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Contemporary Iranian Women Artists in Exile

Art Embodying Feelings of Estrangement between Place of Origin and USA

A Master's Thesis for the Degree Master of Arts (Two years) in Visual Culture

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Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to my beloved family for their support and encouragement, and special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents, *Khalid J. Fahad & Souada Al-Hamdani* whose sacrifices were my gains.

ABSTRACT

In my thesis I address a gap in scholarship on the experience of Contemporary Iranian Women artists in exile. I investigate the feeling of estrangement in exile that is generated from the feeling of the loss of sense of belonging. More specifically I examine the embodiment of the effects of estrangement/*ghorbat* in the artworks in post revolutionary Iran of three contemporary Iranian women artists in exile. The artists whose works I discuss are Shirin Neshat, Taraneh Hemami and Sonia Balassanian, who are physically separated from the land of their birth since the 1970s and are now living in the United States where they live in estrangement. The three artists chose to live in exile due to the censorship that was introduced by the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 1979 revolution. The Iranian Revolution changed not only the artist's place of living but also their approach in their artworks. Some artist works demonstrate issues of veiling, other works demonstrate narratives of Iranians and cultural memory, and other works demonstrates political issues due to the regime. I structure my analysis into three themes- embodying power, embodying loss and embodying sorrows- all of which are interpreted here as responses to experiences of belonging and estrangement.

Keywords

Belonging
Contemporary Iranian Women Artists
Exile
Estrangement
Islamic Revolution 1979/Post Revolution

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Glossary

A:

Ayatollah – it is a high rank title given to shi'ia clerics. This title is similar in rank to a Bishop or Cardinal in Christianity and Chief Rabbi in Judaism. They are experts in Islamic studies and usually teach in Islamic seminaries. The term was popularized in 1922 in Iran, the word meaning is the 'Sign of God'.

Chador - Iranians created the chador, which is a free-standing long dress, covering a woman's body head-to-toe. It is either held in place by Woman's hand or by an elastic band to make the movement easier. It is often accompanied by a smaller headscarf underneath.

Chaqchur - is a loose trouser worn under the chador.

Ghorbat/Ghorbati - is the feeling of estrangement in Arabic and Persian. It is of an Arabic origin.

Hijab - is a veil that covers the head and chest of *Muslim* women in the presence of adult males who are outside their immediate family.

Jahilliya - it indicates the period prior to *Islam, pre-Islamic Arabia*. It is the period before the revelation of the *Quran* to *Prophet Muhammad*. The root of the term, is '*jahil*' means ignorant.

Rubandeh- is a short veil that masks the face.

Shah- it is a *Persian* term for a *king* or *lord* of *Iran*.

zai'feh/ moti'eh - describe women that were identified as *zai'feh* and *moti'eh*, those obedient to men's will.

B:

Estrangement- dictionary definition for estrangement or estrange, is to cause someone to be no longer involved or connected with something.

Exile- dictionary definition for living in exile is a situation in which one is either forced, banished, expelled or voluntarily absence from one's country.

Islamic Republic- it is a name given to a number of several states in the *Muslim* world, including *Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan* and *Mauritania*.

Monarchy- is a form of government where a group, usually a family called *royalty*, represents the country. The political power is represented by an individual known as a *monarch*, single ruler.

Persian- also known as *Farsi* is an Iranian language within the *Indo-Iranian* branch of the *Indo-European* language. It is widely spoken in *Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan* and *Uzbekistan*. It is also spoken, to some extent, in *Armenia, Bahrain* and *Azerbaijan*.

Shi'ia Islam- is the second largest branch of *Islam*. It refers to the people who are known to be the followers of *Ali*. They believe that the proper successor is his son-in-law and cousin *Ali Ibn Abi Talib*. *Shi'a Islam* differs from *Sunni Islam*, who believes that *Muhammad's* proper successor is *Abu Bakr*.

INTRODUCTION

Research Goals

In the following thesis I examine how the effect of exile and the feeling of estrangement are embodied in the artworks of Contemporary Iranian women artists in the USA. The three Iranian artists are Shirin Neshat, Taraneh Hemami and Sonia Balassanian. I will do an in depth analysis of several artworks of these three Contemporary Iranian women artists who have chosen to be in exile since the 1970s due to the censorship under the fundamentalist Islamic regime that took over the power of the country after the 1979 Revolution.

I will draw on the notions of *belonging* and *estrangement*, but not as what the theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich asserts ‘To exist is to be in a state of estrangement, to be dislocated from our essential being’¹, but rather to exist is to be in a state of belonging.

Background

Living in exile cannot be felt unless a person has gone through this experience. It is more than words can ever say or the mind can ever imagine. It is an un-healable situation, as the critic Edward Said asserts ‘Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable [sic] rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home.’²

I am referring to exile in which the artists voluntarily absence from their home of origin which is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Due to living in exile these artists live in estrangement. In my thesis I do not refer to estrangement as a separation from ones place or a group, rather I refer to the emotional feeling of estrangement which is referred as *ghorbat*. It is of an Arabic origin and is defined as *ghorbat* or *ghorbat*i in Persian and Arabic which describes the emotional feeling of exilic experience, the emotional feeling of dislocation.

¹Tillich Paul, quoted in book [Belonging: Constructing a Canadian Theology of Inclusion] by Kawuki Mukasa, 2005, p-220, <https://books.google.se/books?id=Aj4VRHZ9asC&pg=PA220&lpg=PA220&dq=belonging+versus+estrangement&source=bl&ots=jzOASOYKi8&sig=dgOnoEUKStdDe9OdBhuUKGdf9U&hl=sv&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjGgqaUitXMAhWFBZoKHeyUA3oQ6AEISzAG#v=onepage&q=belonging%20versus%20estrangement&f=false>, (accessed 14 March 2016). Paul Tillich the German theologian and philosopher writes that ‘the state of existence is a state of estrangement...Man as he exists is not what he essentially is or ought to be. He is estranged from his true being’. Tillich 1967, Vol.II, 44-45.

² Said, Edward W., *Reflections on exile: and other essays*, Granta, London, 2012[2001].

The artists left home because the pressures were too great for them to go on. They were longing for safety and wanted to have freedom of expression in art. This situation of exile led the artists to live in estrangement/*ghorbati*, a state in which they try to find sense of belonging through their artworks. As the Iranian American historian and author Abbas Milani argues ‘Exile is when you live in one land and dream of another.’³ All three artists live in the United State of America and dream of their old home Iran. Milani continues his argument ‘Exiles, they say, are bifurcated or dual beings, torn between memory and attachment to the past, a past that is paradoxically often reconstructed in our memories as a paradise lost, and the sobering, sometimes strange reality of the present.’⁴

My three chosen artists try to fulfill the sense of belonging through art, and the old memories of old beautiful Iran, and cure themselves from the feeling of estrangement.

One of my motives to research Iranian artists in exile is due to my own background.

Therefore, my situation, being Iraqi who has lived more than half of my life outside my homeland- between USA, Austria, and now Sweden- has had an impact on the focus of this paper. Exile and the feeling of estrangement and longing for belonging are what we share in particular. Although my chosen topic deals with contemporary Iranian women artists, who are already from a different culture, we share the same practice of censorship, and restrictions from our governments in our homelands, but with different levels and different regimes. Most importantly we share the beautiful memory of our old homeland, with their rich art heritages in the world. Unfortunately all the Middle Eastern countries are in some kind of censorship inside their home of origin. My chosen artists are from Islamic Republic of Iran that is because they are the ones who suffered the most from the constraints under the Islamic regime during the 1979 Revolution and post Revolution. I specifically chose contemporary Iranian women artists because women were the most oppressed during that era, and they have been targeted the most. The artists have the tool to present this issue through their artwork, and I have the tool to highlight this reality through my paper.

³ Milani, Abbas Malekzadeh, *Exile and Identity, the San Diego seminar and the Question of Iranian Identity*, 2 September 2005, p.2. Abbas Malekzadeh Milani is an Iranian-American historian and author, and a visiting Professor of Political Science, <http://web.stanford.edu/~amilani/downloads/exileidentity.pdf>, (accessed 22 April 2016).

⁴ Ibid, p. 2.

Research Question and Hypothesis

Mainly, through my investigation, I try to explore the question: How is the experience of estrangement, due to exile, articulated in the art of contemporary female Iranian artists', forced to live abroad in order to escape censorship in their home country?

In order to make coherent analysis of the art projects I intent to examine the history of Iran, specifically women's representation throughout history, that is because throughout Iran's history women were the center of the political struggle between secular and religious forces, and this was presented in my chosen art projects.

Women's status has always been affected by the monarchy for more than 2500 years, and by the Islamic regime during and after the revolution. Throughout Iran's history women were the center of the political struggle between secular and religious forces. Women were veiled in the early 1900s during the Qajar dynasty, towards religious establishment, women were unveiled from 1925-1979, during the Pahlavi period, towards Westernization, and women were reveiled during and after the 1979 Revolution until now (see chapter1). The regime has constrained and shaped the identities of women. Women's voices have been silenced since the Revolution of 1979 until now. Nevertheless there are voices who cannot be muted-out. That primarily includes women who always protest asking for their freedom, the activists, and the women who live in exile, where their lives are not under any risk of execution, or imprisonment by the Iranian government.

For me these circumstances that Iranian women lived in throughout the history of Iran, raise a key question: Are the contemporary women artists standing with the Iranian women against the government through their artworks, or are they only portraying what is happening in the scene? If I come to the conclusion that the women artists and the Iranian women in general are so powerful, will the 'political projects' that I may call which is as much as its aesthetic as much as it triggers political issues consciously, will they have a powerful effect and response towards the regime and will eventually make a change in the women's status in the near coming future or not? One might argue that art as a medium is limited to a certain audience, so it would address the issue, but not make a change in women's status inside Iran. The sociologist and writer Jacqueline Adams indicates 'It is through images that the political communication, the production of meaning, and the making of issues are

accomplished. The concept of ‘political icon’ is used to describe that kind of political communication that depends on images rather than words.”⁵ This implies that it could have an effect on women’s status, even if the changes are not massive, but it will be apparent.

There are two other issues that the art-projects address: one is the wrong image of how Iranian Muslim women are, and the second is, due to exile, the young generations are not really aware of their history and of whom they are as a culture. Therefore, specifically Hemami addresses this issue, and has made installations in order to fulfill this gap to the younger generation. She tries to bridge between the two communities, the Iranian and the Iranian who live in exile, in order to create a common ground between the two, using art as a vehicle of present, past, reality and history of a culture, which is Iran. At the same time she fulfills the sense of belonging and overcomes the feeling of estrangements through her installations (see chapter 3).

Although these artists choose to be in exile, in order to gain a better personal and social life, and have freedom of expression in art, they experience the pain because of what they had to leave behind in their place of origin. They not only have the pain of exile, but also the pain of the identity destruction that was caused by the regime. This effected specifically women who were the most oppressed throughout this era. Through their art projects they are depicting old Iran identities, and the ongoing moments and the situation that they have been going through for 30 years.

Theories and Methods

The theoretical perspectives employed to shape the issues and raised in this thesis involve many disciplines which include cultural, art historical and feminist theories. My interpretation of the specific works included in this thesis is, as John Berger states, ‘affected by what we know or what we believe.’⁶ According to the French theorist Nicolae Babuts in his book *The Dynamics of the Metaphoric Field*, the meanings that audiences relate to the installations, and photographs explored in this thesis build upon their locations, experiences, and their

⁵ Adams, Jacqueline, “Art in Social Movements: Shantytown Womens Protest in Pinochets Chile”, Vol. 17, No-1, 2002, pp.24. <https://arteycambiosocial.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/art-in-chile.pdf>, (accessed 4 March 2016).

⁶ Berger, John, *Ways of seeing: based on the BBC television series with John Berger*, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin books, London, 1972, p-3.

metaphoric fields.⁷ My interpretation is build upon my experience as a woman from the Middle East who lives in exile, and has experienced some kind of constrains and censorship in my home of origin as I mentioned earlier. Adding to that there are two different viewers: Western and Middle Eastern. The Western who tends to relate the artworks to the 9/11 tragedy, while the Middle Eastern viewer relates it back to his experience of *ghorbat* and the 1979 revolution. Both viewers relate what they see to their experiences and build interpretations upon it.

I will draw on the notions ‘*politics of belonging*’ and ‘*belonging*’ which refer to ‘*feeling home*.’ It is not necessarily about belonging to the physical place but rather about the emotional attachment of an individual. Individuals can be in exile and belong to a certain group. Edward Said argues that ‘(e)xile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure.’⁸ Said also suggests that exile is inherited from one generation to another, it is an endless process that is eternal. Therefore by belonging they could feel home and have hope for the future. However the social theorist Ghassan Hage points out ‘home is an ongoing project entailing a sense of hope for the future.’⁹

The experience of home, in Homi Bhabha`s words, embodies both ‘the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home’, and the ‘home-in-the-world.’¹⁰ As I can see from the artists work, the feeling of relocation- the un-homely status- makes the artists create an imaginative home for themselves, that is in the ‘in-between space’, in combination with the political indications in each project, every artwork is political in terms of expression. Their engagements to the political and social experiences form their artworks. Adding to that the notion of ‘*belonging*’ occurs in every artwork, as long as there is connection and conversation between the art piece and the viewer.

As I can see from the artists work, it is framed in two different frameworks: one framework is about a nation and its political framework. The other framework is about media constructed images, about pre-conceived ideas and historically conceived images about how women from Iran are portrayed, and how a culture is portrayed. I agree with the author Nira Yuval Davis arguing in her book ‘*The politics of belonging: intersectional contestations*’ that the notion of

⁷Babuts, Nicolae, *The dynamics of the metaphoric field: a cognitive view of literature*, Univ. of Delaware press, Newark, 1992, p-105.

⁸Said, Edward W., *Reflections on exile: and other essays*, Granta, London, 2012[2001], p. 186.

⁹ Ghassan, Hage, 1997, p.103

¹⁰ Bhabha, Homi K., *The location of culture*, 1. ed. in Routledge Classics with a new preface by the author, Routledge, London, 1994, https://archive.org/stream/TheLocationOfCultureBHABHA/the%20location%20of%20culture%20BHABHA_djvu.txt, (accessed 1 April).

‘social and political belonging’ is divided into three facets. The first facet concerns social locations, the second facet relates to peoples identifications and emotional attachments, and the third facet relates to ethical and political value systems in which people judge their own and others belonging. These facets are interrelated, but cannot be reduced into each other.¹¹ All three facets are significant in my framework. The first facet which is the social location is significant, because Iranian artists are all women, so they belong to the same nation, sex, and grouping. These artists are carrying the same social and economic relations, and the same power positioning. The second facet which is people’s identifications and emotional attachments is of great importance and significance, because the artists are emotionally driven to create the artworks. That is to say the artists are very emotionally attached to their home of origin. Therefore, they struggle to belong, while suffer from estrangement, and try to reconstruct their own identities. That is because Iranians women’s identities in Iran have been lost and hidden due to the regime, and unseen or perceived in the wrong way by the West¹², no matter if they live in Iran or abroad.

The third facet which is the ethical and political value is also very significant, because what the Iranians really need is moral, ethical and honest leaders to spread their voice. Even if those leaders are artists, the spreading of the Iranian voices will be limited because art is limited to certain collectivities. The voices are, however, still very powerful. In addition, the Persian cultural theorist and philosopher *Dariush Shayegan* observes in his discussion about contemporary Iranian art:

As a contrast to the strong collective memory, and the vision dominated by cultural archetypes, and symbols non-western artist have found new sources of inspiration, enabling them to depict ways of being and repressed vision in new ways. They make tradition and modernity confronts and challenges each other.¹³

The body is explicitly expressed in the installations and photographs of the three contemporary women artists in response to issues of gender, religion, society, culture, and politics. As the critic Susan Stewart writes:

¹¹ Yuval-Davis, Nira, *The Politics of Belonging: intersectional contestations*, Sage, Los Angeles, Calif., 2011. Davis is a Professor and Director of the Centre on Migration, Refugees and Belonging, East London University. She is the author of the book: *The politics of Belonging: intersectional contestations, and many other influential books*.

¹² West: by the West I am referring to Western European and North America.

¹³ Shayegan, Dariush, *At the Cutting Edge of Intersecting Worlds*, translated by Ros Swartz in Rose Issa, RuyinPakbaz, and Dariush Shayegan. *Iranian Contemporary Art*. 9-11, London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2001, p.10.

[the body] functions as [. . .] the instrument of lived experience, a place of mediation that remains irreducible beyond the already-structured reductions of the sensory, the direct relation between the body and the world it acts upon.¹⁴ According to the scholar in philosophy Sharon La Von:

Building upon Stewart's discussion in terms of space, identity and contemporary Iranian women, the body is acted upon through legal and social regulations, put into place after the revolution, and, in many instances, the body functions as the mechanism used to challenge the restrictions imposed upon it.¹⁵

That is to say, while women were regulated in terms of dress and were separated by gender after the revolution, many women continued resisting the new regulations. Indeed, regardless of the laws put into place, these women refused to be marginalized.

The theorist Gayati Spivak brought into discussion 'how some kind of narrative of identity is a necessary condition for any notion of agency, or subjectivity to exist. Without a story of identity, a story of who we are and who we are not, according to her it is not possible to a presence of subjectivity or agency and an ability to act.'¹⁶ That is what Shirin Neshat and Taraneh Hemami mainly try to show. I will also draw on the notion of 'Intersectionality' by Yuval-Davis, Nira, in her book 'The politics of belonging: intersectional contestations'.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall is one of the main voices on identity theory and he pointed out how 'the production of identities is always in process.'¹⁷ It is never fixed, it is never complete, it is always continued and multiplex. In all the selected artworks production of identities is always in process thus reflects the artist's and the Iranian identities. Unfortunate for me to say the constraints and regulations, that artists were put through, led talented artists to take different directions in their life to be able to express their inspirations through art, either by migrating or through global or international exhibitions, or through other ways to show their inspirations such as self-censorship. Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, from their perspectives, defined the contemporary era as the 'age of Migration', a period of time where more people have traveled across boundaries than anytime in history.¹⁸

¹⁴ Stewart, Susan, *On longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection*, [New ed.], Duke Univ. Press, Durham, 1993[1984].

¹⁵ La Von, Sharon, *Embodied Exile: contemporary Iranian Women artists and the politics of place*, PhD in Philosophy, 2005, p-15, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.459.3146&rep=rep1&type=pdf> , (accessed 8 March 2016).

¹⁶ Yuval-Davis, Nira, *The politics of belonging: intersectional contestations*, Sage, Los Angeles, Calif., 2011, p-10.

¹⁷ Hall, Stuart & Du Gay, Paul (red.), *Questions of cultural identity*, Sage, London, 1996.

¹⁸ Castles, Stephen & Miller, Mark J., *The age of migration: international population movements in the modern world*, 4. ed., Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009.

For the methodology section of this paper I explored and analyzed the artworks of my chosen contemporary Iranian women artists. I also analyzed the themes-*power, loss* and *sorrow*- of the selected artworks by the three artists in relation to each other.

Relevance of the Work and Current State of Research

The relevance of this thesis corresponds to the lack in scholarship on the emotional experience of contemporary Iranian women artists in exile. This thesis investigates the feeling of estrangement/*ghorbat* in exile that stems from the loss of sense of belonging. The Iranian artists address a very critical issue that has been affecting us women from the Middle East, due to the constraints, and the oppression that we face by our governments. All the internationally known artists that I chose are trying to solve this matter and spread the power and unity between the women in the Middle East. As a scholarly person I find it is my duty to raise my voice for those artists, and the women in the Middle East, and myself and our countries to fight this oppression. The only existing work on the topic of Contemporary female artists in exile is a dissertation of philosophy which examines the gendered experience of exile and diasporas. The research explores the personal and political space since 1979 revolution in Iran, embodied by a selection of artworks by nine artists both who live in Iran and in exile. The dissertation is by *Sharon La Von Walker Parker* entitled *Embodied Exile in Contemporary Iranian Women artists and the Politics of Place*, 2005, University of Arizona.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis started by stating my research question and hypothesis, motivation and purpose of this thesis, which is to investigate how Revolution and exile have affected the contemporary Iranian women artists, and how the experience of estrangement is articulated in the art of the three contemporary women Iranian artists. Thus I have pin-pointed the themes of the artworks which are *power, loss*, and *sorrows*. I started my first chapter by investigating the historical background of the representation and oppression of the Iranian women throughout the history.

The following three chapters will attempt to explore the artworks by the three contemporary women artists in exile and show how the three themes are embodied in the artworks due to the feeling of estrangement. The titles of the themes were developed by analyzing the artworks further on.

This investigation is important to highlight the effect and outcomes of exile and revolution, which lead to the feeling of estrangement that is embodied in the artist's art works. I started each chapter in this thesis by inserting the '*words*' of each artist in order to frame the artwork and pin point to the powerful voice of the Iranian woman artist and the powerful aims of the projects. The last chapter will be an analysis of the artworks interrelated and the three different themes- *power*, *loss* and *sorrows* -in relation to each other. The poet whose work frames the interrelated analysis is Mahmoud Darwish. The analysis will be followed by the conclusion which attempts to conclude the entire thesis.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historical censorship of visual representations of Iranian women first occurred around 3000 years ago when Aryans migrated to Iran. They completely banished effigies of women (prayer women) even the colors of potteries and sculptures were changed to eliminate any hint of femininity or sensuality; pink became dark gray-in religious illustrations and descriptions, or in Iranian mythology. A feminine presence is always celestial, and without sexuality. She is a woman, but she is desexualized.¹⁹

Shahla Lahij

After a deep research of Iran's history and referring to Shahla Lahiji's argument I concluded that visual representations of the female body, the roots and the history reach far back into Iran's past. The political censorship has long term impacts on culture, that is to say women are desexualized.

Womens Representations in three Periods in Iran:

History of the Qajar reign (1785-1925) Ahmad Shah:

In the pre-Islamic period of Iran, in the *Jahilliya*²⁰ era, the time of ignorance, women were sold as commodities, and new born girls were buried. After the Arab invasion of Iran around the mid-600s and the acceptance of Islam as its official religion, the Islamic culture began to shape Iran. Starting with censorship, on books and writers, and they were killed or arrested for various reasons such as promotion of other religions, defamation, publication of false ideas, and acting against social security.²¹ The same given reasons of the current Islamic

¹⁹ S. Lahiji, Feminism needs to be translated here: Interview with Shahla Lahiji. (M.shekarloo, Interviewer) Bad Jans: Iranian Feminist Newsletter, 21 November 2000, quoted in thesis [L. Shanechian, "contradictions and Paradoxes: Political Censorship and Visual Representation of Women in Contemporary Iran", a student Master of Design Thesis, York University of Toronto, Ontario, 2009, p-10].

²⁰ Jahilliya: it indicates the period prior to *Islam, pre-Islamic Arabia*. It is the period before the revelation of the *Quran* to *Prophet Muhammad*. The root of the term, is '*jahil*' means ignorant or stupid.

²¹ L. Shanechian, *contradictions and Paradoxes: Political Censorship and Visual Representation of Women in Contemporary Iran*, Master of Design Thesis, York University of Toronto, Ontario, 2009, p-10.

government in Iran, uses to justify restraining ideological and censoring freedom of expression.²² The desexualizing of women in Iranian visual arts occurred after the Arab invasion.

The *Qajar* 1785-1925 was an Iranian royal dynasty of Turkic origin, which ruled Persia during that era. During that era or precisely 1905-11, Iran was predominantly considered *Shi'ia Islam*²³ and patriarchal society. Women were seen as mindless, and were considered as the slaves of their husbands. Their dresses at that time consisted of three pieces; the *Chador*²⁴, *rubandeh*²⁵, and the *chaqchur*²⁶. The women were identified as *zai'feh* and *moti'eh*, those obedient to men's will. Women were differentiated by class and were culturally and politically diverse. During that time women were not allowed to go on the streets, elite women were accompanied with their eunuchs in a closed carriages if they wanted to.²⁷ A Feminist activist at that time, Badr al-Moluk Bamdad, wrote that Tehran after four in the afternoon is sex segregated, that is to say 'women and men walk on different sides of the streets, and if a woman wants to cross the street to reach her home, she must be authorized by street police, and sadly enough, the streets police asks her to tighten up her veil and walk faster.'²⁸ But, still there existed women's political activism, what might loosely be called feminism.²⁹ In the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11, many women gathered in Tehran without veils, shouting for freedom.³⁰

During the first official department for censorship (1848-1896), 'Censorship Burea' was established. In 1907 the first rules of censorship of press were established. Those rules have been changing many times during Iran's history, and have served to support the traditions of censorship in Iran.³¹ In 1925, Ahmad Shah, the last king of Qajar, was overthrown, and the Pahlavi Monarchy was established.³²

²² L. Shanechian, *contradictions and Paradoxes*, 2009, p-11.

²³ *Shi'ia Islam*: is the second largest branch of *Islam*. It refers to the people who are known to be the followers of *Ali*. They believe that the proper successor is his son-in-law and cousin *Ali Ibn Abi Talib*. *Shi'a Islam* differs from *Sunni Islam*, who believes that *Muhammad's* proper successor is *Abu Bakr*.

²⁴ *Chador*; is a long veil that covered women from head to toe.

²⁵ *Rubandeh*; s a short veil that masks the face.

²⁶ *Chaqchur*; is a loose trousers worn under the chador.

²⁷ D. Atakan, *Representation of Women in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema*, Master thesis, 2006, p-20, <http://openaccess.bilgi.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11411/448/Representation%20of%20women%20in%20postrevolutionary%20C4%B0ranian%20Cinema.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> , (accessed 14th March 2016).

²⁸ Sedghi, Hamideh, *Women and politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p-25.

²⁹ Ibid, p-26

³⁰ Ibid, p-25

³¹ Ibid, p-11

³² Ibid, p-25

History of the Pahlavi reign (1925-1979) Reza Shah and Muhammad Reza Shah:

During the years of Pahlavi regime, there were two significant political decisions that had an effect on the Iranian women's status. They include: Women's '*emancipation*'³³ emerged on January the 7th 1935, with a royal declaration of 'The Great Unveiling' by Reza Shah, banning the public use of the veil. Many of the Iranian women were happy to abandon their *chadors*. Even some of the Iranian women lived abroad and abandoned their *chadors* in favor of being westernized. This enforcement of unveiling disturbed the men, because what was private for them was now turned into public, and they felt that they lost control over their women. *Reza Shah's* daughter, acknowledged, that 'was never subject to feminine influence, and never displayed a sentimental affection for the fair sex, Shahs' primary aim was to break the religious establishment and to establish a Westernized state.'³⁴This dramatic, political phenomenon eventually gained acceptance.

The second political decision was in 1963 by *Muhammad Reza Shah*, was giving the women the right to vote, and women were able to obtain jobs in commercial offices and work side by side with men. The year's between 1941-1952 mark a significant era, where women were actively involved in certain social and political organizations, when the dictatorship has weakened and paved the way for these organizations to emerge.³⁵ *Pahlavi monarchy*, focused on westernizing and modernizing Iran by changing the women's position in society, where the forced unveiling-of women was the first step of the states' ideology of

³³Shahidian, Hammed, *Women in Iran: gender politics in the Islamic republic*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 2002, p-102.

³⁴Sedghi, Hamideh, *Women and politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p.90.

https://www.sssup.it/UploadDocs/14639_7_R_Women_and_Politics_in_Iran_Veiling_Unveiling_and_Reveiling_Hamideh_Sedghi.pdf, (accessed 12 March 2016). 'It is unclear whether Reza Shah had a distinct idea about what constituted a "Western" state and society; in many ways, he promoted autocracy, which paralleled many developing societies of his own time. Nor was he sympathetic to women, especially his own daughter's who could not even choose their own schooling or select their own husbands.

³⁵DERYA ATAKAN, *Representation of women in Post Revolutionary Iranian Cinema*, 2006, p.16, <http://openaccess.bilgi.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11411/448/Representation%20of%20women%20in%20postrevolutionary%20C4%B0ranian%20Cinema.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, (accessed 12 March 2016).

implementation.³⁶ Although women were provided with societal equality in a variety of ways, they failed to address the roots of gender equality.

Islamic Revolution (1979-present/Post Revolution) Ayatollah Khomeini:

The censorship of artistic expression in Iran under the fundamentalist Islamic regime took over the power of the country after the 1979 Revolution. During the revolution all artistic activities were stopped. Art galleries and Universities of Art were closed for almost a decade. During the Iran-Iraq war between 1979-1988, only posters, murals depicting spiritual leaders and glorifying religious devotions, calligraphy and landscape paintings were revived, used and approved by the government.³⁷ The generation that grew up through the war turned to art searching for comfort by expressing themselves through art, especially through the media in Iran which are film and photography. Sculpture is the most unfit art form and was prohibited for many years, but the government changed its attitude after several years and became legally authorized, but animal and human forms are still banned.³⁸

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran announced in 1979 that women are required to be veiled in public. According to *Ayatollah Khomeini*³⁹ ‘What we don’t want is a woman to be a puppet in the hands of men.’⁴⁰ That is to say when men are not distracted by women’s appearance, their potential is fulfilled.⁴¹ This declaration of the reveiling in public was announced in 1979 and brought different responses. Some women felt that it restricted their personal freedom, while others from religiously conservative families were delighted. This led women, who were against the reveiling, to protest through a demonstration that took place on woman’s day that led women to be attacked physically by supporters.⁴² According to the

³⁶Representation of Women’s identity in Iranian Cinema, http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/22634/11/11_chapter_5.pdf, p-226, (accessed 10 March 2016).

³⁷Article 19, *Unveiled*, 2006, p.14, <http://www.artical19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/iran-art-censorship.pdf>, (accessed 12 March).

³⁸ Article 19, *Unveiled*, p-15.

³⁹ *Ayatollah*: it is a high rank title given to *Shi’ia* clerics. This title is similar in rank to a *Bishop* or *Cardinal* in Christianity and *Chief Rabbi* in Judaism. They are experts in Islamic studies and usually teach in Islamic seminaries. The term was popularized in 1922 in Iran, the word meaning is the ‘*Sign of God*’. *Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini* became the religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979-1989.

⁴⁰ Nakanishi, Hisae. “Power, Ideology, and Women’s Consciousness in Post revolutionary Iran.” *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity within Unity*. Eds. Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc. 1988. pp.86-89

⁴¹Ibid, pp.86-89

⁴²Sedghi, Hamideh, *Women and politics in Iran: veiling, unveiling, and reveiling*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 15.

anthropologist Anne H. Betteridge ‘To Veil or Not to Veil, A Matter of Protest or Policy, the veil is a focus while it symbolizes woman`s status and a quarrel, to some women it serves oppression to others its selfworth.’⁴³ This demonstration resulted in no compulsory veiling until in 1983 when the issue was raised again.⁴⁴ And veiling was announced by law for Iranian women and foreigners as well.

Separating women and men in public places was one of the first social changes after the revolution. This separation also took place during the Qajar period. This separation was not only in schools, universities, mosques, streets, and public places, but it also included visual representation of women in any press, books, magazines, advertisements, unless it was approved by the government. The images I intent to show represent Iranian women dress before and after the revolution (figure 1 and 2). Before the 1979 revolution, they were westernized (figure 1), and the second image shows the Iranian women after revolution (figure 2) where they are totally concealed with chador. Definitely, the veil was not used as a mask to conceal women`s appearance, as the philosopher Frantz Fanon argues in his book ‘*black skin white masks*’, in order to protect her from the eyes of the colonizer or unbeliever, but instead to have power over women.⁴⁵

Any hint of expression or depiction of women became taboo. Visual artists were strictly censored and held in jail if any taboos were found. A very popular artist in Iran is Ms. Soudabeh Ardavan. Her artwork consisted of depictions of women, which were the hardest of all. Adravan`s drawings of rocks were prohibited because they appear similar to a female body. She is one of the Iranian artists that was charged with participating in demonstrations against the Islamic republic and was held in Iran`s Evin prison between the years 1981-1989. She now lives in Sweden and continues her art career.

This demonstrates the unequal social position of women in post revolution. Nevertheless, artists had both private and public art collections, that is to say art that has no depictions of women was exhibited in public, and other art works that had freedom of expression was in their own homes in private collections that would not be censored. This resulted in artists

https://www.sssup.it/UploadDocs/14639_7_R_Women_and_Politics_in_Iran_Veiling_Unveiling_and_Reveiling_Hamideh_Sedghi.pdf, (accessed 4 April 2016).

⁴³ Anne H. Betteridge, “To Veil or Not to Veil: A Matter of Protest or Policy” Women and Revolution in Iran, ed. GuityNeshat (Boulder: West view Press, 1983) 109-128.

⁴⁴Pedram Missaghi, comp, “Right to Choose: First protests against mandatory hijab,” The Iranian.com March 7, 2000, May 6, 2005, <http://www.iranian.com/Arts/2000/March/Missaghi.html>, (accessed 1 April 2016).

⁴⁵ Fanon, Frantz, *Black skin, white masks*, Grove Weidenfeld, New York, 2000

developing symbolism in their artworks, self censoring, or choosing to exile, to be able to express their ideas and have freedom of expression.

According to *Ayatollah Khomeini*, on 15th of September 1980 ‘women have the right and must take part in politics. Islam is a political religion. Everything in it is political, even religious practices.’⁴⁶ On the 30th of October 1986, Khomeini announced, that women are allowed to take part in every way, working in offices, studying, and even participating in military activities, but all within the limits of the *hijab*.⁴⁷

In 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini passed away, although a new phase has begun to reconstruct what has been destroyed, but unfortunately different visions of Islam began, and continued mainly the oppression on women.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Khaz Ali, Ansia, *Iranian Women After The Islamic Revolution*, 2010, p-14, <http://conflictsforum.org/briefings/IranianWomenAfterIslamicRev.pdf>, (accessed 24th March 2016).

Dr Ansia Khaz Ali holds a PhD in Arabic language and literature from the University of Tehran. She currently works as a Professor in four universities in Iran and she is Dean of the Institute of Human Sciences and Foreign Languages at A-Zahra University in Tehran. She also lectures regularly on issues related to women in various Arab countries. She is also an activist on different aspects of women’s rights and has published numerous articles and papers in this field.

⁴⁷Ibid, p.15

⁴⁸ Khaz Ali, Ansia, *Iranian Women After The Islamic Revolution*, 2010, p-14, <http://conflictsforum.org/briefings/IranianWomenAfterIslamicRev.pdf>, (accessed 4 March 2016).

CHAPTER 2: EMBODYING POWER: SHIRIN NESHAT

2.1 *Women of Allah Series (1993-1997)*

The chapter investigates the theme *power* through the artwork of Shirin Neshat. The notion of her series of photographs is revolution and femininity, the identity of women in relation to society. Her artwork, that is discussed, embodies the political transformation. The ‘words’ which frame the artworks at the very beginning of this chapter are Shirin Neshat’s own ‘words’ at the Ted Talk in December 2010.

We are fighting two battles in different grounds, being critical of the West; the perception of the West about our Identity, about the image that is constructed about us, about our women, our politics, our religion, the other battle is our regime, our government. [---]My art became slightly more critical, my knife became sharper, and I fell into a life of exile.⁴⁹

Shirin Neshat

I got emotionally very affected by these words, and was very keen on exploring her artworks in depth and through my different lenses: through the lens of a woman from the Middle East who has religious and political views, through the lens of a woman from the Middle east in exile, and through a lens of, I might call, a woman with multicultural identity, and most importantly through the lens of a woman who dislikes being weak, because I know that we women are not weak. However, sometimes they must obey in order to save lives, but of course that only refers to women who are under some kind of censorship, within the borders of their home of origins. However, this is also a kind of power not weakness.

Shirin Neshat is an Iranian woman artist who was born in 1956. She was born and raised in Tehran until she finished high school. She traveled to the US to study art in 1974, and because of the revolution she was not able to go back to Iran. She still chose to operate outside Iran’s borders. In all her collections, she explores the issues concerning contemporary Islamic

⁴⁹Shirin Neshat, TED Talk conference, December 2010. TED is a nonprofit organization devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). Ted began in 1984 as a conference where technology, Entertainment and design converged, and today covers almost all topics, from science to business to global issues in more than 100 languages. Meanwhile, independently run TEDx events help share ideas in communities around the world, https://www.ted.com/talks/shirin_neshat_art_in_exile, (accessed 10 March 2016).

cultures, identities and in particular the Muslim women in Iran.⁵⁰ Her first visit to Iran in 1990 was a shocking experience for her as she saw her own culture in a drastic transformation. She became obsessed with the experience, and became terrified by the impact of the revolution.⁵¹ This experience led to her first series of photographs *Women of Allah series* (1993-1997) in which she reflects on the social and political realities, specifically the position of women after the revolution, who were the potent subjects in terms of how the social and political changes caused by the revolution.⁵² According to Neshat, her art is a way of building a relationship between her own country of origin and the USA, her second home. She adds that her photographs in which she reflects on the questions of gender and identity and how the women's lives were changed due to the revolution, and how they were able to embody this ideology. Her work thus communicates universal ideas about *meaning, memory, and loss*.⁵³

2.1.1 Unveiling

Unveiling in Women of Allah Series (1993-1997) by Shirin Neshat consists of two photographs *Speechless* (figure 3) and *Rebellious* (figure 4). The essence of her work is spiritual reflects on the ideology of Islam. This series are photograph series that were directed and designed by the artist Shirin Neshat, being the model herself.⁵⁴ The notion of the photographs is revolution and femininity, the identity of women in relation to society. The photographs are in a very large in scale. Many Iranians assume that Neshat's work is about Islam, so that she supports the Iranian government, and the opposite has also happened. Many religious Iranians are suspicious of some images, so she preferred not to exhibit her work in Iran.⁵⁵ To analyze the photographs in all of her series in general, I can see the elements of photographs that were used. That includes her own body which is represented as a subject and

⁵⁰Michigan Quarterly Review, "Women of Allah", 1999 , <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0038.207;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1;=mqrq>, (accessed 25 February 2016).

⁵¹ MacDonald, Scott, *Between the Two worlds: An Interview With Shirin Neshat*, p.628, http://www.feministstudies.org/_img/art_gallery/0499697.0030.306.pdf, (accessed 27 February 2016).

⁵² Ibid, p.630

⁵³*Iran Chamber Society*, Wednesday 16 March, 2016, http://www.iranchamber.com/art/sneshat/shirin_neshat.php, (accessed 20 March 2016).

⁵⁴MacDonald, Scott, *Between the Two worlds*.

⁵⁵Michigan Quarterly Review, "Women of Allah", 1999 , <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0038.207;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1;=mqrq> , (accessed 2 April 2016).

object in the photographs, the black veil or *chador*⁵⁶, the text and the weapon. By her using her own body she embodies the female status which is a problematic topic in Islamic culture as it refers to concepts of shame and sexuality. Neshat uses the body as an artistic metaphor in their response to exile. As Elizabeth Grosz argues:

The body is the most peculiar thing, for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing. . . . Bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively.⁵⁷

Referring to Grosz's argument, Neshat uses her own body as the subject and object of her artwork, and inscribes on the body and face. The calligraphy in *Persian*⁵⁸ which Neshat's inscribes on women's body is a decorative device, usually in black and white ink. It defines the women's quest for self-expression and it exposes the silent figure's voice. Neshat inscribes the calligraphy not on her skin, but rather on the photographs. The poems that are inscribed are by two different poets, Forough Farukhzad and Tahereh Saffarzadeh.⁵⁹ Forough Faokhzad (1935-1967) was one of Iran's influential poets. She published her first volume of poetry entitled '*The Captiv*' in 1955. It became the focus of much attention and disapproval. In her poetry, she had a strong feminine voice, and her poetry was banned for more than a decade after the Islamic Revolution.⁶⁰ Tahereh Saffarzadeh (1936-2008) was a poet, translator and university professor.⁶¹ She has published fourteen volumes of poems and ten books that include principles of translations of the Qu'ranic texts and scientific books. Saffarzadeh was honored as an example of the Muslim believer due to her knowledge and political background.⁶²

As Neshat says poetry and calligraphy are innate in Iranian culture and it is a metaphorical language that Iranian visual artists use today in order to say what is forbidden without being

⁵⁶Chador is the Islamic veil that is in black color, which covers all of the females' bodies.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994)

⁵⁸Persian is the official language and script of Iran, called *Farsi* in *Persian*.

⁵⁹ CHRISTIE'S, The Art. People, 23 October, 2012, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/photographs/shirin-neshat-unveiling-5602558-details.aspx#top>, (accessed 18 March 2016).

⁶⁰ Daniel, Elton L.; Mahdi, Ali Akbar (2006). *Culture and Customs of Iran*. Greenwood Press. pp. 81–82. ISBN 978-0-313-32053-8.

⁶¹Muslimah Writers Alliance *Muslim Women Making History: Tahereh Saffarzadeh*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tahereh_Saffarzadeh, (accessed 4 April 2016).

⁶² Muslimah Writers Alliance, *Muslim Women Making History: Tahereh Saffarzadeh*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tahereh_Saffarzadeh, (accessed 19 March 2016).

censored, and it is also a part of her personality and culture.⁶³ There is always a boundary between her as a Muslim and the society around her, due to regulations.

The fourth element is the gun or rifle which is obviously the symbol of violence, but as it seems to me not dangerous in the photographs, so it can be a symbol of defense. This weapon is used as a metaphor of the powerful Iranian women in some of the photographs, but it is also used as violence in some other photographs of the same series, that I will introduce in the following section. What really catches my eyes is the powerful, violent gaze of Neshat herself in the series. Those gazes in almost all of the series are more powerful than the weapon. It can be very cruel, has a voice, and is unpredictable. I think Neshat cleverly uses the weapon in her photographs, in order to hijack the sight of the viewer, to draw the viewer's attention, especially the western viewer.

The photographs from *Women of Allah Series*, called *unveiling*, both images *Speechless* and *Rebellious* depict an armed woman wearing a black chador, and weapon that has no indication of violence see (figures 3). The poem inscribed on the face is by the Iranian poet Tahereh Saffarzadeh, in which she asks her brothers to accept her to take part with them in the revolution.⁶⁴ I can see that the gun refers to no violence, and held between her cheek and the chador; it is inserted un-forcefully as well. She gazes outwards and does intentionally not gaze to the viewer, symbolically saying that you are not the one targeted. I can see in the photograph *Rebellious* (figure 4) that the image is divided into two, using the rifle that symbolizes that the women occupy two positions that refer to 'Intersectionality.'

According to the author Nira Yuval Davis in her book '*The Politics of Belonging: intersectional contestations*', one of her main contradictions, the idea of *Intersectionality* is that there are different positions that a person always occupies. There is a combination of different things, and this combination places us in.⁶⁵ So it is visible to me that the artist Neshat wants to show us these different positions of women in Iran: 1. the powerful who takes part in battles, 2. The religious women inside the boundaries of her homeland, 3. The Iranian women who endure the censorship due to the revolution, 4. The human who fights for human rights and women rights and can be a member.

⁶³ Amor Marse, *The word as a weapon*, February 2014, <http://interartive.org/2014/02/shirin-neshat/>, (accessed 10 February 2016).

⁶⁴ Komaroff, Linda, *Un Framed, Intentionality and Interpretations: Shirin Neshat's Speechless*, November 2, 2015, <http://unframed.lacma.org/2015/11/02/intentionality-and-interpretations-shirin-neshat's-speechless>, (accessed 20 February 2016).

⁶⁵ Yuval-Davis, Nira, *The politics of belonging: intersectional contestations*, Sage, Los Angeles, Calif., 2011

2.1.2 *I Am Its Secret*

By analyzing the photograph *I am its Secret* from *Women of Allah* series (figure 5) closely, I can see that the model who is the artist Shirin Neshat herself wears chador which is a sign of a Muslim identity. In addition, half of her face is covered with chador using one hand, according to her own will, which reflects her obedience to her religion. All of her face is covered with a swirl shaped calligraphy poem written in black and red ink. The shape of the swirl, that is used in addition to the colors, makes my focus as a viewer deeper. That makes me give a reflection of the same intended gaze given by Shirin Neshat the model, back to her. That makes me, the viewer as the subject of the photograph. I assume that Neshat addresses both viewers from the East and the West. As I am a Middle Eastern viewer, that photograph is mirroring me. And I am the subject, the woman under constraints and intend not to express her feelings. The *chador* is what stopping her liberation, but she is also looking towards freedom, through the poem covering her face and the emotional expression of the eyes.

From a Western point of view, that photograph opposes a political message. That is to say that she is covered totally and speechless, because women are not allowed to express themselves. All she has is the gaze, and if you gaze back and go deeper, you will see that she is looking for freedom, and she has the power.

The poem is by the Iranian poet Forough Farrouhzad (1935-67). The poem is entitled '*I will Greet the Sun again*' translated by Paul Weinfield.⁶⁶

I will greet the sun again
And the little river that once ran in me
And the clouds that were my ruminations
And the acting blooms of poplar trees,
My companions in those seasons of drought

In my analysis the poem reflects the women's will to liberate and emphasizes the feelings and desires of many Iranian women. That is a big contrast with her willingly-covering her face. That shows two sides of one woman which also refers to *intersectionality*. That is due to the constraints that cannot be changed easily, so the women use their patience to be able to

⁶⁶Poem in Persian (Farsi) by Forough Farrouhzad , '*I Will Greet the Sun Again* ,Translated by Paul Weinfield, December 15, 2014, <https://paulweinfieldtranslations.wordpress.com/2014/12/15/forough-farrokhzad-i-will-greet-the-sun-again/>, (accessed 16-03-2016).

survive when they have no other choice. Thus, this photograph embodies an ideological and political view.

2.1.3 Allegiance with Wakefulness

By analyzing the photograph *Allegiance with wakefulness* (figure 6) of *Women of Allah* series, (1994). In the photograph the woman's feet can be seen, covered by a poem in the soles. The feet are holding a gun barrel which depicts the martyr. That reflects the woman is ready to sacrifice for her country. My analyses to this photograph, it is pointing out the notion of powerful Iranian women. That is by the powerful gun held by the beholder who is a woman, and also the powerful poem which reads '*I pray for you guardian of the liberating Revolution*⁶⁷ which point that out clearly. That concludes that Iranian women are effective and active beholders of a political change. The poem says:⁶⁸

*O, You martyr
Hold my hands...
I am your poet...
I have come to be with you
And on the promised day
We shall rise again*

In general, the series *Women of Allah* appear to mimic the essay *The Laugh of Medusa* (1975) by the French feminist and writer Hélène Cixous. Cixous writes that a 'woman must write herself, as long as women have been driven away as violently as from their bodies, they must encourage women to writing and write themselves, for the same reason and law, and fatal goal.'⁶⁹ She says that women must gather in order to liberate their voices, their bodies, and sexuality. I think by using a body and text, Neshat wants to show us that the women in the Islamic regime have been deprived of their own voices and bodies. Neshat uses chador that covers a whole women's body. The weapon in her series also seem to be a symbol of defense to her culture

⁶⁷Mottahedeh Negar, *After-Images of a Revolution*, Spring 2003, pp.183-192, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/rhr/summary/v086/86.1mottahedeh.html>, (accessed 17-03-2016).

⁶⁸Komaroff Linda, *Un Framed, Intentionality and Interpretations: Shirin Neshats Speechless*, November 2,2015, <http://unframed.lacma.org/2015/11/02/intentionality-and-interpretations-shirin-neshat's-speechless>, (accessed March 21st 2016).

⁶⁹Cixous, Hélène, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, *Signs* 1,no.4,1975, p-875

and heritage, not only women's freedom against the regime, but as the theoretician and critic Edward Said's emphasizes 'exile is a jealous state' in his essay '*Reflections on Exile*'⁷⁰, It can be emphasized that Neshat is jealous of the culture that has been taken away by the revolution, and the heritage that has been taken from her by the years she was away of her home of origin.

I really think that Neshat's choice for this medium still work for this series, it was really successful, because it goes with the theme, which is woman deprived of their own bodies and voices due to the revolution. I agree with Neshat mentioning that her 'photographs are left to the viewers interpretation'⁷¹, that is because it is obvious to me that each photograph conveys different meanings. It depends on the viewers background, whether the viewer is from the East or West, religious/anti-religious, political/anti political. In addition I can see that her work still has no time limit, it can always be interpreted in different ways: for example after the 9/11, her photographs were interpreted in totally different ways, especially from the western point of view. That is to say Eastern women are terrorist as much as men are in the Middle East.

Apart from the common elements that she uses in her series, which are a woman's body, a veil, a text, and sometimes a gun, all photograph share one common characteristic, which is addressing the role of women in Iran through photographs .Neshat intends to make or present her photographs as ambiguous. They contradict a western notion of women to be diminished and desexualized by the veil as the era before 1900, and as the critic Shahla Lahiji indicates (see p.10).

I assume that the artist mirrors herself as one of them, occupying different positions as well, although she operates outside of Iran's borders, so there are no boundaries that she should follow. There are only the personal boundaries that she puts to herself that is to say self-censorship, but still searching for the women rights of her own culture in a globalized and civilized way using art. We can be oppressed and free at the same time, and we have multiple identities that sometimes contradict each other. At the same time she is lost between her Iranian identity and the identity that she gained in exile.

⁷⁰ Said, Edward, *Reflection on Exile*, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge, MA:Harvard University Press, 2008, p-178.

⁷¹ Michigan Quarterly Review, Women of Allah, 1999, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0038.207;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1;=mqrq>, (accessed 20 February 2016).

Peggy Phelan, a contemporary feminist theorist, claims, ‘[...] for feminist, art became the domain for implementing both political and personal vision, was both an enlightenment to political response, and productive of it.’⁷² It is obvious to me that Neshat is critical or political in her art and the issues also reflect her own personal perspective as a woman. She successfully reflected on important issues that affected Iranian women’s lives that gained international attention.

2.1.4 Neshat’s Photographs that Symbolizes Violence

The photographs from reality showing Iranian women undergoing a voluntarily military training course (figure 10), where they are taught how to use weapons and act in wars. They took the course due to the Iraq invasion of Iran.⁷³ The three images from real life show that women take part in military services in order to stand side by side with the men, as they think and say to protect themselves against wars, and any unpredictable attacks. The third image is showing Iranian women protesting for their rights against the regime in (figure 10).⁷⁴ It is obvious how Neshat translated the Iranian women’s representation in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the *Women of Allah* series (figures 7-9). Here I obviously see the violence of the weapon in the images that is directly targeting the audience, or outsiders. The image with the red paint that is painted on Neshat’s hands and arms (figure 8), represents the blood of the enemy. Here, I can say that Iranians can be depicted as terrorists, even if they think they are defending their land, but that has no excuse, because blood brings streams of blood, and the loss of many innocent people’s lives.

In the image of the video installation *Fervor* (figure 11) represents the gender separation, which has become a normal act of everyday life in Iran. That resonates with what Dabashi says ‘Commonalities between sexes, and how sexual taboos have been so deeply internalized by both

⁷²Reckitt, Helena & Phelan, Peggy (red.), *Art and feminism*, Phaidon, London, 2001, p.21.

⁷³Nasim, International Short Messaging News Agency, Culture and Society, August 24, 2013, <http://en.nasimonline.ir/archives/8840>, (accessed 31 March 2016).

⁷⁴Iran o NBCNEWS.com, Iranian women fight on the frontlines of protest, updated 6/24/2009, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/31531225/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/t/iranian-women-fight-frontlines-protest/#.Vv2LteKLSt8, accessed 29 March 2016.

men and women. The conflict here is human nature versus social, cultural and religious.⁷⁵ This gender inequality which women failed to change, since Qajar period, not even during Pahlavi monarchy, when women lived through societal equality, and modernization, and Westernization (see chapter one).

2.1.5 TED Talk by Shirin Neshat

At the TED Talk by Shirin Neshat in December 2010, the artist explained her inner motivation for her art projects starting from the *Women of Allah* series (1993-1997) to her latest artworks. First, she referred to her visit to Iran in 1990 and how shocking it was for her seeing the drastic transformation and the oppression of women. From that moment, she changed the focus of her art. I heard and felt the grief for the loss of her country, the old Iran that was before the revolution of 1979. Neshat is very proud of herself as being an Iranian woman and an artist, in order to use her art as a weapon to be the voice of her people, the speaker of her own people, even though she has no access to her country. According to Neshat in her TED talk:

[---]Our artists are at risk, we are in a position of danger, we pose a threat to the order of the government, but ironically this situation has empowered all of us, because we are considered as artists central to the cultural political social discourse in Iran.⁷⁶

As the sociologist Jacqueline Adams indicates, 'It is through images that the political communication, the production of meaning and the making of issues are accomplished. The concept of political icon is used to describe that kind of political communication that depends on images rather than words.'⁷⁷ Through Neshat's images, the visual communication, she produces a tool in order to reproduce ideologies for viewers. This tool is very effective and can give the right meanings she aims to address. I can observe from her artwork and recognize from her TED Talk that Neshat intends to make political actions through her art. I see that Neshat's artwork and aim is addressing three different audiences, Iranian government, Iranian women in Iran and outside Iran, and the western audience. She is fighting the regime and government and its

⁷⁵Neshat & Dabashi, Shirin Neshat: The Last Word, Milano:Edizioni Charta, 2005, p.138.

⁷⁶Shirin Neshat, TED talk: Art In Exile, December 2010, https://www.ted.com/talks/shirin_neshat_art_in_exile, (accessed 10 February 2016).

⁷⁷ Adams, Jacqueline, "Art in Social Movements:Shantytown Womens Protest in Pinochets Chile", Vol. 17, No-1, 2002, pp.24, <https://artecambiosocial.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/art-in-chile.pdf>, (accessed 20 February 2016).

censorship that functions to oppress and undermine Iranian women. She wants to show the western audience, the Iranian women's character, who is educated, forward thinking, nontraditional, sexually open, fearless and seriously feminist. Last but not least, Neshat addresses the Iranian women to encourage them to always express themselves freely, whether with or without *hijab*, as always has been standing for their rights.

I can also see that Neshat consciously and intentionally leaves her photographs with more questions than answers by making it ambiguous, on the one hand in order to spread the issue of Iranian women internationally, on the other hand to spread her voice and art wider and quicker. I can see from the TED Talk by Neshat that she is a very powerful woman, as powerful as her artworks, as much as she is emotional, and has great hopes for the future for her as an Iranian woman artist and for Iranian women in general, inside and outside Iran.

Throughout this chapter I explored Neshat's series of photographs which attempt to visually express sociopolitical issues concerning Iranian women. They can be called a 'political art project' which has the potential to mobilize people to turn them against the state. In the next chapter, I introduce and explore Taraneh Hemami's work which revolves around political and personal narratives and histories of the Iranians. The 'words' which frames the artwork are Taraneh Hemami's own words from an interview.

CHAPTER 3: EMBODYING LOSS: TARANEH HEMAMI

3.1 Hall of Reflections

I work with archives from the community to give historical and personal context to the project. It allowed us to talk about who we are. [---] There is a sense of satisfaction in placing myself within the walls I create.⁷⁸

Taraneh Hemami

In this chapter, I aim to explore the theme of *loss* in Hemami's artworks, where the loss of culture and loss of language are introduced. In Hemami's artwork, she shares narratives of all Iranians in exile, and brings the community together. Hemami's aim is to show who the Iranians are, and she feels delighted at every step she makes in this artwork.

As an Iranian visual artist, curator, and professor Teranah Hemami who has been living in the United States, San Francisco since 1978, and wasn't able to go back to Iran due to the Revolution 1979. Hemami has been awarded a Creative Work Fund year 2000, a Visions for the New California in 2007, and a Eureka Fellowship 2012. Taraneh Hemami is now an Adjunct Professor at California College of Arts.

Hemami's visit to Iran in 1990 changed and influenced the focus of her art. Hemami's artworks investigate the complex cultural politics of exile, as she argues 'I explore the complex relationship with the idea of home and struggle to secure a sense of belonging from both her country of residence and the country and culture of her youth.'⁷⁹

Hemami's installation that began in the year 2000 called '*Hall Of Reflections*' is a project that is a combination of art, history, archive and a reflection, as the title suggests. It is a collection of hundreds of images and portraits of Iranians immigrants and exiles. The concept of the design is to put together and bond physically and conceptually the shattered stories of Iranian

⁷⁸ Creo Noveno, 'Taraneh Hemami Creates a Sense of Place for Displaced Iranians', 22 March 2016, <http://ww2.kqed.org/arts/2016/03/22/taraneh-hemami-creates-a-sense-of-place-for-displaced-iranians/>, (accessed 1 May 2016).

⁷⁹ Creo Noveno, *Taraneh Hemami Creates a Sense of Place for Displaced Iranians*, 22 March 2016, <http://ww2.kqed.org/arts/2016/03/22/taraneh-hemami-creates-a-sense-of-place-for-displaced-iranians/>, (accessed 1 May 2016).

whose voice and lives have been veiled due to media images that have dominated since the revolution in 1979. Hemami mentioned that ‘American audiences have perceived false images of her people’ and that she wants to clarify the reality of the Iranian people in the installation of *Hall of Reflections*. Hemami’s other aim in this installation is, while taking control of her own image and sharing the true stories, she wants to bridge between the two communities, the Iranian and the Iranian in exile.⁸⁰ That is to say between the people who have exiled or migrated and have their memories of their homeland and their journey to the US, and between the younger generation who have portrayed their people and land which is derived from shared family stories. Julia Kristiva talks about in her book *Strangers to Ourselves*, how a foreigner lacks a sense and belonging, and loss of his home and language, and eventually memories are constantly changing, and how difficult to understand a foreigner’s innermost feelings.⁸¹ That is what Hemami feels, and wants to feel, is the sense of belonging through the installation, because she lost her home of origin, and the younger generation lost its language due to exile.

This also refers to Nira Yuval Davis in her book *the politics of belonging: intersectional contestations* who writes about the notion of social and political belonging. That is to say they are all Iranian, and all are foreigners so they all are from the same social location. As foreigners, they feel the lack of sense of belonging, and they all feel the loss of the home and the mother tongue, which is Persian, by the young generation that is due speaking the foreign language so that refers to their identification and emotional attachments. Hemami, as an artist, leads and spreads the voices of the Iranians through art, that represents the ethical and political value.

By analyzing the installation *Hall of Reflections* 2002 (figure 12), one can see, due to the real images that are collected by the artist from different people, that she explores different themes, which include *loss, preservation, dislocation* and *belonging*. This is created by the unique archive of personal photographs and narratives of the experiences of the Iranian immigrants and exiles to tell a collective story of a community, as well as the artists’ personal past.

The installation *Hall of Reflections* from 2002 consists of five sections; *Mirrors, Missing, Albums and Letters, Cutouts, and Ruins*. Each section is presented in a different way, but they all trace similar themes. Traditional Iranian patterns and designs are displayed on more than

⁸⁰ Hemami, Taraneh, *Hall of Reflections*, <http://www.taranehemami.com/hall-of-reflections-2000-present>, (accessed 12 February 2016).

⁸¹ Kristiva Julia, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1991, New York: Columbia University Press, pp.1-44.

400 hundred mirrors and glass tiles using prints and transparencies that fade away over time, where text and images are transposed on the same glass and mirror tiles. Due to the different lights and colors illuminating the tiles and the reflections, the viewers focus shifts away back and forth between the images and different layers of patterns and texts.⁸² Hemami made this archive accessible through web to all Iranian immigrants and exiles around the world in order for them to add their images and voices to the archive.

The writer and literary critic Said stresses that ‘anyone prevented from returning home is in exile.’⁸³ He also goes on and divides immigrants into categories, an immigrant is anyone who migrates to a new country, and an expatriate is one who voluntarily lives abroad. According to Said, exile is a ‘condition of terminal loss’ that is resulted by ‘discontinues state of being.’⁸⁴ The place of origin is important since it is related to ones histories, social relations and memories. That is what Hemami’s aim of the installation, representing history through collective memorials. She transforms the personal and cultural memories and histories into the present and future. She breaks this discontinues state of being, which is exile.

Hemami states that the *Hall of Reflections* is the vehicle for all Iranians around the world, in order to tell a shared story and show who they were before the revolution, and weave it to the present, that is because memories fade away but archives of texts and images are eternal.⁸⁵

The theorist Gayati Spivak argues the necessity of having some kind of narrative of identity, a story of who we are and who we are not, which is important for any notion of agency or subjectivity to exist.⁸⁶ That is what mainly Shirin Neshat and Taraneh Hemami try to show. Through the *Hall of Reflections* installation, Hemami showed the real image of the Iranian Muslim woman which was completely different than the one that was clichéd. That is due to the drastic changes that took place in Iran, and fulfilled the gap for the younger generations to see who they were. Stuart Hall is one of the main voices on identity theory and he pointed out how ‘the production of identities is always in process, it is never fixed, it is never complete, it is always continuer and multiplex.’⁸⁷

⁸²Hemami, Taraneh, *Hall of Reflections*, <http://www.taranehemami.com/hall-of-reflections-2000-present>, (accessed 12 February 2016).

⁸³Said, Edward W., *Reflections on exile: and other essays*, Granta, London, 2012[2001], p.181

⁸⁴Ibid, pp.173, 177.

⁸⁵ Hemami Taraneh, *Hall of Reflections*, <http://www.taranehemami.com/hall-of-reflections-2000-present>, (accessed 12 February 2016).

⁸⁶ Yuval-Davis, Nira, *The politics of belonging: intersectional contestations*, Sage, Los Angeles, Calif., 2011, p-14.

⁸⁷Ibid, p-14

Also, the theorist and philosopher Dariush Shayegan observes in his discussion about contemporary Iranian art, he says:

As a contrast to the strong collective memory, and the vision dominated by cultural archetypes, and symbols non-western artist have found new sources of inspiration, enabling them to depict ways of being and repressed vision in new ways. They make tradition and modernity confront and challenge each other.⁸⁸

3.2 Silent Tears: Alphabet of Silence

Language is an enclosure (or all that there is), language (is the) medium of cultural creation, or language (is) the controller of culture.⁸⁹

By Hazard Adams

The German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch argues that ‘it is not possible to destroy a language, without in the act destroying its culture. On the other hand it’s not possible to preserve and develop a culture without speaking the language in which it is formed and is lived.’⁹⁰ It is very common for me as a person who also lives in exile to know that the Iranian in exile, or any person who lives in exile, usually does not speak her/his mother tongue in order to learn the native language. Thus, the new generation usually learns the native language as well. That results in them not being able to speak their mother tongue in a proper way, if speaking it at all. That is one of the cons of exile, which results in destroying a culture.

Silent Tears 2011, from the series *Alphabet of Silence* series (2000-2011) (figure 13), is an installation by Taraneh Hemami. The work consists of seven ceramic tears of different sizes; and each tear is painted with Farsi Alphabets in dark grey. The tears are scattered and mounted strictly vertically on a dark grey wall.⁹¹ I can see from this installation by Hemami that she refers to the notion of crying women due to the everyday loss in their lives, which is common in the Middle East due to the violence they face. Hemami is not only expressing the

⁸⁸Shayegan, Dariush, *At the Cutting Edge of Intersecting Worlds*, translated by Ros Swartz in Rose Issa, RuyinPakbaz, and Dariush Shayegan. *Iranian Contemporary Art*. 9-11, London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2001, p.10.

⁸⁹Hazard Adams, *Introduction, Critical Theory Since 1965*, edited by Hazard Adams and Lerory Searle, Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1992, pp.1.22

⁹⁰ Ernst Bloch, in a quote from a lecture, 1939, *Art in Exile*, <http://kuenste-im-exil.de/KIE/Web/EN/Navigation/Exile/Language/language.html>, (accessed 6 March 2016).

⁹¹ V & A, search the collection, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1194700/silent-tears-alphabet-of-silence-ceramic-hemami-taraneh/>, (accessed 8 March 2016).

women's daily grieve, but also her deep sorrow for the home she left behind. It is very visible for me that the calligraphy, that is inserted, is similar to Neshat's work, Neshat asserts that poetry and calligraphy are innate in Iranian culture, but as I can see it Hemami also depicts the loss of language which leads to the loss of culture as the literary critic Hazard Adam's discussion above about language and culture. Hemami represented the loss of language in the way the tear shaped ceramics and is scattered on the wall. Here Hemami addresses a reflection of a state of exile, that is to say the Iranians are scattered in different places around the world. As a result, the language is also scattered and forgotten.

3.3 Theory of Survival

I have been working with materials of history for quite some time. It has become a way of making some sense of the world around me.⁹² The project started with me having lost stories of my family after being away for nearly 20 years. Being on the public platform invites me to do something more than personal reflections. My art practice, my teaching practice, my activism, and my community organizing are merging into one.⁹³

Taraneh Hemami

It seems to me that Hemami got very emotionally affected by the drastic changes in Iran when she visited Iran in 1990. In this art project, curated by Hemami, she presents the loss of lives, and tries to gather Iran's history and the young Iranian's in exile together.

Theory of Survival is an art project curated by Hemami (figure 14). It illustrates the loss of lives and aims to put the Iranians and history side by side. It is an archival on-going project (2008-2015). It is a project that brings together artists, scholars and audiences, linked by a mutual cultural heritage and historical background, to bring the matter of belonging to the Iranian student Association of Northern California, ISANC, which has been active from 1964

⁹² Taraneh Hemami words from an interview, *Theory of survival*, 2014, <http://creative-cap.tumblr.com/post/93785103317/taraneh-hemami-theory-of-survival-2014-i>, (accessed 12 March 2016).

⁹³ Creo Noveno, 'Taraneh Hemami Creates a Sense of Place for Displaced Iranians', <http://ww2.kqed.org/arts/2016/03/22/taraneh-hemami-creates-a-sense-of-place-for-displaced-iranians/>, 22 March 2016, (accessed 1 May 2016).

to 1984.⁹⁴ The historical collection reflects the political moral sense of the Student Organization globally; in books, news papers, analytical essays, documentations and translated text books published both inside and outside Iran. *Theory of Survival* is well presented as the progressive workshop for creative interchange and cooperation and as educational and cultural institution, permitting the audience to be active participants, engaging with the layered archive of the Iranian Revolution. Hemami asserts that:

Every attempt was made to facilitate an open dialog to connect people and ideas, curiosities and histories. The approach was experimental when open participation and was focus on removing boundaries between audience, art, while fusing the material and the works produced.⁹⁵

The project is a part of an inter-connection between the residency project and the center of art and the public life at Californian College of Arts in 2007. The agenda of the project is basically to create opportunities for exchange between artists, scholars and audiences, addressing issues of identity, culture, preservation and representation. Unlike traditional exhibitions, it is designed as a space gathering, a research lab, a library, a photo studio and an open stage. The project is aiming to supply the right tools for learning how to communicate together as a community and reconstruct their history. This project is bound by a common language, historical circumstances, and the experience of exile, referring to Nira Yval Davis, and the notion of *social* and *political belonging*. This project gathers all the Iranian in exile together. They are from the same nation, and they are scholars, artists and audiences, which correspond to the same national and cultural identity. They are emotionally attached and driven to collect their histories and share them with each other, and let the young generation be aware of their histories. They bring their own curiosity, attachment connections and narratives, to respond to this library of underground publication and banned books, reflecting theoretical framework of its era. As Hemami claims,

Theory of Survival creates an unique historical collection to interact with these archives of passionate discourse, theorizing devotional to sacrifices and to create a dialogue and exchange that investigates the notions of martyr, heroism, freedom survival and loss. In this way, the archive becomes a vehicle for reconnecting, remembering and negotiating of historical events, of personal, regional, national, and global significance.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Taraneh Hemami: summary of the talk at the Sharja Art Foundation about the “Theory of Survival Project”, 27th November 2011, (summarized by author), <https://vimeo.com/32729174> , (accessed 1st May 2016).

⁹⁵ Ibid, (accessed 1 May 2016).

⁹⁶ Taraneh Hemami: talk at the Sharja Art Foundation about the “Theory of Survival Project”, 27th November 2011, (summarized by author), <https://vimeo.com/32729174> , (accessed 27 April 2016).

3.4 Fabrication

The installation *Fabrication* is part of the *Theory of Survival* project, exhibited at Luggage Store Gallery (2012) in San Francisco. It is a gathering of archives from basements that are banned before and after the Revolution 1979. It is a Participation of artists to recreate the materials in different mediums, replication of the books, portrays as well as prints. The materials are handcrafted as well as factored items. The main concern for Hemami was to pull this archive out of the basements, where it has been sitting for thirty years. By 2012, the material was ready for research to engage with it. The publications were done both in English and Persian.⁹⁷ *Fabrication* is an opportunity to create a project that travels in residencies as well as to Europe and elsewhere where there is a large population of Iranian in exile.

3.5 Resistance

This '*Curtain of Blood*' 2013, from the *Fabrication* series entitled *Resistance* in (figure 15), demonstrates the loss of lives during the Revolution, the lives of activists through the depiction of blood which generates uncomfortable feeling to the viewer. Hemami argues that the *Fabrication* is a handcrafted and manufactured replication of historical archives exploring decades of collective activism and revolutionary actions both inside Iran and its diasporas.

For me, the *Resistance* artwork is very much similar to Hemami's *Silent tears* artwork which I explored earlier (see chapter 2) which demonstrates the loss of language that was due to exile. Here, it reminds them of the loss of lives, during and after the revolution. It is a part of their history that they should be aware of. The beaded curtain untitled *Resistance* and ceramic pearls of tears in *Silent tears* artworks, both recall traditional Persian handicraft which played a predominant role in the artistic history of Persia. It specifically reminds me of the personalized *Tasbih*⁹⁸ prayer beads in (figure 16). Muslims use *Tasbih* beads for the prayer. The beads can be in different sizes and of different materials; stones or glass and of different colors but usually rounded in shape and perforated in shape for threading with others as a necklace, usually each *Tasbih* consists of 99 beads, but sometimes only 33 beads.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ *Tasbih*: is used by the Muslim to make the prayer, http://www.islamicity.com/bazar/action.lasso.asp?-db=Bazaar&-lay=Product&-format=detail.asp&-op=cn&Part_no=05705-7156&-find, (accessed 14 April 2016).

Here Hemami combines religion and prayers with the tears of women in the *Silent Tears* installation, and the blood of innocent lives, in the *Resistance* artwork.

As I can see, the main aim for this archive is to be seen by the younger Iranian generation in exile, so it was mainly for the Iranian audience. Audiences engage with the material, it is not necessarily about nostalgia of that time, it is about the knowledge that they did not have due to exile. It is about those connections that are made historically and about the recent demonstrations, and that is important material to know about. It is to fulfill the sense of belonging through their past.

I mentioned earlier in this thesis, art is a limited medium. That is why I present Hemami's *Theory of survival project*; it is an aesthetic project, and gathers large members of Iranians. *Theory of Survival* engages scholars, artists, and audiences. A larger community is gathered to fulfill estrangement through knowledge. Iran's history and archive that have been hidden in the basement both before and after the Revolution and its consequences. That is due to the censorship that was practiced on books, the owners and publishers of the books have hidden all the materials that have any hint of political to save it from being burned by the police, and saving themselves from being jailed as I mentioned earlier (see chapter one). The artworks reflect on the sorrows and loss. Through this unity, the Iranian's in exile learn about their history. As a result, they fulfill the sense of belonging a. As the philosopher Jacques Derrida argues:

The question of archive is not [...] the question of concept dealing with the past that might already be at our disposal or not [...] it is a question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.⁹⁹

I can see what is more important for Hemami it is to bring responses, hopes, and promises for the change that could be achieved in the future. By also achieving her aim, she is gathering the Iranians to fulfill the sense of belonging, and overcome the feeling of estrangement/ghorbat. I can see in *Theory of Survival* that it is the bridge between past and present of the narratives of Iran's history and the Iranians in exile, whereas in the *Hall of Reflections* installation is the bridge between past and present of the Iranians personal narratives who live in exile. The results go beyond generational distance, through the images and materials, used to construct the artworks, by unveiling their memories.

⁹⁹ Mercer, Kobena (red.), *Exiles, diasporas and strangers*, Iniva, London, 2008, p-205.

CHAPTER 4: EMBODYING SORROW: SONIA BALASSANIAN

4.1 *The Other Side II*

Sonia Amirian Balassanian was born in Arak, Iran in 1942. She received her Bachelor degree of Fine Arts from the University of Pennsylvania in 1970 and her Master degree of Fine Arts from Pratt Institute in New York in 1978. A US trained Iranian artist of Armenian descent was the first woman to teach art at the university in Tehran. Balassanian is a recognized poet, painter and a teacher. Due to the constraints placed on women and her minority status as an Armenian Christian, she was concerned for her safety under the Islamic regime. Therefore, she exiled to the United States in 1978. She currently works both in New York and Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. Balassanian changed her scope and focus of her art, as she changed her country of residence. She was known for her unique Persian miniatures, her focus now lies on exhibiting large scale installations with political references. Her installations are space specific.¹⁰⁰ In her installation, untitled *The Other Side II* 1992 (figure 17), larger than life scale figures gathered in the gallery space with their black chadors with a mysterious purpose.

In this installation *The Other Side II*¹⁰¹ by Balassanian, eleven figures of women are covered totally in chador, lined in a semi-circular in the dark room. The sizes of the figures are larger than human size and they are seated in front of a lined lit floor spotlights. The light from the spotlight is very condensed, almost momentarily blinding that focus on the entrance of the room. Balassanian says that ‘the veiled figures are backlit with spotlights that turn the gallery into something like an interrogation room, there is a restless yet purposeful ambiguity in this scene as the spectator is left alone to make out who is the judge, who is the jury, who is the victim, and who is the criminal.’¹⁰²

As I interpret it, although it is obvious that those figures are women, they seem very ambiguous, because they are covering their faces. They are not showing who they are and how they look. This can indicate that we do not know them. Their identity is ambiguous to us viewers, specifically to the western viewers. In addition, they are silenced and muted forcefully by covering all the face, and this is not how the chador is worn in reality. Also I

¹⁰⁰ Sonia Balassanian, installations: space specific, <http://www.soniabalassanian.com/en/installations-space-specific>, (accessed 8 March 2016).

¹⁰¹ Young, Geoffrey, “*The other Side*”, 1992, Sonia Balassanian, <http://soniabalassanian.com/en/the-other-side-1992-sculpture-center>, (accessed 2 May 2016).

¹⁰² Balassanian, Sonia, Homepage, 2001, March 4, 2005, www.soniabalassanian.com/projects, (accessed 1st May 2016).

think Balassanian intended to make the figures of larger scale to make them have power over us viewers. That can also mean to show us that they have the power, but they are silenced and enslaved for now.

In the installation *The Other Side II*, when the viewer enters the dark room through a narrow corridor, and is blinded by the array of the spotlight, I think the artist wants to put the viewers in the position of the figures, which means the position of Muslim women under the Islamic regime or under enslavement. The artist wants the viewer to feel the power over them, the darkness they are living in, the silenced women as she is forced to be. The narrow corridor, in return, refers to the narrow or limited choice the Iranian women have in their lives. I also noticed that Balassanian wants the viewer to feel this uncomfortable gaze by the western which is a reflection of not knowing who Iranian women are and are questioning their identity. The artist Balassanian confronts the oppression and enslavement and bridge the cultural gap between the western and eastern women.

4.2 The Other Side

The installation entitled *The other Side* 1992 (figure 18) which is filled around with a series of black metal boxes hanging on the walls, with a single eye peeking out following the viewer's movement. Balassanian says, 'I used the metaphor of a container of electricity as a prison for in trapped energies and gagged expression. The persistent gaze, watching the spectator in every step, is meant to convey the presence of a creative woman who may be condemned to silence but who remains vigilant.'¹⁰³

I can interpret that women are imprisoned in this black chador, and depicts women are observed at every step by the street police asking them to tighten up their veil and walk faster. This situation was during the Qajar dynasty 1785-1925(see chapter one). I can also interpret it in a different way, that is to say that the black boxes are women in chadors, and one eye of theirs is gazing through the chador to the outside world, which can represent that women cannot look at the outside world because they are imprisoned, but they can 'steal' a look to the outside world. Balassanian uses the chadors as a symbol of the Muslim women and as by the means to depict post revolutionary issues; the veiled figure is the one

¹⁰³ Art Journal, <http://soniabalassanian.com/files/52.pdf>, (accessed 1st May 2016).

highlighted. Women are the ones who are most oppressed and marginalized, as the author Farzaneh Milani argues in her book *'Veils and Words'*:

[. . .] socially and politically marginalized [woman who has] become central symbolically, an important feature of the imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture. Excluded from the public domain, they come to rule the symbolic order. Absented in one arena, they become an overwhelming presence in the other.¹⁰⁴

As women in Iran have been always marginalized in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and they have always been an issue in the outside world, artist Balassanian seems to reflect that in her installation.

4.3 *Shadows of My Sisters*

Balassanian expanded her criticism of the political situation in Iran under Khomeini's regime by different installations, specifically images of repressed Muslim women. She is using art to represent the mandatory dress for women in chador, and the fundamental changes in Iranian society and the lack of choice.

Balassanian's installation *Shadows of my sisters* (figure 19) was exhibited in Balassanian's studio in New York in 1993. The installation consists of eleven figures larger than human size wrapped in black chador. The figures are totally covered and situated in different positions, either standing, kneeling, or laying down on the room's floor. The light bulbs are also scattered on the floor.

In my point of view, the women status in the room, in this disorient positions and the muted voices, represents the women's insolence since the revolution of 1979 until now. It shows that they are the victims, and the oppressed ones. It shows the power that is over them, while the viewers go around them. The installation addresses issues of feminism, Muslim and oppression. Balassanian's work is deeply influenced by the aesthetics and the politics of the Iran. She combines the Muslim's daily life in the post revolutionary condition. The repressive change in Iran during 1980 changed the focus of her art from a decorative painter in 1970s to her emotive materialized installations. Balassanian's installation depicts post revolutionary issues through the mandatory veil for women in fundamentalist Islam, in

¹⁰⁴Milani, Farzaneh, "Veils and Words", 1985, P-4

large- scale Sculptural installations in most of her artworks. The artworks confront the oppression and imprisonment.

By comparing Balassanian's three installations, *The other Side II*, *The other Side* and *Shadows of My Sisters*, I can see that women are in the main role, as they are in the main role since the revolution and post revolution, that is to say the main victims. Balassanian demonstrates the representation of women throughout the revolution until today. That is through the three installations.

As I interpret the first Installation *The Other Side II* that the eleven seated figures of women are frozen like dead bodies, and in the second installation *The Other Side* where black metal boxes depict women who are imprisoned or enslaved, while in the third installation *Shadows of My Sisters* depicts women who are also represented but they are in a scattered or disoriented position, as though somehow they move during the post revolution, where they are somehow raising their voices, trying to entangle this enslavement, whether by going against the Islamic dress, or against the political and social constraints in general. Balassanian therefore demonstrates a timeline of women's representation.

4.4 Hostages Diary

I would like to point out that Balassanian was the first Iranian artist who criticized the political situation during the revolution 1980. That was through her artwork *Hostages Diary*, which is due to the political tensions between America and Iran. The tension occurred between the Iranians and Americans in 1980. A takeover of the US Embassy in 1980, and the American hostage crises on November 1979, when the Iranian students attacked the American Embassy in Tehran taking more than 60 American hostages. The students aimed to declare a break with Iran's past and an end to American interference in its affairs. The hostages were set free on January 1981.

Balassanian criticized this political situation through her *Hostages Diary* of collage images (figure 20) consists of photographs of the American hostages, and a photograph of Balassanian putting herself in a position of a hostage and other photographs of women in chador. Balassanian's politically focused work combines elements of photography, calligraphy, which presents documentary materials in collage, and acrylic on paper. The calligraphy in Persian added to all collage images esthetics to politics.

I can see that Balassanian's artwork is similar to Neshat's artworks where Balassanian positions herself in a position of a hostage. The art historian Robert C. Hobbes describes her work as '[...] implicit in her work is the suggestion that the revolution is not something that is out there, that is merely political and legislative; a revolution affects everyone coming into contact with it.'¹⁰⁵ This fact is symbolized by her putting herself in this position of a hostage. The art historian Robert C. Hobbes continues to describe her work as:

Her images are icons of crises; they are like weathered billboards containing a variety of dissonant [sic] slogans and banners, torn, overlaid, scratched out, and marked up. Her art deals with the look of revolution, with the confluence of personal, historical, cultural, and newsworthy information.'¹⁰⁶

That is to say that her work depicts or frames the circumstances during the revolution, by the way her photographs are represented as torn and scratched, and Balassanian translated this daily information during the revolution crises of 1980 through her artwork. I can see that both artists Neshat and Balassanian have the same political focused work, and the body is explicitly depict Iranian women's bodies as constrained and restricted, and they have their own body inscribed with Persian script.

4.5 Self Portraits

Self Portraits series (figure 21) by Sonia Balassanian was exhibited at the Franklin Furnace Gallery in New York in 1983 while she was in exile and has published a book of Portraits. This work was to be exhibited again in Tehran's Aria Gallery in 2007, but unfortunately the portraits were taken down by the authorities due to its overtly political references.

Balassanian Portraits series are photographs of herself wearing hijab and the same image was repeated in all photographs of her series. Each image is a collage work, is represented as it has been distorted or fractured in different ways, the ripped parts of the collages insert an amount of violence that the Iranian women have been submitted to. As can be seen that Balassanian has inserted in each image calligraphy and fingerprints. The woman's gaze is what is

¹⁰⁵ Armenian Reporter, *American Hostages are Subject of Current Balassanian Exhibit*, July 3 1980, p.5, <http://soniabalassanian.com/files/35.pdf>, (accessed 5 May 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.5

constant and firm in the image. I can see that her eyes could speak although she is speechless; the woman's eyes confess the dark crucial circumstances during the revolution and post Revolution. Balassanian puts herself as the witness of the situation during the revolution 1979 although she was in exile, which is due to her connectedness to her home of origin. The Persian calligraphy that each image has consists of two words repeated over and over, the words are *stoning* and *raping*. These words depict the *raping* and *stoning* of the Iranian women who were taken to jail during the revolution due to standing against the regime, they were raped before their execution. These words were scratched or crossed out in each image as though these acts never existed, that highlights the governments or people in power denial of such acts. The fingerprints indicate the prisoner's state as criminals and can also mean the artist signature of the incidence. This does not only reflect the women's status during the revolution, but Balassanian also points out that this would have been her destiny if she had stayed in Iran during the Revolution. Balassanian says 'I dedicate this book to the memory of those women who perished as a result of political turmoil.'¹⁰⁷

I interpret that Balassanian's Portraits are similar to Neshat's in *Women of Allah* series. In addition, Balassanian was the first Iranian woman artist who criticized the regime. Both artists put themselves in the situation of the Iranian women living in Iran, thus they both put themselves in the place of either a woman or a hostage in the photographs, that is due to their connection to their home country. Both inscribed Persian Calligraphy in their artworks, and both have very political intentions. They used mostly black and white motives in their images, and they also introduce this deep and sharp gaze. The artists are trying to highlight the situation that the Iranian women have been going through since 1979 Revolution until now.

¹⁰⁷ Sonia Balassanian Portraits, ACCEA/NPAK Publishers, Yerevan-New York, 2007, <http://soniabalassanian.com/files/56.pdf>, (accessed 4 May 2016).

CHAPTER 5: EMBODYING ESTRANGEMENT – INTERRELATED THEMES

In the previous chapters, I analyzed several different artworks by the three contemporary Iranian women artists who live in exile; the artworks embodied the themes- *power, loss, and sorrow*- In this chapter, I analyze how the three themes are embodied in the artworks of the three artists at different levels of occurrence and significance, and how they interrelate due to *ghorbat*.

But I am in exile.
Seal me with your eyes.
Take me where ever you are_
Take me whatever you are.
Restore to me the color of face
And the warmth of body
The light of heart and eye,
The salt of bread and rhythm,
The taste of earth...The Motherland.
Shield me with your eyes.
Take me as a relic from the mansion of sorrow.
Take me as a verse from my tragedy;
Take me as a toy, a brick from the house
So that our children will remember to return.¹⁰⁸

By Mahmoud Darwish

My motivation by inserting an emotional poem by Mahmoud Darwish is due to the whole situation that the artists are bringing forward, a sensitive and critical issue. In addition, all of the artist's artwork embodies this emotional issue, and mainly Neshat's photographs include this poetic calligraphy, which generates emotional feelings, and by me inserting a poem that generates feelings in order to frame and reflect to this issue raised, which is a feeling of estrangement or *ghorbat* tying it to Neshat's framework. My chosen poet also lives in exile and has the same feelings of estrangement and he is longing to belong.

¹⁰⁸ Said, Edward W., *Reflections on exile: and other essays*, Granta, London, 2012[2001]. It is a poem by Mahmoud Darwish (1942-2008), a Palestinian contemporary poet who managed to reach a matchless position as a poet of Palestinian people. His experience as an exiled, jailed and a refugee stamp his poetry with nationalism and make his words and images come expressive and impressive. p.142, <http://www.dobrasvisuais.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Reflections-on-Exile.pdf>, (accessed 1 May 2016).

Mahmoud Darwish's poem embodies the sorrow, loss of home of origin, and the dream of return, and his feeling of estrangement is depicted through the sentences that are unfinished in his poem, where he feels that he is homeless. Edward Said argues:

Darwish converts the lyrics of loss into postponed drama of return, and he depicts his homelessness through the form of incomplete things: The pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of question.¹⁰⁹

Drawing on the critic George Steiner 'Text has become a home and an instrument of exilic survival' I would like to say 'Art has become a home and a tool for belonging.'¹¹⁰ All the artworks by the three artists are embodying the effect of exile and its feeling of estrangement which is *ghorbati*, with all its *sorrows*, *loss*, and *power*.

Neshat's artwork's theme which is *power*, embodies her photographs with its entire means. Indeed, from the first glance *power* is practiced over the viewer due to the large scale of photographs. Apart from all the *power* that was embodied by her photographs, her artworks also embody the theme *loss*, the loss of the old Iran, martyr, and the loss of the language, by inscribing the calligraphy in her work, the loss of freedom since the 1979 revolution, and post revolution. Also Neshat's photographs are embodying *sorrow*, due to the oppression that women have been going through by the censorship of the government. Neshat indicates sorrow by the gaze of the women, although the gaze is very powerful, but also very depressive. Sorrow is also very clear from her Ted Talk that was very emotional in regards to the situation of women in Iran, and the longing for change in order for Neshat to exhibit in Iran again.

Due to the shifts of Neshat's focus of art, where it is more politically focused, her artworks resonates with what the author Grant H. Kester describes in his book *Conversation pieces* about the avant-garde works, that it is the artists '[...] challenge [and] disrupt the viewer's expectations about a given image, or system of meaning [needed by the viewer] to overcome his or her habitual forms of perception.'¹¹¹ That refers to Neshat's *Women of Allah series* when an Iranian woman is depicted in a chador with the gun, may disrupt any preconceived conceptions the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p-142

¹¹⁰ Steiner, George, quote from an article by Abbas Milani, *Ghorbati, The purgatory of exile: Persian intellectuals in America*, March 27, 2003, <http://iranian.com/Opinion/2003/March/Milani/>, (accessed 4 April 2016).

¹¹¹ Kester, Grant H., *Conversation pieces: community and communication in modern art*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004, P-17.

viewers have regarding Iranian women. In addition, that will give a wider space of interpretations, questions and open for negotiations.

Hemami's installations embody the theme *Loss*, but I can also see the sorrow by the loss of language in the installation *The Silent Tears*, and by the narratives that have been forgotten by Iranian individuals in her installation *Hall of Reflections*. Also, sorrow is illustrated by the archives that have been lost, or hidden in *The theory of Survival* installation. Hemami's installations also embody power. It is illustrated by the gathered narratives and archives through her installations, by engaging scholars, artists, and audience in exile to take part in such a project, she creates unity. Unity is very powerful, in any circumstances, project, movement or art project.

In Balassanian's installation *The other Side* sorrow is the main theme, but power is indicated clearly as well. First, by the scale of the sculptural women figures, which are larger than human size. She makes the figures to have power over the viewers. The dark room, and narrow corridor, in addition the intense array of light, have power over the viewers and make a tensed atmosphere. In the other room with *The Other Side* installation the one eye gaze practices power over the viewer. The theme loss is indicated in her installation, by the concealed faces and by the chador of the women figures, which depicts that they are muted. This refers to the loss of freedom, the loss of not being able to raise their voices. This loss also leads to sorrow that is indicated indirectly, through the absence of women's freedom, the sorrow of the whole situation that the women are placed in their society.

Most of the work that is represented by the artists, sculptured figures by Balassanian, photographs by Neshat, and *Curtain of Blood* by Hemami, represent power through the scales of the artworks. Power is practiced over the viewer, which is generated by *ghorbat*. All three artists 'write' female bodies explicitly into their art, thus they make all narratives visible using the body. Balassanian explicitly depicts Iranian women's bodies as constrained and imprisoned. Neshat's photographs her own body inscribed with Persian script, wrapped in chador. Taraneh Hemami represents bodies in exile.¹¹² The artists artwork that represents narrative art breaks the 'silence', both the silence of Iranian women in post revolution Iran

¹¹² Sharon, La Von, *Embodied Exile: contemporary Iranian Women artists and the politics of place*, PhD in Philosophy, 2005, p-15, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.459.3146&rep=rep1&type=pdf> , (accessed 8 March 2016).

and the silence of Iranian artists in exile by engaging what the philosopher and literacy critic Bakhtin calls ‘a dialogue with the past and present through writing and art making.’¹¹³

All three artists share the notion of social and political belonging, that is to say they share the same social location, which refers to that they are all Iranian women artists in exile. They belong to the same nation, sex, and grouping. They also share the emotional attachment which refers to them living in exile and sharing the feeling of loss and sorrow, and are emotionally driven to belong through art. Their artworks embody their emotional feeling which is generated from estrangement.

The artworks also embody the circumstances that the Iranian as a culture have been living since the Revolution of 1979 until now, specifically women who have been most affected and oppressed. The artists are honest leaders to their people and are raising their voices in order to make a change that corresponds to the political and ethical value. As I can see, there are two frameworks; the first one is about a nation, a political framework. The other framework is about media constructed images, about pre-conceived images how women from Iran are portrayed, and how the culture is portrayed.

A contemporary feminist theorist Peggy Phelan claims, ‘...for feminist, art became the domain for implementing both political and personal vision, was both an enlightenment to political response, and productive of it.’¹¹⁴ That is to say, it is obvious to me that Neshat and Balassanian addresses critical and political issues but also reflects their own personal perspective as women. Furthermore there are two different viewers with two different perspectives, the Western viewer who might relate the artworks back to 9/11 tragedy, and the Middle Eastern viewer whose life experience may differ, but, nevertheless they share the same common experience of living in ghorbati which relates it back to their experience of ghorbati and the 1979 revolution. Both viewers relate what they see to their memories and build interpretations upon it. The researcher Hamid Naficy argues that:

All Cultures are located in place and time. Exile culture is located at the intersection and in the interstices of other cultures. Physically placed outside its original homeland, it is mentally and emotionally both here and there, and as a result, it is both local and global.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikailovich, *From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse, The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: university of Texas Press, 1981.

¹¹⁴Reckitt, Helena & Phelan, Peggy (red.), *Art and feminism*, Phaidon, London, 2001, p.21.

¹¹⁵Naficy, Hamid, *Identity Politics and Iranian Exile, Iranian Studies 31.1, 1998, pp.51-64, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4311118?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents*, (accessed 20 February 2016). Hamid Naficy is a leading authority in cultural studies of diaspora, exile, and postcolonial cinemas and media, and of Iranian and Middle Eastern cinemas and media. He published a dozen of books some award-winning and

I can say that exile Culture for the Iranians is both like living mentally ‘*here and there*’, they are attached to their home of origin which is Iran, and attached to their past. They try to build an imaginative place between the two cultures, their place of origin and the place they live in.

The three artist’s artworks are situated in the in-between space, the space between longing and belonging, the past and present, between feeling home and dislocated, between East and West, Silence and Speech, Iran and USA, all of that due to *ghorbat*. The artist’s works try to engage sense of belonging through, emotions, feelings, facts and histories, which all Iranian share as a community, and link it with the outside world. They create belonging through the projects in the ‘in between-space’, or sphere, which is in the USA, and overcome the feeling of estrangement. According to the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha in the ‘*Location of Culture*’:

The in-between spaces as terrains for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal-that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself...It is in the emergence of the interstices-the overlap and displacement of domains of difference-that the intersubjectivity and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.¹¹⁶

The artists long for the old Iran which is their home that they belong to, not specifically as a physical location but where heritage is, and emotional memories of the place, that has been lost or hidden and unseen by the Western world, since the 1979 revolution. All these artists experience some form of exile and estrangement/*ghorbat* in the *in-between spaces*, pain and longing for their home of origin, they long for belonging.

lectured widely national and international. His work have been cited and reprinted and translated in many languages.

¹¹⁶ K. Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, pp.1-2.

CONCLUSION

Iranian Women are the centre of political struggle between secular and religious forces in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The effects of these forces constrained and shaped women's identities. Thus women's voices have been silenced since 1979 Revolution. This situation led Iranian women artists to live in exile, in order to gain a better personal and social life, and have freedom of expression in art. They have not only the pain of exile, but the pain of the exilic experience which is defined as estrangement/*ghorbat*. Artists live in countries that offer them a present and a future that is safe and promising. They reconstruct their cultural memories from the perspective of people who have developed their own identity by looking for themselves between their origin in Iran and their destiny in the country they live in. The artists live in the United States and dream of their home of origin which is Iran.

As long as the Iranian women artists have experienced the exile, the political tension after the revolution 1979, the censorship that is still going on until now, and the false image given in the West about the reality of an Iranian women, and as long as they have the freedom of expression and the tool to convey all these issues, that is to say they have the methodology and subject matter, they will always try to make this change to their people. Artists will encourage Iranian women living in Iran to stand up for their rights, as women against the constraints and censorship, and unify the Iranians who are living in exile and share their stories in order to fulfill the feeling of belonging and overcome the feeling of estrangement/*ghorbat*, and share a common ground.

I can also conclude that the Iranian women are so powerful throughout history. Veiling or unveiling is only a matter of dress for most Iranian women inside Iran they go with the flow in order for them to achieve their goals. The Iranian women artists in exile are even more powerful because they touch upon these issues and try to solve very critical, sociopolitical issues.

The selected artworks by the three artists' embody the themes, power, loss and sorrows. The artworks embody these themes due to the exilic experience *ghorbat*. *Ghorbat* is the thread that ties the body of the three artists work together. The experience of exile made the artists

produce artwork that expresses their feelings, preserve their histories and share them with the community. That resulted in generating sense of belonging in exile, and made meaning of their experiences through art.

Neshat, Hemami and Balassanian create history in art about Iranian women's personal experience in post-revolutionary Iran. The artists engagement with political situation and issues concerning their experience are shaping their artworks, thus they play an important role in shaping a culture. Each artist has a different pathway in the creation of artworks, but they are all longing to belong and share the experience of *ghorbat*/estrangement and longing for remembered homes. This is what it means to be an Iranian woman in exile today, and this is how artists try to construct belonging in the United States and overcome the feeling of estrangement/*ghorbat*. They are Persian contemporary female artists in the modern world; every piece of their artwork is global and is very Iranian in the core.

Many areas concerning contemporary Iranian women artists are yet to be investigated. For example how the experience of censorship, due to the Islamic regime is articulated in the art of contemporary female Iranian artists inside Iran. Another research can be how religion is embodied in the artworks of contemporary Iranian women artists inside and outside of Iran. As long as Iran is politically and religiously troubled, that gives broader space to the field of research.

APPENDIX

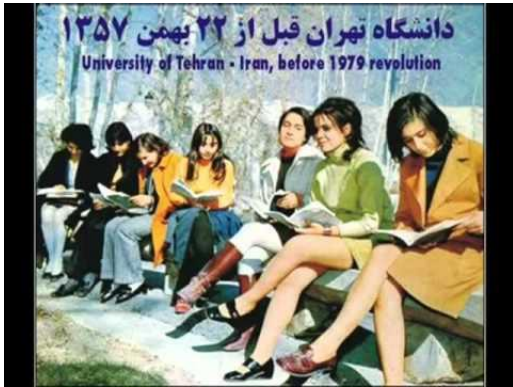


Fig.1: Iranian women before the revolution

Fig.2: Iranian women after the revolution

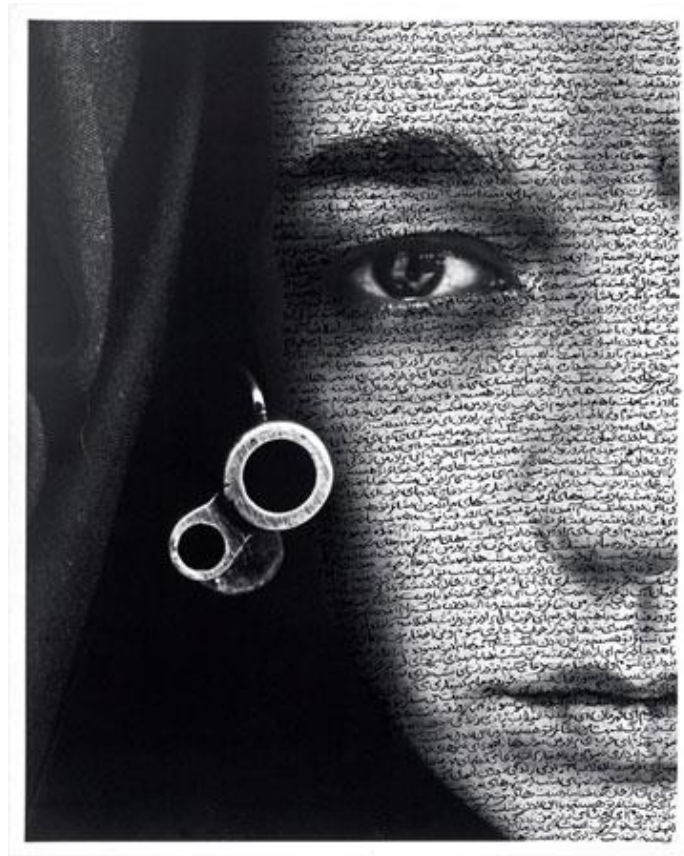


Fig. 3: *Speechless*

Shirin Neshat, in *Unveiling from Women of Allah Series* (1993-1997),
Stark black-and-white photographs, exhibited in Artspeak Gallery, New York
©Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York



Fig. 4: *Rebellious Silence*

Shirin Neshat, in *Unveiling from Women of Allah Series* (1993-1997), Stark black-and-white photographs, exhibited in Artspeak Gallery, New York ©Shirin Neshat (courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussel)

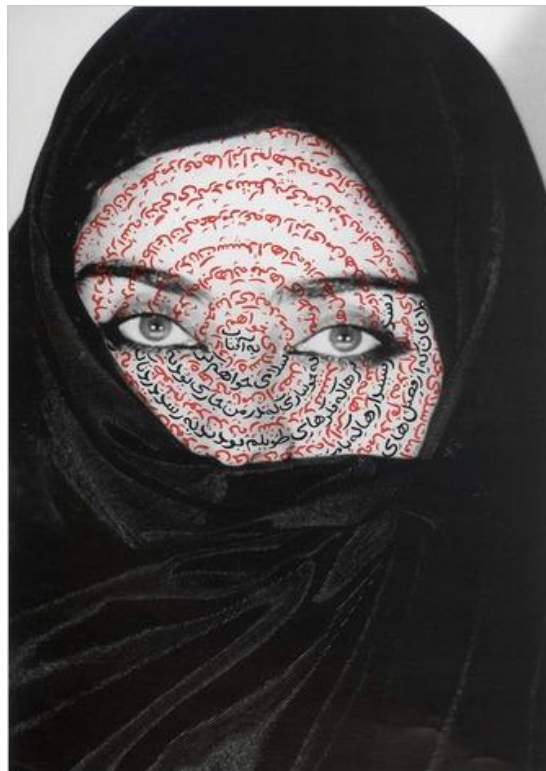


Fig. 5:

Shirin Neshat, *I Am Its Secret* (1993) *Women of Allah Series* ©Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York

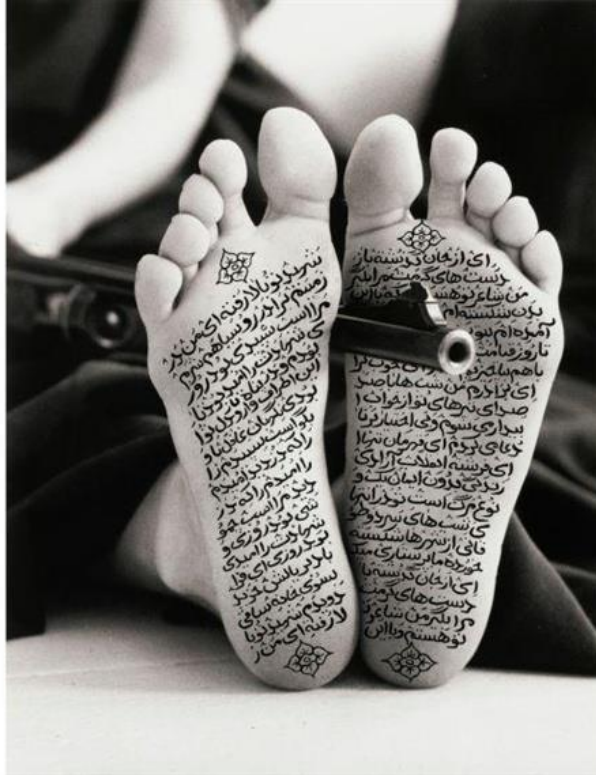


Figure 6: Shirin Neshat, *Allegiance with wakefulness* (1994), *Women of Allah* Series
Dimensions: 13.5 X 10.37 in (34.29 X 26.34 cm) Medium: Chromogenic print© Images are copyright of their respective owners, assignees or others.



Figure 7: *Rebellious* Figure 8: *Unveiling* Figure 9: *Faceless*
 Shirin Neshat, *Women of Allah* Series
 ©Shirin Neshat (courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussel)



Figure 10: images of Iranian Women undergoing
 Military training and protesting, 2016

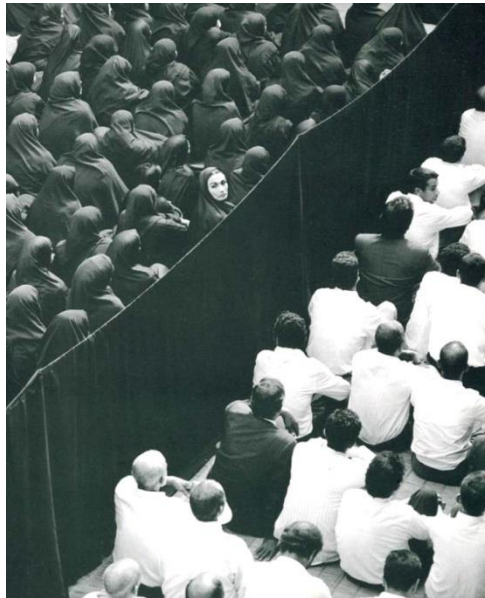
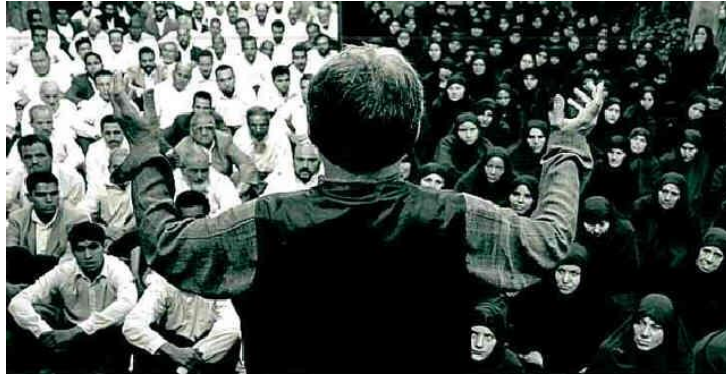


Figure 11: Shirin Neshat, two images from a Video Installation *Fevor* (2000)
© Shirin Neshat

Figure 12 *Below: Hall of Reflections* installation 2002-2006 (consists of 5 images)



Cutouts- Collage, oil and wax on wood panel, 36x4x48



Mirrors- photographs on Persian and Islamic designs



Albums & Letters

Hemami has exhibited parts of the project *Hall of Reflection* at the Sharjah Sixth international Biennial, UAE in 2002, the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery in 2002, the Richmond Health Centre and the Articultural Gallery in Los Angeles.



Ruins



Missing- acrylic on wood panels, 20''x20'' each



Figure 13: Taraneh Hemami, *Silent Tears; Alphabet of Silence* series, exhibited at Luggage Store Galler (2012); Rose Issa Projects, London (2008); and Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco (2007); and in 2011 installed 'Free' a public art project at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco.



Figure 14: Taraneh Hemami, *Theory of Survival* (2008-2015), explores the History of dissent in the Iranian community



Figure 15: Blood Curtain untitled *Resistance* in *Fabrication* series 2013, exhibited at Luggage Store Gallery (2012) in San Francisco, by Taraneh Hemami; consists of three curtains made with 8mm faceted beads and thread; 64"x5"x94"



Blood Curtain



Figure 16: Tasbih Prayer Beads, used by a Muslim



Figure 17: Sonia Balassanian, *The Other Side II*, (1992), The Sculpture Center, New York



Figure 18: Sonia Balassanian, *The Other Side* (1992), The Sculpture Centre, New York



Figure 19: Sonia Balassanian, *Shadows of My Sisters* installation (1993), Exhibited in Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, North California



Figure 20: Sonia Balassanian, *Hostages Diary*, 1981 exhibited at Elise Meyer in New York



Figure 21: Sonia Balassanian, *Self Portraits* 1983, exhibited at the Franklin Furnace Gallery in New

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