critique. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 32(2), 157-172.
- Golshiri, B. (2009). For they know what they do know. *E-flux*, 8. Retrieved from <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/08/61377/for-they-know-what-they-do-know/>
- Gonzalez, J., & Posner, A. (2006). Fracture for change: US activist art since 1950. In A. Jones (Ed), *A companion to contemporary art since 1945* (pp. 212-231). Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing.
- Grayling, A.C. (2006). *The philosophy of Superman: From Prohibition-era enemy of the mob to post-9/11 saviour*. Retrieved from <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2006/07/the-philosophy-of-superman/>
- Grimes, W. (2010). *Sylvia Sleigh, provocative portraitist and feminist artist, dies at 94*. *Art & Design*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/26/arts/design/26sleigh.html?_r=0
- Habib, S., & Darabi, H. (2007). Video art as a rising medium in Iranian contemporary art. *International Congress of Aesthetics: "Aesthetics Bridging Cultures"*. Retrieved from: http://www.academia.edu/734261/Video_Art_as_a_Rising_Medium_in_Iranian_Contemporary_Art
- Hakoköngäs, E., & Sakki, I. (2016). The naturalized nation: Anchoring, objectification and naturalized social representations of history. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 4(2), 646-669. Retrieved from <http://jspp.psychopen.eu/article/viewFile/664/pdf>

- Hall, S. (2013). The spectacle of the 'other'. In S. Hall, E. Evans, & S. Nixon (Eds.), *Representation* (2nd ed., pp. 215-271). London, England: Sage.
- Hall, S. (2006a). Encoding/decoding. In M. G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (pp. 163-173). Milton, Australia: Blackwell.
- Hall, S. (2006b). *Cultural studies: Decoding cultural oppression*. Retrieved from https://www.corwin.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/13286_Chapter_2_Web_Byte__Stuart_Hall.pdf
- Hall, S. (2000). *The multicultural question, lecture at political Economy research centre*. Retrieved from http://red.pucp.edu.pe/wp-content/uploads/biblioteca/Stuart_Hall_The_multicultural_question.pdf
- Hall, S. (1998). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference*. London, England: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London, England: Sage.
- Hall, S. (1996). New ethnicities. In K. H. Che & D. Morley (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 442-451). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1994). Cultural identity and diaspora. In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: A reader* (pp. 222-237). London, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Hall, S. (1991). Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities. In A.D. King (Ed.), *Culture, globalisation and the world system* (pp. 42-68). London, England: Macmillan.
- Hall, S. (1982). The rediscovery of ideology: Return of the repressed in media studies. In M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran, & J. Woollacott (Eds.), *Culture, society and the media* (pp. 56-90). London, England: Methuen.
- Hamilton, J., & Jaaniste, L. (2010). A connective model for the practice-led research exegesis: An analysis of content and structure. *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, 3(1), 31-44.
- Han, G. & Zhang, A. (2009). Starbucks is forbidden in The Forbidden City: Blog, Circuit of Culture and informal public relations campaign in China. *Public Relations Review*, 35(4), 395-401. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0363811109001271>
- Harding, S. (1998). Multiculturalism, postcolonialism, feminism: Do they require new research epistemologies? *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 25(1), 37-51.

- Hardy, A., Hight, C., & Michelle, C. (2011). Reservoir hill and audiences for online interactive drama. *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 8(2), 616-643.
- Harrison, C. (2003). Visual social semiotics: Understanding how still images make meaning. *Technical Communication*, 50(1), 46-60.
- Heartney, E., Posner, H., Princenthal, N., & Scott, S. (2013). *After the revolution: Women who transformed contemporary art*. New York, NY: Prestel.
- Helfont, S. (2015). *Post-colonial state and the struggle for identity in the Middle-East since World War Two*. Retrieved from <https://www.fpri.org/article/2015/10/post-colonial-states-and-the-struggle-for-identity-in-the-middle-east-since-world-war-two/>
- Hight, C. (1997). *Shifts in the political ideologies of 'film' treatments of political protest in New Zealand* (Doctoral thesis, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand).
- Hoddell, S., Street, D., & Wildblood, H. (2002). Doctorates - converging or diverging patterns of provision. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 10(2), 61-70. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/09684880210423546>
- Höijer, B. (2011). Social representations theory a new theory for media research. *Nordicom Review* 32(2), 3-16. Retrieved from <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/nor.2011.32.issue-2/nor-2017-0109/nor-2017-0109.pdf>
- Holden, S. (2010). *In 1953 Iran, sisterhood sought during a coup: Women without men*. New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/14/movies/14women.html>
- Holquist, M. (2004). *The dialogic imagination. Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Holman, R. (2013). Holding a mirror to Iran: Liminality and ambivalence in Shirin Neshat's women without men. *Screening the past*. Retrieved from <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2013/12/holding-a-mirror-to-iran-liminality-and-ambivalence-in-shirin-neshat%E2%80%99s-women-without-men/>
- Holmes, J., & Marra, M. (2010). Femininity, feminism and gendered discourse. In J. Holmes & M. Marra (Eds.). *Femininity, feminism and gendered discourse: A selected and edited collection of papers from the fifth International Language and Gender Association Conference* (pp. 1-18). Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Hooks, B. (2014). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. London, England: Routledge.

- Hoseini, M., & Zarea-zadeh, F. (2010). مقایسه ی تطبیقی سیمای زن در داستانهای هزارویکشب و نگارهایی صنیعالمک نقاش. [Comparative analogy of woman's depiction in One Thousand and one nights Stories and the illustrations by Sanie-Al-Mulk Painter]. *پژوهش زنان [Women's Research]*, 2, 7-32. Retrieved from <http://www.sid.ir/fa/journal/ViewPaper.aspx?id=109292>
- Hout, S. C. (2002). Critical encounters: Feminism, exoticism, and Orientalism in Freya Stark's the southern gates of Arabia. *Studies in Travel Writing*, 6(1), 54-77.
- Howarth, C. (2011). Representations, identity and resistance in communication. In D. Hook, B. Franks, & M. Bauer, (Eds.), *The social psychology of communication*. London, England. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hull, G. A. & Zacher, J. (2007). Enacting identities: An ethnography of a job training program. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 7(1), 71-102
- Hung, D., Lim, S. H., & Jamaludin, A. B. (2011). Social constructivism, projective identity, and learning: Case study of Nathan. *Asia Pacific Education*, 12, 161-171.
- Hunter, W. C. (2015). The social construction of tourism online destination image: A comparative semiotic analysis of the visual representation of Seoul. *Tourism Management*, 54, 221-229.
- Hurrell, J. (2015). Reihaba's Infected Pursuit of Venus. *Eye Contact*. Retrieved from <http://eyecontactsite.com/2015/05/reihanas-infected-pursuit-of-venus>
- Iedema, R. (2001), Analysing film and television: A social semiotic account of Hospital: *An Unhealthy Business*. In T. Van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *Handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 134-156). London, England: Sage.
- IranWire Online Journal. (2016). توضیح براندرزاده میرحسین موسوی. [Statement of Mir Hossein Mousavi's nephew]. Retrieved from <http://iranwire.com/blogs/6272/8208/>
- Ings, W. (2015). The authored voice: Emerging approaches to exegesis design in creative practice PhDs. *Educational philosophy and theory*, 47(12), 1277-1290.
- Ings, W. J. (2014). Narcissus and the muse: Supervisory implications of autobiographical, practice-led PhD design theses. *Qualitative Research*, 14(6), 675-693. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794113488128>
- Irwin, R. (2006). *For lust of knowing: The orientalists and their enemies*. London, England: Penguin Books.

- Izadinia, M. (2015). In search of a lost identity: Iranian women and their identity issues. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(2), 128-140.
- Jasanoff, M. (2006). Before and after Said. *London Review of Books*, 28(11), 14-15.
- Javidi, M. (2012). تاریخچه‌های مختصر از مکتب هرات [A brief history of 'Herat School']. شرق: فرهنگ ایرانی [East, Iranian culture]. Retrieved from <http://old.sharghdaily.ir/pdf/90-10-15/vijeh/14.pdf>
- Jenson, K. B. (2008). Media. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of communication* (pp. 2811-2817). Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Jewitt, C., & Oyama, R. (2001). Visual meaning: A social semiotic approach. In T. V. Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *The handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 134-156). London, England: Sage.
- Joffe, J. (2008). *The science of stories: An introduction to narrative psychology*. London, England: Routledge.
- John, E. (2008). *Painting by numbers: Focus groups are muscling their way into the arts. Are they a useful tool - or a death blow to creativity?* Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/jul/02/art.booksforchildrenandteenagers>
- Johnson, N. C., Schein, R. H., & Winders, J. (2013). *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to cultural geography*. Chichester, England: John Wiley and Sons.
- Jones, S. H., Adams, T. E., & Ellis, C. (2013). *Handbook of autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Kail, E. (2016). *Cindy Sherman releases first new work in 5 years*. Retrieved from <https://www.featureshoot.com/2016/05/cindy-sherman-releases-first-new-work-in-5-years/>
- Kalra, V. S., Kaur, R., & Hutnyk, J. (2005). *Diaspora & hybridity*. London, England: Sage.
- Kamali Dehghan, S. (2015). Iranian woman wins rights award for hijab campaign. *Support the Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/24/iranian-woman-wins-rights-award-hijab-campaign>
- Katz-Gerro, T. (2004). Cultural consumption research: Review of methodology, theory, and consequence. *International Review of Sociology*, 14(1), 11-29. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0390670042000186743>

- Kenare, A. (2009). *Presidential election polling station*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2009/jun/19/iran-obama-us-policy>
- Keshmirshekan, H. (2015). Standardisation and the question of identity: On the dominant discourses on contemporary Iranian art. *Quarterly Kimia-ye Honar, 11*, 110-127. Retrieved from http://kimiahonar.ir/browse.php?a_code=A-10-1-82&slc_lang=en&sid=1
- Keshmirshekan, H. (2013). Reclaiming cultural space: The artist's performativity versus the state's expectations in contemporary Iran. In S. G. Scheiwiller (Ed.), *Performing the Iranian state: Visual culture and representations of Iranian identity* (pp. 145-155). London, England: Anthem press.
- Keshmirshekan, H. (2010). The question of identity vis-à-vis exoticism in contemporary Iranian art. *Iranian Studies, 43*(4), 489-512. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23033221>
- Keshmirshekan, H. (2006). Discourses on postrevolutionary Iranian art: Neotraditionalism during the 1990s. *Muqarnas, 23*, 131-157. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/stable/25482440>
- Kester, G. (1998). *Art, activism, and oppositionality: Essays from afterimage*. London, England: Duke University Press.
- Khair, T. (2012). Re-Orientalisms: meditations on exoticism and transcendence otherness and self. In L. Lau & A. C. Mendes (Eds.), *Re-Orientalism and South Asian identity politics: The Oriental other within* (pp. 144-158). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Khalighi Motlagh J. (2012). *Women in the Shahnameh: Their history and social status within the framework of ancient and medieval sources* (Bibliotheca Iranica literature series). Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers.
- Khaz Ali, A. (2010). Iranian women after the Islamic Revolution. *A Conflicts Forum Monograph*. Retrieved from <http://conflictsforum.org/briefings/IranianWomenAfterIslamicRev.pdf>
- Khusrawjirdi, H. (1980). *Mullah, mother, and soldiours*. Retrieved from <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/graphics-revolution-and-war-iranian-poster-arts/holy-defense/>
- Kinder, M., & McPherson, T. (2014). *Transmedia frictions: The digital, the arts, and the humanities*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Koester, D. (2015). *Gender and power. Developmental Leadership Program*. Retrieved from <http://publications.dlprog.org/Gender&Power.pdf>
- Koolae, E. (2014). The Impact of Iraq-Iran War on Social Roles of Iranian Women. *Middle East Critique, 23*(3), 277-291

- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kress, G. (1988). *Communication and culture*. Sydney, Australia: New South Wales University Press.
- Lau, L. (2009) Re-Orientalism: The perpetration and development of Orientalism. *Modern Asian Studies* 43(2), 571-90.
- Lau, L. (2005). Making the difference: The differing presentations and representations of South Asia in the contemporary fiction of home and diasporic South Asian women writers. *Modern Asian Studies*, 39(1): 249-269.
- Leeuwen, T. V. (2001). Semiotics and iconography. In T. V. Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *The handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 1-9). London, England: Sage.
- Lemke, J. (1990). *Talking science: Language, learning and values*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publication.
- Leve, A. (2012). *The Circuit of Culture as a generative tool of contemporary analysis: Examining the construction of an education commodity*. Paper presented at the international conference, Sydney. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED544487.pdf>
- Lewis, B. (1982). The questions of Orientalism. *The New York Review*, 1-20. Retrieved from <https://www.amherst.edu/media/view/307584/original/The+Question+of+Orientalism+by+Bernard+Lewis+%7C+The+New+York+Review+of+Books.pdf>
- Lindemuth, C. J., Thomas, L. A., Mates, H. A., & Casey, J. A. (2011). Gender patterns in dress and outward appearance: An individual choice or fulfilment of cultural expectations? *Modern Psychological Studies*, 17(1), 30-36. Retrieved from <https://scholar.utc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1196&context=mps>
- Lippmann, W. (1965). *Public Opinion*. Toronto, Canada: Free Press.
- Lippard, L. (1984). Trojan horses: Activist art and power. In B. Wallis (Ed.), *Art after modernism: Rethinking representation* (pp. 341-358). New York, NY: The New Museum of Contemporary Art.
- Loomba, A. (2015). *Colonialism/postcolonialism*. London, England: Routledge.
- Lorenz, C. (2010). 'Representations of identity: Ethnicity, race, class, gender and religion. An introduction to conceptual history'. In S. Berger (Ed.), *The contested nation: Ethnicity, religion, class and gender in national histories*, (pp. 24-60). Houndsmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Loveimi, S. (2016). Fateful women in Ferdowsi Shahnameh. *The American journal of Islamic social sciences*, 19(4), 46-52.
- Luhmann, N. (2000). *Art as a social system*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lunt, P., & Livingstone, S. (1996). Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research. *Journal of Communication*, 46(2), 79–98. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1996.tb01475.x>
- MacDonald, M. (2006). Performing memory on television: Documentary and the 1960s, *Screen*, 47(3), pp. 327-345. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/screen/article/47/3/327/1669763>
- Mackary, H. (1997). *Consumption and everyday life: Culture, media & identity*. London, England: Sage.
- Madriz, E. (2000). Focus groups in feminist research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 835–850). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mäkelä, M. (2007). Knowing through making: The role of the artefact in practice-led research. *Knowledge, Technology & Policy*, 20(3), 157-163. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12130-007-9028-2>
- Mäkelä, M., & Routarinne, S. (2006). Connecting different practices. In M. Mäkelä, & S. Routarinne (Eds.), *The art of research: Practice in research of art and design* (pp. 10-39). Helsinki, Finland: University of Art and Design Helsinki.
- Marcus, L. (1992). Feminist aesthetics and the new realism. In I. Armstrong (Ed.), *New feminist discourse: Critical essays on theories and texts* (pp. 11-25). London, England: Routledge.
- Marien, M. W. (n.d.). Photography a cultural history. *The post modern Era*. 434-444. Retrieved from <http://www.art.ucla.edu/photography/downloads/Constructed%20Realities-Marien.pdf>
- Mathews, S. (1995). Creating conversations. In D. Augaitis, L. Falk, S. Gillbert, M. A. Moser (Eds.), *Questions of community*. Banff, Canada: Banff Centre Press.
- McCabe, I. B. (2008). *Orientalism in early modern France: Eurasian trade, exoticism, and the Ancien Régime*. New York, NY: Berg.
- McLeod, J. (2000). *Beginning postcolonialism*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press.

- Mehri, B. (2009). *Presidential election polling station*. Retrieved from <https://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/Iran-s-vote-ends-in-confusion-confrontation-3227994.php#photo-2370639>
- Memarian, O., & Nesvaderani, t. (2015). *The Iran primer: The youth*. Retrieved from <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/youth>
- Mendez, M. (2013). Autoethnography as a research method: Advantages, limitations and criticisms. *Theoretical discussion paper*, 15(2), 279-287.
- Meng, Q. (2015). Diasporic writer's self-Orientalisation or self-reflexivity: American Orientalist discourse and the rejection of Eileen Chang's *The Rouge of the North*. *Asiatic*, 9(2), 89-104.
- Merton R. K., & Kendall P.L. (1946). The focused interview. *American Journal of Sociology* 51, 541-557.
- Micelotta, F. (2001). *V Day 2001*. Retrieved from <https://www.gettyimages.ie/license/2223536>
- Milani, A. (2015), Iran's paradoxical regime. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(2), 52-60. Retrieved from <http://acme.highpoint.edu/~msetzler/ComPol/CPSreadingsbank/IranJOD2015.9pp.pdf>
- Milani, A. (2011a). *The Shah*. NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Milani, A. (2011b). Zoroaster and the Ayatollahs. *The National Interest*, (111), 64-72.
- Milani, A. (2010). The Green Movement. *United States Institute of Peace, The Iran Primer*. Retrieved from <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/green-movement>
- Milani, A. (2005). U.S. foreign policy and the future of democracy in Iran. *The Washington Quarterly*, 28(3), 41-56.
- Mizzi, R. (2010). Unraveling researcher subjectivity through multivocality in autoethnography. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(1), Article M3. Retrieved from <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/201/185>.
- Moaveni, A. (2013). *Through Story, a Look into Iran: Newsha Tavakolian's Portraiture*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/3798777/through-story-a-look-into-iran-newsha-tavakolians-portraiture/>
- Mohanty, C. T. (1988). Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Palgrave Macmillan Journals: Feminist Review*, 30, 61-88.

- Moghadam, V. M., & Haghightjoo, F. (2016). Women and political leadership in an authoritarian context: A Case study of the sixth parliament in the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Politics and Gender*, 1-30. Retrieved from https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/dc075a78/Moghadam_and_Haghightjoo.doc.pdf
- Moloney, K. (2006). *Rethinking public relations: PR propaganda and democracy*. London, England: Routledge.
- Moscovici, S. (2001). *Social representations: Essays in social psychology*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Moscovici, S. (2000). *Social representations: Explorations in social psychology*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Moscovici, S. (1988). Notes towards a description of social representations. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 18, 211-250.
- Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representation. In R. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Social representations* (pp. 3-70). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Mostafavi, S. (2010). The world of Iranian images in foreigners' eyes. *Art Quarterly*, 7(33). Retrieved from <http://www.tavoosonline.com/Articles/ArticleDetailEn.aspx?src=113&Page=1>
- Motamedzade, M., & Moghimbeigi, A. (2012). Musculoskeletal disorders among female carpet weavers in Iran. *Ergonomics*, 55(2), 229-236. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/00140139.2011.582539?scroll=top&needAccess=true>
- Mullin, A. (2003). Feminist art and the political imagination. *Hypatia*, 18(4), 189-213.
- Mullen, L. (1998). *Truth in photography: Perception, myth and reality in the postmodern world* (Master's thesis, University of Florida, Gainesville, America). Retrieved from <http://etd.fcla.edu/UF/amd0040/Leslie.pdf>
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6-18. Retrieved from <https://moviesalonanddiscourse.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/mulveyvisualpleasureandnarrativecinema.pdf>
- Munday, J. (2006). Identity in focus: The use of focus groups to study the construction of collective identity. *Sociology*, 40(1), 89-105.

- Muslim women's art & voices (n.d.). *Nil, Nil, the collision of war and domestic life*, Shadi Ghadirian, Iran. Retrieved from <http://muslima.globalfundforwomen.org/content/nil-nil>
- Naficy, H. (2001). *An accented cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Sheffield, England: Princeton University Press.
- Ngozi Adichie, C. (2009). *The danger of a single story*. Video transcription. Retrieved from http://ngl.cengage.com/21centuryreading/resources/sites/default/files/B3_TG_AT7_0.pdf
- Nichols, B. (2010). *Introduction to documentary*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Nichols, B. (2001). *Introduction to documentary*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Nimkulrat, N. (2007). The role of documentation in practice-led research. *Journal of Research Practice*, 3(1), 1-8. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.869.9004&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Nooshin, L. (2008). The language of rock: Iranian youth, popular music, and national identity. In M. Semati (Ed.) *Media, culture and society: Living with globalization and the Islamic state* (pp. 69-93). Manitoba, Canada: Routledge.
- Nooshin, L. (2005). Underground, overground: Rock music and youth discourses in Iran. *Iranian Studies*, 38(3), 463-494. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4311744>
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2000). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), 93-96. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x/epdf>
- Orgad, S. (2012). *Media representation and the global imagination*. Cambridge, England: Polity.
- Ottavi, M., & Luyssen, J. (2015). *La nudité très politique de Golshifteh Farahani [The very political nudity of Golshifteh Farahani]*. Retrieved from http://www.liberation.fr/ecrans/2015/02/08/la-nudite-tres-politique-de-golshifteh-farahani_1197823
- Oueijan, N. (2006). Sexualizing the Orient. *Essays in Romanticism*, 14(1), 7-25.
- Pakbaz, R. (n.d.) In search of identity. *British council: Underline Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.britishcouncil.ir/en/underline/visual-arts/search-of-identity>

- Parladir, H. S., & Özkan, D. (2014). Diaspora studies in social sciences: Modernity, power and identity. *Journal of Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences*, 2(20), 101-124. Retrieved from <http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/215709>
- Pathak, A. A. (2010). Opening my voice, claiming my space: Theorizing the possibilities of postcolonial approaches to autoethnography. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(1), Article M10. Retrieved from <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/231/191>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pearson, S. (2005). Darkness and light: Dusky maidens and velvet dreams. *Camera Obscura* 20(1), 185–207.
- Perrott, L. (2017). Bowie the cultural alchemist: Performing gender, synthesizing gesture and liberating identity. *Continuum*, 31(4), 528-541. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2017.1334380>
- Pickering, M., & Keightley, E. (2006). The modalities of nostalgia. *Current Sociology*, 54(6), 919- 941. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0011392106068458>
- Prasad, A. (2003). *Postcolonial theory and organizational analysis: A critical engagement*. New York, NY: Springer
- Prasad, P. (2006). The jewel in the crown: Postcolonial theory and workplace diversity. In A. M. Konrad, P. Prasad, J. K. Pringle (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace diversity* (pp. 121-144). London, England: Sage.
- Pyke, K. D. (2010). What is internalized racial oppression and why don't we study it? Acknowledging racism's hidden injuries. *Sociological Perspectives*, 53(4) 551–572. Retrieved from <http://www.irows.ucr.edu/cd/courses/232/pyke/intracopp.pdf>
- Rafizadeh, M. (2016). *45 weird bans on women in Iran: Gender apartheid in the Islamic Republic*. Retrieved from: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/264622/45-weird-bans-women-iran-dr-majid-rafizadeh>
- Rahimi, B. (2008). The politics of the Internet in Iran. In M. Semati (Ed.), *Media, culture and society in Iran* (pp. 37-56). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ram, H. (2002). Multiple iconographies: Political posters in the Iranian Revolution 98. In S. Balaghi & L. Gumpert (Eds.), *Picturing Iran: Art, society and revolution* (pp. 89- 96). London, England: I.B.Tauris.

- Rastovac, H. (2009). Contending with censorship: The underground music scene in urban Iran. *Intersections* 10(2), 59-82. Retrieved from https://depts.washington.edu/chid/intersections_Spring_2009/Heather_Rastovac_The_Underground_Music_Scene_in_Urban_Iran.pdf
- Razmjou, S. (2005). In search of the lost median art. *Iranian Antiqua*, XL, 271-314. Retrieved from https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/30424088/23-Razmjou-In_search_of_the_lost_Median_art-Razmjou.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1532576867&Signature=MVXG2nh24Hyx9xDTi8KJ1ZeO1zk%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DIn_Search_of_the_Lost_Median_Art_Iranic.pdf
- Reinhuber, E. (n.d.). *Artist's website: Elke Reinhuber [eer]*. Retrieved from: <http://www.eer.de/decide/e/klone.html>
- Revesz, R. (2017). *Iranian women get on their bikes to defy cycling fatwa*. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/iran-women-defy-cycling-fatwa-tehran-religious-prohibitions-rights-traffic-a7787876.html>
- Rich, R. B. (1990). In the name of feminist film criticism. In P. Erens (Ed), *Issues in feminist film criticism* (pp. 268-287). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Ritchie, J. (2003). The applications of qualitative methods to special research. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 22-46). London, England: Sage.
- Roscoe, J., & Hight, C. (2005). Building a mock-documentary schema. In A. Rosenthal & J. Corner (Eds.), *New challenges for documentary* (2nd ed., pp. 230-241). Manchester, England: Manchester University Press.
- Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4th ed). London, England: Sage.
- Rose, G. (2007). Semiology: Laying bare the prejudices beneath the smooth surface of the beautiful. In G. Rose (Ed), *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials* (2nd ed., pp. 74-1-6). London, England: Sage.
- Roushanzamir, E. L. (2004). Chimera veil of "Iranian Woman" and processes of U.S. textual commodification: How U.S. print media represent Iran. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 28(1), 9-28. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0196859903258576>

- Rounthwaite, A. (2008). Veiled subjects: Shirin Neshat and non-liberatory agency. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 7(2), 165–180.
- Rutten, K. (2016). Art, ethnography and practice-led research. *Critical Arts*, 30(3), 295-306. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02560046.2016.1205317>
- Rutten, K., Mottart, A., & Soetaert, R. (2010). Narrative and rhetoric in social work education. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(2), 480-495. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article/40/2/480/1654795>
- Sadr, B. (2014). زمزمه های حجاب اجباری از کجا آغاز شد؟ [Where did the whispers of compulsive veil begin?]. Retrieved from: <http://www.radiofarda.com/a/f3-hijab-iran-1979/25286342.html>
- Said, E. (1990). Reflections on exile. In R. Ferguson, R. et al. (Eds.), *Out there: Marginalization and contemporary culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press
- Said, E. (1977). *Orientalism*. London, England: Penguin. Retrieved from <http://jpkc.fudan.edu.cn/picture/article/294/2d/bb/f0541e364151afa9136935ce911b/cfd376a0-3bad-441f-88e5-dad82e291148.pdf>
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora*, 1(1), 83-99.
- Salbi, Z. (2015). *What people in the Middle East say in private about the West*. Retrieved from <http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2015/05/26/what-people-in-the-middle-east-are-saying-in-private-about-the-west/>
- Scheiwiller, S. G. (2013). Cartographic desires: Some reflections on the Shahr-e Farang (Peepshow) and modern Iran. In S. G. Scheiwiller (Ed.), *Performing the Iranian state: Visual culture and representations of Iranian identity* (pp. 33-54). London, England: Anthem Press.
- Scolari, C. A. (2014). Transmedia storytelling: New ways of communicating in the digital age. *Digital Culture, Annual Report*, 69-79. Retrieved from https://www.accioncultural.es/media/Default%20Files/activ/2014/Adj/Anuario_ACE_2014/EN/6Storytelling_CScolari.pdf
- Schwalbe, M., Godwin, S., Holden, D., Schrock, D., Thompson, S., & Wolkomir, M. (2000). Generic processes in the reproduction of inequality: An interactionist analysis. *Social Forces*, 79(2), 419-452.

- Seitel, F. P., & Rockefeller, D. (2007). *The practice of public relations*. Harlow, England: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Semati, M. (2008). *Media, culture and society: Living with globalization and the Islamic state*. Manitoba, Canada: Routledge.
- Seyed-Emami, K. (2008). Youth, politics, and media habits in Iran. In M. Semati (Ed.) *Media, culture and society: Living with globalization and the Islamic state* (pp. 57-68). Manitoba, Canada: Routledge.
- Shahroudi, F. (n.d.). *Artist's website: Farkhondeh Shahroudi*. Retrieved from <http://farkhondehshahroudi.com/Guards>
- Shapiro, R. (2000). In defence of exoticism: Rescuing the literary imagination. In I. Santaolalla (Ed.), *"New" exoticisms: Changing patterns in the construction of otherness* (pp. 41-50). Amsterdam, Netherland: Rodopi.
- Sharafedin, B. (2016). *Rouhani clashes with Iranian police over undercover hijab agents*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-rights-rouhani/rouhani-clashes-with-iranian-police-over-undercover-hijab-agents-idUSKCN0XH0WH>
- Shay, A., & Sellers-Young, B. (2003). Belly dance: Orientalism-exoticism- self-exoticism. *Dance Research Journal*, 35(1), 13-37.
- Shay, S. (2017). *The axis of evil: Iran, Hizballah, and the Palestinian terror*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Shirin Neshat. (2018). [Artist biographical information]. Retrieved from <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/shirin-neshat>
- Shusterman, R. (2012). Photography as performative process. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70(1), 67-77.
- Siamdoust, N. (2018). *Why Iranian women are taking off their head scarves*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/03/opinion/sunday/iran-hijab-women-scarves.html>
- Skrbiš, Z. (2017). *Long-distance nationalism: Diasporas, homelands and identities*. London, England: Routledge.
- Smith, D. A. (1991). *National identity*. London, England: University of Nevada Press.
- Smith, H., & Dean, R. (2009). Introduction: Practice-led research, research-led-practice towards the iterative cyclic web. In H. Smith, & R. Dean (Eds.), *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts* (pp. 1-38). Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

- Smith, T. J. (2008). Postcolonial affirmations: The return of the Dusky Maiden in Sima Urale's Velvet Dreams. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 22(1), 79-88. Retrieved from http://www.victoria.ac.nz/seftms/about/staff/attachments/Smith__Jo._Pos_tcolonial_Affirmations_the_return_of_the_Dusk.pdf
- Spencer-Oatey, H. (2012). *What is culture? A compilation of quotations*. Retrieved from https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad/openhouse/interculturalskills/global_pad_-_what_is_culture.pdf
- Spencer, S. (2010). *Visual research methods in the social sciences: Awakening visions*. London, England: Taylor and Francis.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press. Retrieved from <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/Spivak%20CanTheSubalternSpeak.pdf>
- Spivak, G. C. (1985). Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism. *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1), 243-261.
- Sreberny, A., & Mohammadi, A. (1994). *Small media, big revolution: Communication, culture, and the Iranian revolution*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Starr, L. J. (2010). The use of autoethnography in educational research: Locating who we are in what we do. *Canadian Journal for New Scholarship in Education/Revue Canadienne des Jeunes Chercheuses et Chercheurs en Education*, 3 (1). Retrieved from www.cjnserecjc.ca/ojs2/index.php/cjnse/article/download/149/112.
- Stein, D. (2013). The photographic source for Qajar painting. In S. G. Scheiwiller (Ed.), *Performing the Iranian state: Visual culture and representations of Iranian identity* (pp. 23-32). London, England: Anthem Press
- Stubbs, J. (1996). Surrealism's book of revelation: Isidore Ducasse's Poesies, detournement and automatic writing. *Romanic Review*, 87(4): 493–510.
- StudioArt (n.d.). *Shirin Neshat: Women without men*. Retrieved from <http://studioart.arts.uci.edu/2010/04/shirin-neshat-women-without-men.html>
- Sullivan, G. (2010). *Art practice as research: Inquiry in visual arts* (2nd ed.). London, England: Sage
- Sullivan, G. (2009). Making space: The purpose and place of practice-led research. In H. Smith, & R. Dean (Eds.), *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts* (pp. 41-65). Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

- Tahmasebi-Birgani, V. (2010). Green women of Iran: The role of the women's movement during and after Iran's presidential election of 2009. *Constellations*, 7(1), 78-86.
- Tavousi, M., Samini, N., & Mohandes Pour, F. (2006). در جستجوی شهرزاد هزار و یک شب [In a search for The Shahrzad of One thousand and One nights]. *Quarterly journal of literary research*, 15, 63-80. Retrieved from <http://www.sid.ir/Fa/Journal/ViewPaper.aspx?id=67625>
- Taylor, G., & Spencer, S. (2004). *Social identities: Multidisciplinary approaches*. London, England: Routledge.
- The Hollywood Reporter. (2015, May 21). 'Am I a threat?': Golshifteh Farahani full women in motion panel [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtPt27IDTrI&list=PLhz59AwXE_oKuW_lmGpbfEndxQV653kp4&index=3
- Thornburgh, N. (n.d.). *Newsha Tavakolian's still life in Tehran*. Retrieved from <http://roadsandkingdoms.com/2013/newsha-tavakolians-still-life-in-tehran/>
- Thurlow, C., & Aiello, G. (2007). National pride, global capital: A social semiotic analysis of transnational visual branding in the airline industry. *Visual Communication*, 6(3), 305 - 344.
- Tikhonova, Y. (2010). *Self-Orientalise: Iran inside out*. Retrieved from http://www.contemporarypractices.net/essays/volume6/review/Self-Orientalise-Iran%20Inside%20Out_108-116.pdf
- Tohidi, N. (2016). Women's rights and feminist movements in Iran. *International Journal on Human Rights*, 13(24), 75-89.
- Tolstoy, L. N. (1986). *What is art?* New York, NY: The Liberal Arts Press.
- Torshizi, F. (2012). The unveiled apple: Ethnicity, gender, and the limits of inter-discursive interpretation of Iranian contemporary art. *Iranian Studies*, 45(4), 549-569.
- Tyrer, E. (2012). *The social-semiotic discourse of the visual element in UK produced English as a foreign language coursebooks 1960-2009* (Doctoral thesis, The University of Brighton, Brighton, England). Retrieved from <http://eprints.brighton.ac.uk/12158/1/EdDApril%202013.pdf>
- Ulaby, N. (2015). *Artist Shirin Neshat captures Iran's sharp contrasts in black and white*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2015/05/18/407671343/artist-shirin-neshat-captures-irans-sharp-contrasts-in-black-and-white>

- University of Waikato. (2008). *Ethical conduct in human research and related activities regulations*. Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved from: <https://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/assessment/ethicalConduct.html>
- University of Waikato. (n.d.). *Requirements for PhD with a Creative Practice Component*. Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved from: http://www.waikato.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/269158/Requirements-for-PhD-with-Creative-Practice.pdf
- Van de Water, M. (1938). Propaganda. *The Science News-Letter*, 34(15), 234-235.
- Van Laar, T., & Diepeveen, L. (1997). The function of artists in society. In T. Van Laar & L. Diepeveen (Eds.), *Active sights: Art as social interaction* (pp. 51-70). San Francisco, CA: Mayfield. Retrieved from <https://msu.edu/course/ha/121/activesights.pdf>
- Van Laar, T., & Diepeveen, L. (1998). *Active sights: Art as social interaction*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing social semiotics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Van Leeuwen, T., & Jewitt, C. (2001). *Handbook of visual analysis*. London, England: Sage.
- Velicu, A. (2011). Cultural memory between the national and the transnational. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 3(1), 1-4. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.3402/jac.v3i0.7246>
- Vertovec, S. (1999). Three meaning of diaspora, exemplified among South Asian religions. *Diaspora*, 7(2), 1-37.
- Vertovec, S. (1997). Three meanings of "Diaspora," exemplified among South Asian religions. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 6(3), 277-299.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wagner, W., Sen, S., Permanadeli, R., & Howarth, C. S. (2012). The veil and Muslim women's identity: Cultural pressures and resistance to stereotyping. *Culture & Psychology*, 18(4), 521 - 541. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1354067X12456713#articleCitationDownloadContainer>
- Weerakkody, N. (2009). *Research methods for media and communication*. Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford.
- Wells, L. (2004). *Photography: A critical introduction*. London: Routledge.

- Wenders, W. (1997). *The act of seeing: Essays and conversations*. London, England: Faber & Faber.
- Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the language of racism: Discourse and the legitimation of exploitation*. London, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf and Columbia University Press.
- Whatley, S. (2003). Iranian women film directors: A clever activism. *Off our backs: A Women's News Journal*, 33(3/4), 30-32.
- Williams, R. (2011). Culture is ordinary. In I. Szeman, & T. Kaposy (Eds.), *Cultural theory: An anthology* (pp. 4-53). Oxford, England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Wilson, G., & Shpall, S. (2012). *Action*. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/action/>
- Williams, A. (2013). *Women without men: The ghostworld of Shirin Neshat*. Retrieved from <http://muftah.org/women-without-men-the-ghostworld-of-shirin-neshat/#.V98p6lt9670>
- Williams, R. (1989). Culture is ordinary. In R. Williams (Ed.) *Resources of hope: Culture, democracy, socialism*, (pp. 3-18). London: Verso.
- Wolf, K., & Tombleson, B. (2017). Rethinking the Circuit of Culture: How participatory culture has transformed cross-cultural communication. *Public Relations Review*, 43(1), 14-25.
- Women in the Orient - Occident in women: Photographic works by international artists (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://gedok-karlsruhe.de/vorschau/februar06/orientok2.htm>
- Woodward, K. (1997). *Identity and difference*. London, England: Sage.
- Yammouni, D. (2014, April 29). *What is practice led research?* [Youtube video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2909KkJBxfM&t=1014s>
- Yar-shater, E. (1998). *The lion and the throne: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*. Ann Arbor, MI: Mage Publishers.
- Young, R. (2016). *Postcolonialism: An historical introduction*. Chicester, England: John Wiley and Sons.
- Zahedi, A. (2007). Contested meaning of the veil and political ideologies of Iranian regimes. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 3(3), 75-98.

Zahir, S. (2008). *The music of the children of revolution: The stage of music and emergence of the underground music in the Islamic republic of Iran with an analysis of its lyrical content* (Master thesis, University of Arizona, Tucson, United States).

Zangwill, N. (1999). Art and audience. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57(3), 315-332. Retrieved from <https://www.hull.ac.uk/php/465848/HOMEPAGE/PDFs/Art&Audience.pdf>

Zine, J. (2002). Muslim women and the politics of representation. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 19(4), 1-22.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Requirements for PhD with a Creative Practice Component

Requirements for PhD with a Creative Practice Component

Postgraduate Studies
Student and Academic Services Division
Wahanga Ratonga Matauranga Akonga
The University of Waikato
Hamilton 3240, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 858 5096
Fax +64 7 838 4130
Email postgrad@waikato.ac.nz
www.waikato.ac.nz/sasd/postgraduate/



OVERVIEW

A PhD which includes a creative practice component is an alternative to the traditional PhD by single 'unpublished' thesis document. This model is an option for students who intend to integrate a creative practice component such as a music or dance performance, composition, film or literary production, creative written work, exhibition or design, with a thesis. The PhD with a creative practice component involves both producing new and original works in the candidate's chosen medium/media, and engaging in critical reflection, examination, and analysis of both their own processes of creative production in the chosen field and the wider social, cultural, theoretical and conceptual contexts in which this occurs. As with all types of academic research, the PhD with a creative practice component is original, speculative and systematically pursues new knowledge. However, while the outcomes of research with creative practice can mirror the range of outcomes found in many different academic disciplines, it is the presentation of those outcomes that differentiates creative practice research from other approaches. These requirements should be considered in consultation with the PhD regulations which can be found online at <http://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/regulations/higher/phd.html>.

THE PRESENTATION OF A PHD WITH A CREATIVE PRACTICE COMPONENT

A PhD with a creative practice component is presented in three interrelated parts:

- (i) **A Thesis Abstract** (max. of 2 written pages) that outlines the nature, scope and intent of the creative project. The abstract must provide a brief description that locates the creative and written components within their relevant fields of practice and theory. It must also outline the proportionate balance between the respective creative and written components, and their preferred 'reading/viewing' order.
- (ii) **A creative practice component** presented in a format that provides a durable record of the creative work undertaken for the creative project. In the case where the creative practice component of the research is a major live performance or exhibition for examination, this must be professionally recorded in an appropriate high quality medium. This will be submitted to the Postgraduate Studies Office with the written thesis component. A copy of the recorded material will also be submitted to the University Research Repository upon completion of the degree.
- (iii) **Written Thesis Component** of between 40,000 and 60,000 words which follows the general structural requirements of a thesis document, in terms of, for example, containing a literature review, methodology, findings, etc., and which provides a critical scholarly analysis of the creative project and its outcomes. A written creative practice component, such as prose fiction, poetry or script, can not be counted as part of the written thesis component.

▼ REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCEPTANCE INTO A PHD WHICH WILL INCLUDE A CREATIVE PRACTICE COMPONENT

In addition to meeting the entry criteria for the PhD, applicants who wish to include a creative practice component in their PhD are expected to have advanced training or professional experience in the relevant creative field. Advanced training may be understood as a postgraduate degree or diploma and professional experience may be understood as two or more year's employment or productivity in the relevant creative field.

At the application for confirmed enrolment stage (normally at six months of full-time study) PhD candidates are required to present a formal research proposal; candidates intending to include a creative practice component must outline the intended integration of the creative and written components as part of the draft methodology chapter.

The supervision team should comprise at least one supervisor who also has professional experience as a practitioner in the relevant creative field/s.

▼ EXAMINATION

The PhD is to be examined on the basis of the combination of the creative practice component and the written thesis. These components are not to be examined separately, but as an integrated whole constituting the original and substantial contribution to knowledge required of research candidates at doctoral level.

- Examiners for a PhD with a creative practice component should be nominated following the standard processes for appointing examiners. Examiners should normally have a PhD and at least one examiner should have professional experience as a practitioner in the relevant creative field/s.
- Examiners will be advised of the format of the examinable creative practice component at the time they are first approached by the Chief Supervisor to examine the thesis.
- For creative projects that require examiner attendance at an exhibition or performance, these additional requirements are to be followed:
 - a) Examiners will be advised of the requirement to attend a live performance or exhibition at the time of their appointment and costs associated with travel will be the responsibility of the relevant Faculty. Where the Postgraduate Research Committee consider that the quality of the work being examined will be retained through recorded media, they may allow an examiner to receive a recording of the performance or exhibition. At least one examiner must view the live performance or exhibition.
 - b) Examiners will be provided with the Abstract no less than 14 days prior to their scheduled attendance at the live performance or exhibition. If the candidate has opted for the written thesis component to be read prior to the viewing of the performance or exhibition, then this must also be provided no less than 6 weeks prior to the scheduled live performance or exhibition.

▼ CONCLUSION

The PhD with a creative practice component should not lessen the extent to which scholarship is developed during the PhD. It is an alternative designed to facilitate the development of new knowledge that can be expressed through creative practice. It is critical that the supervision team and student negotiate and clarify the relationship of the creative practice components with the written thesis component. Finally, the PhD candidate and the supervision team need to consider the following: Does the PhD with a creative practice component make a strong contribution to the research and indicate that the candidate can conduct independent research? Ultimately this is the goal of any PhD.

Appendix 2: The Ethical Approval

Dr Colin McLeay
Senior Lecturer
Programme Convenor

Geography Programme
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
Te Kura Kōwhiri
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4466 x8436
Fax + 64 7 838 4633
www.waikato.ac.nz/wfaas/subjects/geography



Neda Nourmohammadi
Ann Hardy

Screen and Media Studies
School of Arts

11 December 2014

Dear Neda

Re: **FS2014-45 Shaping the Future: Reconciling Iranian Contemporary Art with Dynamic Identity**

Thank you for submitting your amended application to me. I have reviewed it and am happy to provide you with formal ethical approval as you have satisfactorily addressed all the matters raised by the Ethics Committee.

I wish you well with your research.

Kind regards,

Kind regards,



Colin McLeay
Acting Chair
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee.

Appendix 3: Information Sheet for Participant Artists

INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET

Screen and Media Studies
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3240
New Zealand
Phone +64 7 838 4543
www.waikato.ac.nz/film/



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

IRANIAN WOMEN ARTISTS AND THEIR ARTWORKS INFORMATION SHEET

Date.....

Introduction

This is part of the research project looking at how Iranian women artists, both in Iran and diaspora, are presenting Iranian identity and female identity in particular in their works. Since recently Iranian contemporary art has been eagerly embraced by international art venues, it is important to investigate how Iranian artists visualize Iranian identity through art as a cultural medium and circulate their imaginative representations in both local and transnational art markets. I hope that together we can contribute to a discussion about the current limitations and opportunities for art made by Iranian women, both in Iran and overseas.

This is an academic research project. Undertaken by Neda Nourmohammadi (University of Waikato – PhD student) and supervised by Dr. Ann Hardy of the Screen & Media Studies Programme. I am exploring how social practices, ideologies and identities in Iranian women artists are formed, visualized and circulated, repeated and innovated on in the contrasting circumstances of Iran and other countries. The findings from my research will be presented to international conferences, published in academic journals and possibly as a book. This sheet provides some basic information about the research project.

You have been identified as an Iranian woman artist whose works are available internationally on the Internet and I would like you to participate in this project in an email interview to discuss your art practice. Your participation in this project would be voluntary and you may withdraw up to three weeks after your participation. Please read the details below and ask any questions you have about what this project is about and how I am asking of you.

Contact details for PhD student Neda Nourmohammadi: Phone: +64 224 372 972

Email:

nn68@students.waikato.ac.nz

Contact details for PhD supervisor Dr. Ann Hardy: 709

Phone: +64 279 334

Email: yhdra@waikato.ac.nz

Who are the researchers? As a PhD student at the University of Waikato, I am the researcher for this project. Dr. Ann Hardy, Senior Lecturer (chief supervisor) and Assoc. Prof. Adrian Athique in Screen and Media Studies at the University of Waikato, support my research.

What would my part in this research involve? I would like you to participate in an E-mail interview. The interview would involve discussion of the ways in which you are presenting artworks, and should take no more 60 minutes. I may also wish to contact you by email again later to clarify any details covered in the interview (but only if you give explicit permission to do so at the bottom of this information sheet).

I would also like to observe your artworks in my position as an Iranian woman with an academic background in arts. This will involve myself, Neda Nourmohammadi, spending some time observing and analysing those of your artworks which are available on the internet and accessible online for the current project. If you agree, I will also show some of your artworks to several small groups of people to record their impressions about themes and techniques in contemporary Iranian art. At the end, I would also ask your opinion on my own artworks that I will make through this research project.

What are my rights as a participant? Your participation is voluntary; you can withdraw at any time before the interview, and you can withdraw any information you give us during the interview session (up to three weeks after the session is conducted). If you decide to withdraw, any information you give us will be destroyed. You are free to decline to answer any particular questions during the interview. You are welcome to ask any questions about the research project, your participation, and what I will do with information you provide.

Are there any risks to my participation? I am interested in both interviewing you and analysing your artworks. As the interview and your artworks will both be noted in the research you will be identified through my discussion of your works. It is possible that I use only your first name or an alias if you prefer.

What happens to any information I give in the interview? The interview will be recorded in textual format. The context of the interview will be translated into English and analysed by myself. I will use your name and attribute your artworks to you in the PhD document; if I want to use your name and artworks in any subsequent publication I will check with you if you are happy to be identified in this way. All data gathered in this project will be kept on a password-protected hard-drive for 7 years and will be deleted after that period.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation? If I have not heard from you within a week, I will follow up by email or phone. I will also check your answer to the interview by email once, before I use them and if I do not receive any respond from you I consider it as your confirmation.

How do I get a copy of results from this project? During the research I will send an overview of findings and a list of all publications produced by the information that I am receiving from this project through email whenever you ask.

What if I have concerns about this research? Any concerns regarding the nature of this research should be notified in the first instance to PhD candidate, Neda Nourmohammadi using the contact detail above and /or my chief supervisor (Dr. Ann Hardy) using the contact detail above. This research project has been approved by the

Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Science. Any question about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz, postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

How do I agree to participate in this research? You will need to sign two copies of this information sheet (see below) – or give explicit consent to the interview through email or on camera. In either case you should keep a copy of this information sheet.

Appendix 4: Consent Form for Participant Artists

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Screen and Media Studies
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3240
New Zealand



Phone +64 7 838 4543
www.waikato.ac.nz/film/

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

[A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant]

Name of person interviewed: _____

I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation, and that I can withdraw my participation at any time up to three weeks after the interview. During the interview, I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to talk about the topic. I understand that my artworks will be reviewed and discussed by a number of participants in group discussions and I also have to give my opinion on the artworks which are the outcome of this research. I can stop the interview at any time. When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, but I give consent for the researcher to use the interview for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick [✓] the appropriate box for each point.	YES	NO
I agree to participate in this interview.		
I wish to view the transcript of the interview.		
I wish to receive a copy of the findings of the research project.		
I agree that the content of this interview may be used within this research project and written publications		
I agree to let my works be used in a discussion group with participants from New Zealand		
I agree to give my opinion on the artworks which are the outcome of this research project		

Participant: _____
Signature: _____
Date: _____
Email: _____
Phone: _____

Researcher: Neda Nourmohammadi
Signature: _____
Date: _____
Email: nn68@students.waikato.ac.nz
Phone: +64 224 372 972

Please retain your copy of this sheet for your own records

Appendix 5: Information Sheet for Focus-Groups' Participants

FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION SHEET

Screen and Media Studies
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3240
New Zealand



Phone +64 7 838 4543
www.waikato.ac.nz/film/

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION INFORMATION SHEET

Date.....

Introduction

This is part of the research project looking at how Iranian women artists, both in Iran and diaspora, are presenting Iranian identity and female identity in particular in their works. Since recently Iranian contemporary art has been eagerly embraced by international art venues, it is important to investigate how Iranian artists visualize Iranian identity through art as a cultural media and circulate their representation of their imaginations in both local and transnational art markets.

This is an academic research project. The findings from my research will be presented to international conferences, published in academic journals and as a book. This sheet provides some basic information about a research project investigating the ways in which practitioners engage with art market. The benefit of this study is to offer the contemporary Iranian art an approach in which Iranian artists make a positive change and accentuate the depth and beauty of Iranian culture and country in the direction of Iranian representation especially in transnational recitations.

I would like you to participate in this project by discussing your reactions to the themes and techniques of Iranian women's art. My aim is to contribute to a wider discussion about the current limitations and opportunities for art made by Iranian women, both in Iran and overseas.

This research is led by Neda Nourmohammadi (University of Waikato – PhD student) and supervised by Dr. Ann Hardy. I am exploring how social practices, ideologies and identities in Iranian women artists are formed, visualized and circulated, repeated and innovated on in the contrasting circumstances of Iran and other countries.

Your participation in this project would be voluntary and you may withdraw up to three weeks after your participation. Please read the details below, and ask any questions you have about what this project is about and how I am asking of you.

Contact details for PhD student Neda Nourmohammadi: Phone: +64 224 372 972
Email: nn68@students.waikato.ac.nz

Contact details for PhD supervisor Dr. Ann Hardy: Phone: +64 279 334 709
Email: yhdra@waikato.ac.nz

Who are the researchers? As a PhD student at the University of Waikato, I am the researcher for this project. Dr. Ann Hardy, Senior Lecturer (chief supervisor) and Assoc. Prof. Adrian Athique in Screen and Media Studies at the University of Waikato, support my research.

What would my part in this research involve? I would like you to participate in a focus group discussion session. The session would involve discussion of the ways in which Iranian artists are presenting artworks, and should take no more than 60 to 90 minutes.

I would like you to look at some artworks made by Iranian woman artists and answer the questions that I ask regarding the artworks. This will involve audio-recording of the session discussion to get to know your impression about the artworks as a non-Oriental person.

What are my rights as a participant? Your participation is voluntary; you can withdraw at any time before the discussion, and you can withdraw any information you give us during the discussion session (up to three weeks after the session is conducted). If you decide to withdraw, any information you give us will be destroyed. You are free to decline to answer any particular questions during the discussion. You are welcome to ask any questions about the research project, your participation, and what I will do with information you provide.

Are there any risks to my participation? It is possible that we use only your first name or an alias if you prefer. There is no risk in to your participation in this discussion.

What happens to any information I give in the group discussion? The discussion will be recorded in audio format. All data gathered in this project will be kept on a password-protected hard-drive for 7 years and will be deleted after that period.

How do I get a copy of results from this project? During the research I will send an overview of findings and a list of all publications produced by the information that I am receiving from this project through email whenever you ask.

What if I have concerns about this research? Any concerns regarding the nature of this research should be notified in the first instance to PhD candidate, Neda Nourmohammadi using the contact detail above and /or my chief supervisor leader (Dr. Ann Hardy) using the contact detail above. This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Science. Any question about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz, postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

How do I agree to participate in this research? You will need to sign two copies of this information sheet (see below) – or give explicit consent to the focus group discussion through email or on camera. In either case you should keep a copy of this information sheet.

Appendix 6: Consent Form for Focus Groups' Participants

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Screen and Media Studies
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3240
New Zealand



Phone +64 7 838 4543
www.waikato.ac.nz/film/

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO - FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

[A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant]

Name of person participating: _____

I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation, and that I can withdraw my participation at any time up to three weeks after the group discussion.

During the group discussion, I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to talk about the topic. I can stop the participation at any time. When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, but I give consent for the researcher to use the interview for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet. I understand that all the information about the group discussion are confidential. I understand that my identity will remain confidential in the presentation of the research findings.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick [✓] the appropriate box for each point.	YES	NO
I agree to participate in this focus group discussion.		
I wish to receive a copy of the findings of the research project		
I agree that the content of this discussion may be used within this research project and written publications.		

Participant: _____

Researcher: Neda Nourmohammadi

Signature: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Email: _____

Email: nn68@students.waikato.ac.nz

Phone: _____

Phone: +64 224 372 972

Please retain your copy of this sheet for your own records.

Appendix 7: Semi-Structured Interview Questions with Participant Artists

1. How would you describe the kind of art you make?
2. What techniques/media do you like to use and why? (How do your choice of medium, subject and technique interact to produce the effect that you desire?)
3. Are there any Iranian artists who you think have influenced your art making?
What about non-Iranian artists?
4. Who is/are the most outstanding and notable Iranian artist/s from your point of view? And why?
5. What are the main influences on your art works?
6. Do you work alone or with other artists? Tell me a bit about that!
7. How do people get to see your art?
8. Is your art available for people to buy?
9. What kind of public and or critical reactions have you had to your work?
10. (if relevant) When did your art work get known in transnational art venues?
What do you think are the reasons for that?
 - a. Is the reaction there any different to the reactions in Iran?
 - b. If yes, how does that influence what you do?
 - c. Do you think about whether or how your art might shape international perceptions of Iran? Do you think artists should think about such things?
11. In respect to being a woman, to what extent is gender a feature of your work?
12. What do you think the situation of women in Iran is like in general?
13. Do you think the environment for women has changed much since you started making art? Has Iranian society changed?
14. Do the concepts of Islam inform your work? If yes how?
15. Do you consider your work to have a political dimension? If yes, what are the political factors that shape your work?
 - a. Do you want people to do anything in particular after looking at your art? (i.e. do you want them to think it is beautiful, and/or... how do you like to capture the viewer's sight?)
16. How do you help people to understand your message or concept behind your artwork through the representations?
17. Would you consider yourself to be a feminist? How do you frame your ideologies?

18. To what extent are the government's rules (about what?) a barrier or shaping factor for your art activities?
19. How do you want your art to develop in the future? What do you want to do that you are not doing now?
20. I am looking for one artwork that best represents the current socio-political direction of your work so that I can use it with focus-groups back in New Zealand –Are you happy for me to do that and can you tell me which one you would recommend?

Appendix 8: Exhibition's Brochure

**RAMP
GALLERY**
www.rampgallery.co.nz

111 Collingwood Street, Hamilton
For more info call 078348800 ext 3228

**Patiently
Insistently
Intensively**

Neda Nourmohammadi
1 - 15 November 2017

Ramp Gallery is open Monday - Friday
12.30 - 4 pm or by appointment.
Email: info@nedamn.com

ISBN 978-0-473-41254-8
Published for the occasion of the exhibition
Patiently Insistently Intensively
1 - 15 November 2017

 THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
The Future. Housed in a Whānau

 **wintec**
WAIKATO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Patternfly, Insistently, Intensely at Ramp Gallery is the creative component to my doctorate research at the University of Waikato.

This project started with an ever-present feeling of identity-consciousness in relation to my nationality as I journeyed outside my home country, Iran. In 2010, when I left Iran for the first time, I soon realized that my identity triggered predetermined codes in people's minds. These codes were limited and mostly ideological: seeing us Iranians as oppressed and victimized.

Iran is a Middle-Eastern country which has been represented in the Western media as being in turmoil. According to these media Iranian women like me have no rights and are covered in black veils from head to toe: both culturally and religiously oppressed.

Meanwhile in Iran, although there is still a disproportionate amount of power in the hands of impolitic Islamic clergy the actual society is far from the model that the Islamic regime has in mind. Beneath the superficial propagandistic images of the lives of people in Iran, there is a vibrant society, with many women, especially, being at the forefront of struggles to create a democratic society: for instance the 2009 movement called 'The Green Revolution'.

The global media's circulation of a small range of images of Iranian society, coupled with Iranian artistic and cultural producers choosing to represent the identities of Iranians by using the same motifs as Islamic propaganda, have led to identity crises for individuals like me outside the context of Iran.

While my living experiences and observations in Iran were dynamic and complex, outside Iran, in relation to that former life, my identity has been mostly represented by reductive, simplified, or passive stereotypes.

I was born and raised in Iran and my nationality will remain at the heart of all I will become. As a result, this project involves expressing myself to re-connect with the context that I'm living in today and representing another facet of an identity which has been distorted by the images others have made. An identity that has its roots in the motherland and has gained its strength in the struggle against despotism with all its downfalls and peaks.



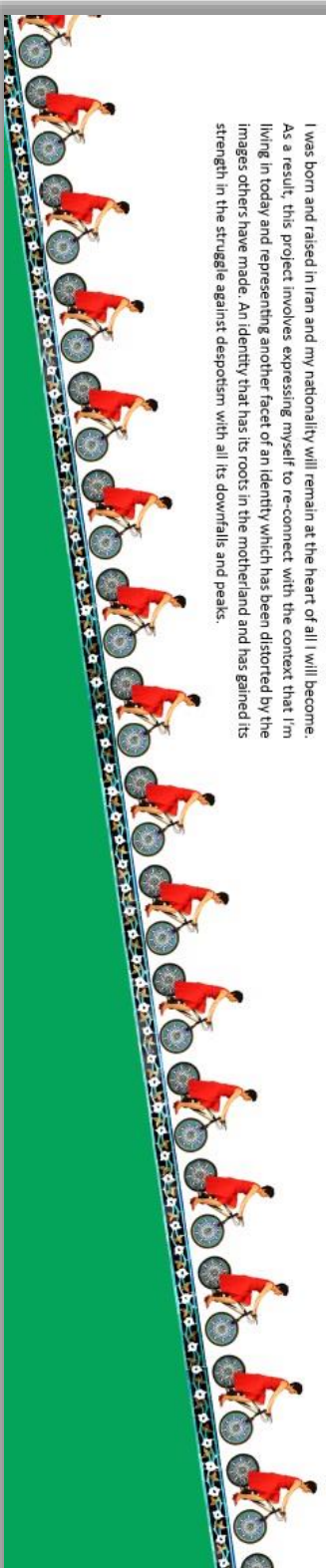
In my practice I use art as an empowering means to crack open clichés by challenging and debunking some of the misconceptions contained in simplified, ideological representations of Iranian society. By employing Iranian cultural and Islamic motifs mixed with feminine elements I aim to create a space for portraying and creating resistance to the despotic theocratic system regulating Iranian society, and in particular, the lives of women.

I have narrowed the focus of this project's representations to my own connection to these themes to reclaim an identity that resonates with concepts of determination, power, and optimistic resistance.

Because Iranian representations are typically saturated with Islamic and political concepts, in my works I have also addressed these principal themes through a range of aspects of a complex and paradoxical identity. My hope is to open a new window on the face of a nation by making some images that suggest the younger spirit of a new Iran, one that has reconnected with the wider world.

I would like to thank my supervisors Ann Hardy and Lisa Perrott at the University of Waikato and Tim Croucher at Waikato Institute of Technology for their support and encouragement throughout my research project. My thanks also go to Stephanie Chalmers, Tony Nicholls, and Wendy Rickdale who helped me organise the exhibition.

Neda Nourmohammadi



Appendix 9: Exhibition's Handouts

RAMP GALLERY

Patiently / Insistently / Intensively

Neda Nourmohammadi

1 - 15 Nov, 2017

Opening preview: Wed 1 Nov, 5:30 - 7pm

This exhibition, *Patiently / Insistently / Intensively* at Ramp Gallery, comes at a point two-thirds of the way through Neda's Ph.D with Creative Practice Component project: the rest of which is a 50,000 word thesis that will be completed next year.

To understand where the works around you have come from it can help to recall the imagery you may have seen by other Iranian female artists. Works that are often elegant, beautifully composed, and to our eyes, political in a feminist mode, but almost all of them drawing from the same iconographic resource-bank where the symmetry, mystery and impersonal representativeness of the veiled woman has a melancholic appeal that seems impossible to resist. Many of these feminist works are photographic since several renowned Iranian women artists got their start as photojournalists working in female worlds - and photography is at its most striking when played out in tones of black, white and gray.

Neda's work is not like that. She loves colour, she likes to make art in a range of media, and the spirited persona she has

created in these pieces is anything but impersonally representative. It brings to my mind, the feisty, voluble, female taxi-driver who is the heroine of the Iranian director Kiarostaami's film *Ten* and by the thousands of women who took part in the 'Green Revolution' of 2009.

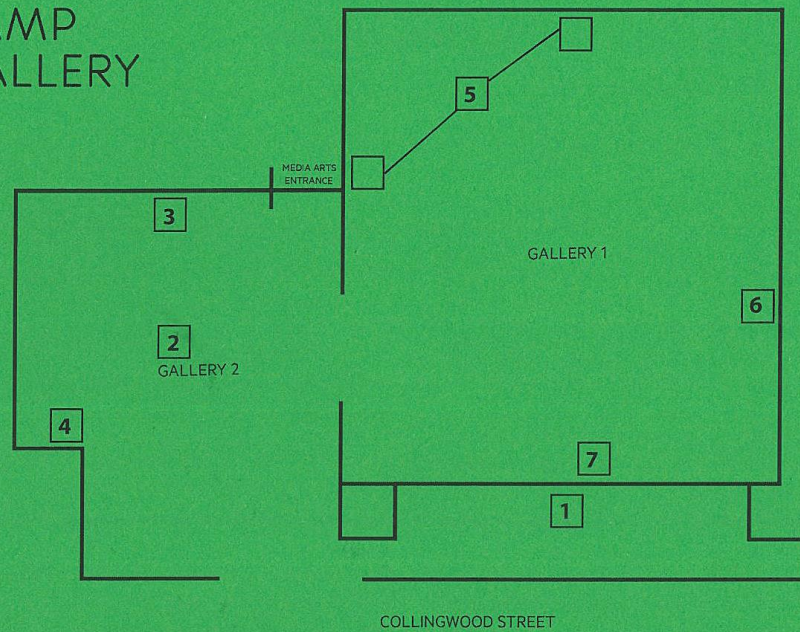
.....

The Ph.D with Creative Practice is a relatively new form for Waikato University, in this case sitting between a fine arts project and a project in cultural media studies. There are more projects in progress however because this hybrid form fits well with the growth in interdisciplinarity and with the diverse backgrounds, skills and passions of our postgraduate research students. It's been a great pleasure too, to work with Tim Croucher from Wintec as the Professional Supervisor to support Neda in this project.

Dr Ann Hardy: Chief Supervisor - Screen & Media Programme, School of Arts, University of Waikato

Ramp Gallery is open Monday - Friday 12:30 - 4pm or by appointment.
www.rampgallery.co.nz

RAMP GALLERY



Works List:

1. *Fatwa on Kaashi* (2017), Digital print on ceramic.
2. *Hands of Dissent* (2016), Plaster & fabric.
3. *SelfPortrait (Key Necklace)* (2016), Photograph.
4. *Heritage Souvenir Suite* (2017), Mixed media.
5. *Shrine* (2017), Fabric, aluminium tube, nylon thread & acrylic on canvas.
6. *One from 1001 (Sand Story)* (2016), Video & audio (approx. 3 min loop)
7. *My Paradox* (2017), Digitally manipulated photograph.

Ramp Gallery is open Monday - Friday 12:30 - 4pm or by appointment.
www.rampgallery.co.nz

Appendix 10: Artists' Statements of Their Selected Work for This Study

Ghadirian's statement: *'In the Nil, Nil series is another point of view on war'. In other words, this series is about the effects of war on our today's life. 'I wanted to show how war is reflected inside the home—what happens to the other members of the family who stayed at home and are now waiting. I also wanted to show what life is like when somebody comes back from war, and that many things change after war' (Ghadirian Muslim women's art & voices, n.d.).*

Tavakolian's statement: *About her video art Look, Tavakolian says: the project was my desire to look deeply into the lives of those around me who I have known for over ten years and live in my building. I wanted to bring to life the story of a nation of middle class youths who are everyday battling with themselves, their isolated conformed society, their lack of hope for future and each of their individual stories. I have tried to capture a moment of each of their stories within the frame of a window that looks out onto the cold concrete buildings which surrounds us daily.*

Moaiery's statement: *On 11 february 1979, Iranian people with an Islamic revolution brought the Islamic republic regime on power. From the first moment, Islamic revolution was named with Imam Khomeini, who with charismatic power and slogans like Islamic Democracy for the country of 2500 years of authoritarian Kingdom dynasty, could mobilize people, analyze what could have been so called problems under the Pahlavi dynasty and explain that revolt and overthrow the regime as the only solution to all of those. The extraordinary religious scholar, in addition to charisma that truly belonged to him could bring all parties and factions united, and played the justified and loved leader of revolution. Iran-Iraq war started on 22 September 1980 by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and brought so many humanitarian and financial damages and losses to Iran. Under his theocratic power, Imam Khomeini's command, so many young people rushed to the fronts and fought to death for defeating aggressive enemy. The war lasted 8 years and imposed a great deal amount of economical costs to the country, but dealing with war and all the challenges involved, it was Imam Khomeini's power that could keep the country united, people spirit high and upbeat, and ultimately makes the country stable. Imam Khomeini passed away on 3rd June 1989 and left a deep grief in the hearts of Iranians. After 34 years of Islamic revolution, Imam Khomeini is still undoubtedly the most influential man in Iranians' hearts and minds and most notably in Iranian history.*

Khademian's statement: *'This picture is a fact in our society. I went there in Qom on Iran, which is a very religious city in a shrine (Hazrat Masoumeh), on the Election Day, and everyone had to wear a veil because it is compulsory to wear one in sacred places. There is a controversy in this picture; it is feminine and also dark. This picture represents a reality of our society that exists in my mind and I was seeing it there. In Iran, the majority of women from any social level are active in social events, regardless of being traditional or religious. In this work I was interested, firstly, in the presence of women in the Election Day and being influential in the decision making of Iran's government; secondly, having feminine elements such as the ring, and purse was another interesting aspect of the scene'.*

Anvari's statement: *'If the chador is the icon for Iran, let it meet the icons for some other nations. Chador-Dadar became a live installation in every city it was photographed and ultimately revealed as much about the nature of the people it visited that it did about itself. We made it to Dubai, to Taj- Mahal, the Amber Fort in Jaipur, we went to London and joined a peace protest, we visited Big Ben, then onto Paris, the Louvre, where we were thrown out because the Hejab is a hot button issue and to Istanbul where the only model I could find wouldn't wear it because she was a staunch secularist. So, in Istanbul I became a model and she photographed!'*

Keramati's statement: *'My statement is the text on the video'* (Keramati, 2015).

Navab's statement: *'My photographic performance series, Super East-West is motivated by a strategy of using humour and my own body for political and cultural critique. The idea started to take shape in 2002 after President George W. Bush branded Iran as one of the three nations comprising an "axis of evil." It re-minded me of when I was nine years old and escaped with my family during the Islamic revolution in 1978-79. Iran's new leaders labelled the United States as the country of the "Great Satan." Growing up in the USA, I was destined to critique the two nations and cultures that inhabit my identity and who are so bent on vilifying each other. As an Iranian American, the demonization of the 'other' becomes a daily negation of the Self. At once you are depicted evil by the political propaganda of both ends of your identity: doubly evil, double negative, negating each other so that in the end you are good, because the evil cancels each other out.*

So, I took my chador and turned it into a cape. The Superman figure of popular Western culture is transformed into a Superwoman whose chador turns into a cape of agency. She pokes fun at herself, her two cultures, and the ludicrous situations in which her life, between East and West, has placed her. Cultural displacement has not left her incapacitated; rather, it has given her the capacity to live out her healing vision. Armoured with her Persian amulets and Greek anti-evil eye bracelets, Super East-West Woman hopes to chase away the evil for which each nation blames the other. Super East-West Woman allows her audience to have a good laugh with her; to invite and create an opening for conversation in the way that strong humour can do and take the dialogue to an inter-cultural and inter-national level.

Sharifi's statement: *'The Maxiature series intervene and interject issues from contemporary culture into a traditional art form by way of photography. Highly sophisticated pieces of visual language, Persian miniatures often explore the tension between public and private spaces. They also offer the viewer idealized vignettes from daily life behind the walls of aristocratic court culture. The Maxiature series expands on this premise of opening up the private spaces of homes to give the audience a privileged view of contemporary Islamic culture. This rupture occurs on two levels: that of the medium, whereby photography intervenes in the tradition of painted miniatures, as well as on the level of the narrative itself, with incongruous and at times humorous results.*

Persian miniatures traditionally depict court spectacles, scenes of the hunt and battle, grand receptions and amorous encounters between persons who are more typologies than individuals. The figures in Maxiatures, though, are sourced from both staged and documentary images. By blurring the line between reality and fiction, the Maxiatures hint at a tension between traditional Islamic society and imported, Western influences. A region too often depicted in black and white is revealed as colourful, complex and carnivalesque as any, where old and new values, East and West can collide in dialogue. Via the mash-up of contemporary culture and historical fiction, the challenges facing Islam and modernity are played out in the composition and the very medium of the miniature.

My work aims to add further layers of complexity and interpretation to subject matter—be it Islam, modernity, or youth culture—often depicted in a monolithic manner. The Islamic arts, from their preference for decoration over figuration, to the production of the art itself, challenge the very understanding we have in the West of both art and the artist. The traditions of miniatures are exemplary of this. Essentially secular compositions, they are rare examples of figurative work aimed for an exclusively courtly audience. The Maxiatures highlight this paradox by demystifying contemporary life in the Islamic Republic of Iran: not only bringing the intimacy of the private sphere out into the public but translating them to an international audience via the collective experience of globalization. By adding further layers to the existing fabric of the original miniature, I intend to draw a line of continuity between the content and crafts of the 15th century through to the 21st century. Miniatures were made by a workshop of artisans of cosmopolitan influences: from Mughal to Persian to Arab. Via the Maxiatures, I hope to contribute to the collaborative nature of these pieces, bringing a further, creolized understanding of Western and Middle Eastern identity to the sophisticated nature of these originals’.

Manouchehri’s statement: *This work is named Power. I made it in 2014, last year. These two powerful women (Queen Victoria from the UK and a Qajar woman from Iran), standing in front of each other, are from the same era, but from different part of the world.*

This work is metaphorical, because, Qajar era was the time that Iran started to become westernized and get influenced by the Western agents. But we were in fact a caricature of the Western culture. Qajar era was one of the worst parts of the history of Iran whereas at the same time Queen Victoria was very powerful and had colonized many countries. The cloths of the Iranian woman, at the bottom looks westernized and on top and the scarf is traditional which in general gives her a mixed ironic look in comparison with the Queen who is standing in front of her imposingly.

We have been imitating the West from the past and I think until now we still try to imitate the West, and in this imitation we have been losing some of our originality and good essence’.

The surface of the work which is the third layer has been painted with a pattern made of the power bottom sign.

Appendix 11: Keramati's Writing on Her Video

*No I can't get rid of them
While walking
The stink of shits
My nose becomes the biggest part of my body
~~How do I~~
Shits of men, cats and rats
They all fill my big nose
And my eyes
~~Although they~~
They just look
They don't find anything to see
There is nothing remembered in my eyes
Everything disappears immediately
All that I remember at the end of the day is a series of unclear and displaced pieces of a puzzle
that I don't like to put them in their right place
And I don't care
They all need to be forgotten
This chaos of pictures
But
...
To be honest
There is this image
~~Which~~
It is enough to say
It's beautiful
Really beautiful
...
~~And do I have any ears~~
I can't listen to anything
...
~~The war of sounds~~
~~None of them is the winner~~
~~All of the people~~
All of the voices, they die before having any reflection in my ears and my mind
~~Voice~~
What I hear is not real voice
But a repetition of same memories
Belonging to a lost time*

*There is always this portrait of myself
Melting
While walking
I feel drops of my face
Running over each other
A fall into nowhere
And at the end
I find myself
Walking on the streets of this city
While I am
Faceless*

Appendix 12: Transcription of My Voice on the Video *One from 1001* (*Sand Story*)

When you say hijab, it's mostly recognized with the chador (or the black veil) which is not the case, because it differs...

Sometime it can be a sheer scarf and sometime it's just a tiny piece of colourful and flowery cloth, which is somehow really fashionable.

But as long as something is over your head, it's recognized as hijab and therefore, it is oppressed, it's victimized.

And of course it's an obligation, I'm required (definitively) if I'm going to walk freely on the street without getting arrested I have to follow that rule, which sucks...

I'm not a victim. My sisters, my friends, my mother... we have never had such insights towards ourselves.

In none of the societies you are really the prisoner of that...

you always, I guess, like, to my own experience you'll always find your way, no matter how many obstacles you face... you always keep going forwards.

You have the choice, basically; you are the one who decides, and sometimes you don't even care about how others think; you will stick to your own beliefs; you will stick to your own decisions.

I basically see myself as a feminine person, and embrace my femininity and I think that, that's a quality.

I'm coming from a context which is full of restrictions, full of limitations for women... but all those challenges, all those difficulties... they have made me who I am... it's something that I'm proud of... I think it's something that not everybody really deals with.

It's basically, to me to get your own destiny in hand and create something of your own.

How can you say stop to someone going like that; patiently, insistently, intensively...

I don't know... for some reason I had a feeling that I'm going to reach the destination that I had always looked for. You know... an absolute of everything, absolute of beauty, absolute of freedom, goodness and everything.

But there are of course some disturbing things that I, every now and then, face... and some questions that I have to answer... you know... I've found myself justifying myself just because of my nationality.


Sometimes I feel like I'm being scrutinized, and I don't really want to get used to it, because again it's not what I wanted to experience.

Well... it's challenging. It's challenging more than disappointing; and it kinds of takes extra energy of you; like, you can do much more with that time, to spend, to go through all those channels and processes and...

I don't really know when I'm going to get to that phase that I feel comfortable with myself and people around me, but I'm hoping that, that's something that's gonna happen.

Appendix 13: An Art Collection Curator's Comment on My Practice

8/27/2018 Gmail - Asking for a meeting

 Gmail Neda <neda.nourmohammadi@gmail.com>

Asking for a meeting

Stephanie Chalmers <stephanie.chalmers@waikato.ac.nz> Mon, Jun 12, 2017 at 4:44 PM
To: Neda <neda.nourmohammadi@gmail.com>

Hi Neda,

I just wanted to say that I really enjoyed talking with you today, and seeing how your artwork has progressed.


The imagery is strong *and* feminine - two things which are often presented as somehow mutually exclusive.

Your plans for the Ramp exhibition look great. I feel excited for you!

Happy to talk any time :-)

All the best,

Steph



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Hīnonga o Waikato

Steph Chalmers | Art Collection Curator
Library | University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105 | Hamilton 3240 | New Zealand
stephanie.chalmers@waikato.ac.nz | ddi +64 7 838 4147 |

[Quoted text
hidden]

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=fcf2ff32cf&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1569972744024828807&simpl=msg-f%3A1569972744...> 1/1