Negotiating Identities: Embodied Experience as Resistance to the Orientalist Gaze in the Artworks of Three Contemporary Women Artists from Iran

by

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Abstract

This dissertation offers three case studies of contemporary women artists from Iran: Ghazaleh Hedayat (b. 1979), Simin Keramati (b. 1970), and Katayoun Karami (b. 1967), to challenge stereotypical readings of Iranian contemporary art that are based on homogenized notions of Iranian identity. I examine self-reflective photographs and videos made by these artists to consider how they question assumptions about politicized and cultural identities in their artworks. In doing so, I contextualize the art of these three artists within an art historical genealogy in which the artists from the Global South challenge the identity politics prevalent in the mainstream international art world. I focus on the visual qualities of the artworks to show how these artists interrogate and complicate the notion of "Iranian-ness" and how they re-define and conceptualize this notion based on their lived experiences as women in Iran.

After conducting semi-structured interviews with the artists and choosing six works in total (two for each artist), I position the selected work within feminist and postcolonial critical frameworks to analyze how these artists perform embodiment in relation to their personal lived experiences. I investigate how they introduce themselves as embodied subjects to problematize the lens through which the artworks of artists from Iran are typically viewed. After defining the term "Orientalist gaze", I argue this mode of looking is still discernable in the globalized art world. In this dissertation, I explore what strategies are employed by these artists to undermine this gaze. By developing these strategies, the selected artists represent their critical responses to an imposed ethnic group identification, refusing to allow their bodies to become objectified and racialized by the Orientalist gaze. I argue that the artists strive to generate affective responses in their audiences and provide them with the experience of embodied viewership. This form of viewing puts the artist and the viewer in a looking relation in which both of them occupy the role of being an embodied subject.

Preface

This dissertation is an original work by Somayeh Noori Shirazi. The research project, of which this dissertation is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES IN THE ARTWORKS OF THREE CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN WOMEN ARTISTS", No. Pro00065653. Approval Date: 10/14/2016.This ethics approval was received for conducting interviews with the selected three artists of this project: Ghazaleh Hedayat, Simin Keramati, and Katayoun Karami. The letter of approval and a copy of the interview questions are provided in appendix A and B.

Some of the paragraphs used in the introduction (on pages 37 and 38) and chapter three (from page 150 to 160) of this dissertation are excerpted from a published essay written by the author. This essay has been published as "The Articulating-self Inside Out: Katayoun Karami and Becoming a Woman," in *Under the Skin: Feminist Art and Art Histories from the Middle East and North Africa Today*, eds. Ceren Özpinar and Mary Kelly, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 73–86.

Dedication

To my husband Hamid Baz Mohammadi and our daughters Morva and Yara.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to all the individuals who have supported me in accomplishing this research, my supervisor, supervisory committee members, the artists whose works are discussed in this dissertation, and my family. Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my main supervisor Dr. Lianne McTavish for her continuous support and mentorship throughout my PhD program. She is one of the most knowledgeable, thoughtful and inspiring scholars I know. I am very proud for having the opportunity to take classes with her, being her teaching assistant and learning from her while working on my thesis.

Dr. McTavish's guidance and counselling played a major role in conducting this research. I am deeply grateful for her openness to review multiple drafts of this dissertation and provide me with invaluable feedback on my writing and analytical arguments over the years. Her constructive comments and critical perspective significantly improved the structure and organization of my dissertation. She assisted me to rethink several aspects of my arguments, and generously let me learn from her expertise in art history to improve my analyses. In particular, when my examining committee requested me to revise parts of my dissertation, Dr. McTavish's professional and warm support and guidance was very crucial for me to welcome the criticism and improve my dissertation. I am very grateful and I feel very fortunate to have Dr. McTavish as my supervisor.

I would also like to thank my supervisory committee members Dr. Natalie Loveless and Dr. Manijeh Mannani. I am thankful for Dr. Natalie Loveless's scholarship and her critical feedback and resourcefulness. She gave me helpful ideas and suggestions on the theoretical

frameworks I used in this research, and she was instrumental in strengthening my dissertation in terms of covering feminist and postcolonial approaches. I have always been inspired by Dr. Loveless's passion for the contemporary art and her creativity is her artworks, and I am proud to have had the chance to learn from her in her classes and during writing this research. I am also dearly thankful to Dr. Manijeh Mannani for guiding my work, and giving me insightful advice regarding my approach towards the contemporary art of Iran. Her positivity and helpful comments provided me with intellectual and scholarly support over the years.

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Furthermore, I would like to thank other professors that I was fortunate to have classes or be in contact with during my PhD program. Dr. Joan Greer, Dr. Steven Harris, Dr. Michelle Meagher, and Dr. Betsy Boone. The content of this dissertation is a reflection of all the insights and knowledge that they passionately shared in their classes, and the ideas that came to me in my conversations with them during my study.

Most importantly, I benefited a lot from my contact with the artists and curators who live and work in Iran and abroad. I am very grateful to all of those who I talked with in person or over the phone. Among those artists and curators Barbad Golshiri, Jinoos Taghizadeh, and Mohsen Nabizadeh were particularly helpful to get me more familiar with the Iranian contemporary artists.

My special thanks go to Ghazaleh Hedayat, Simin Keramati, and Katayoun Karami, who accepted to be interviewed by me. Not only did they kindly answer my interview questions, but

also they answered the innumerable questions I came up with during writing my dissertation. They shared with me the images of their artworks and the links of their videos, and they were most generous with their resources and time over the period I was in contact with them. Writing this dissertation would have not been possible without their warm collaboration.

I am also thankful to my mother, Poorandokht Taheri, my brother, Ali Noori Shirazi, and my late father, Ali Akbar Noori Shirazi, for their unlimited support and encouragement throughout my life. Their patience, sacrifice, and love have always paved the way for me to achieve my goals.

Last but not least, if I had not had the intellectual and material support of my husband, Hamid Baz Mohammadi, I would have not been able to successfully complete my PhD study and research. My academic achievement in art history is indebted to him, and I am deeply grateful for that. This dissertation is dedicated to him and our two daughters Morva and Yara who were born during my graduate school journey. Their love motivates me to make anything possible.

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Introduction

"I try to bring the state of not seeing into photography."
(Ghazaleh Hedayat, personal interview with the author, 19 December 2016).

"I use my body in my works to convey my ideas."
(Simin Keramati, personal interview with the author, 23 December 2016).

"When I want to say something, I try to make it visual in the simplest form I can."
(Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, 30 December 2016).

This dissertation analyzes selected works created by the three women artists from Iran quoted above: Ghazaleh Hedayat, Simin Keramati, and Katayoun Karami. They made these statements in 2016, during a series of interviews with me in Persian. Though I interviewed each woman separately, a set of common themes emerged from the discussions. Each artist expressed a dedication to exploring issues of embodiment, and often used images of their own bodies in their assemblages, video, photographic, and installation artworks. All three artists similarly emphasized the formal elements of their works, and drew attention to how and why they had constructed them. The artists furthermore expressed a mutual concern with both what they wished audiences, in particular those audiences viewing the works outside of Iran, to see in their artworks and what those audiences could perceive with the sense of touch instead of the sense of seeing. They asked viewers to reflect on the "state of not seeing," according to the phrase used

by Hedayat. Although the three artists produce distinctive works that address a range of issues, I listened carefully to their words and decided to analyze how the formal elements of selected artworks highlight questions of embodiment when these works are received and responded to in art scenes located outside of Iran. In the chapters that follow, I pay particular attention to how their artworks either refuse or reconfigure the looking relationship known as the "Orientalist gaze," a concept I explain below.

My experiences as an art historian trained and employed in Iran led me to pursue this research. Between 2005 and 2008, I undertook a Master of Art degree in Art Research at Islamic Azad University, located in my home town of Tehran. There I took courses in the history of Islamic and European art, and wrote a thesis on the surrealist art made in Europe between the two world wars. During my studies, I engaged with the contemporary art scene in the region, visiting the mostly private art galleries in the capital city, as well as the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, founded by the former Empress Farah Pahlavi in 1977. Many private galleries in Tehran featured the paintings, sculpture, multimedia, and installation artworks of Iranian as well as other artists. In 2005, for the first time after the 1979 Islamic revolution, the museum's comprehensive collection of American and European modern art was on display. This collection was assembled before the 1979 revolution under the patronage of the former Empress Farah Pahlavi, and it is "considered the most inclusive collection of Western art outside the Western world."[1] Visiting the museum's collection and other exhibitions related to modern and contemporary art of Iran provided me with a variety of visual experiences. I was excited by this

[1] Helia Darabi, "Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art as a Microcosm of the State's Cultural Agenda," in *Contemporary Art from the Middle East: Regional Interactions with Global Art Discourses*, ed. Hamid Keshmirshekan (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 221.

diversity and aware of the expanding interest in contemporary Iranian art, an interest fueled in part by the global art market, another issue discussed below.

Significance of the dissertation

Though the critical writing about the contemporary art of Iran was growing, it often lacked reference to the voices of specific artists from Iran. The artistic production of women artists from Iran participating in international art exhibitions, notably those dealing with embodiment and the representation of the body — the issues of most concern to me — was in my opinion not receiving the scholarly attention it deserved. This situation was underlined by my efforts to teach contemporary art in Iran after completing my degree. In 2009, I began working as an art lecturer at both the Eram Art Institute of High Education and the Shiraz Art Institute of High Education in Shiraz, offering introductory and survey courses in art history. Finding little published material on women or feminist artists from Iran and few critical viewpoints towards the reception of their art at the global stage, I continued visiting galleries, attending events, and speaking with curators and artists in Iran. In 2005, two Iranian women, Mandana Moghaddam and Bita Fayyazi, represented Iranian contemporary art at the Venice Biennale, only the second year of participation by artists from Iran after thirty years of their absence. As a young woman who then lived in Iran and had witnessed many socio-cultural restrictions, I was inspired by the presence of those two women in an international art venue. Although the works of Moghaddam and Fayyazi received considerable attention in the years following the Biennale, I believed some subtle nuances of their work were overlooked, notably content related to the lived experiences of women from Iran. Eager to participate in the discourse about Iranian art and to feature both women artists and feminist material in it, I decided to write an article about Moghaddam,

highlighting her use of human hair to address embodiment in one particular installation.[2] Encouraged by the reception of this article, published in the *Woman's Art Journal* in 2012, I applied to pursue doctoral work, wanting to learn from experts in the history of the body, contemporary body and performance art, and contemporary Iranian culture.

This biographical overview situates myself in relation to the arguments that follow but also provides a broader context for the scholarly contributions made by my dissertation. I selected the three artists examined in this study because of their feminist interventions in the domain of contemporary art, in particular outside of Iran, and because of their sustained interest in issues of embodiment. My goal in this dissertation is to explore their artworks from a primarily feminist viewpoint and, perhaps most importantly, to provide another space for these women artists from Iran to enrich the discourse on contemporary art. Although I chose the artists based on my own scholarly interests, I then undertook my research with them in order to respect their concerns. My attention to these artists does not stem from a belief in their authority as exclusive or ultimate sites of meaning; nor is it meant merely to "include" them within existing art historical narratives and concerns. Instead, I want to ensure that the voices of women artists from Iran are heard, without attempting to speak for them. In terms of interpreting the works, I repeatedly use "I argue" and "in my view" throughout the chapters in order to not suggest that these are the only correct possible interpretations of the works, when interpreting the works largely in terms of embodiment and the Orientalist gaze. I intend to demonstrate that they are important ones highlighted by the artists and of interest to me.

[2]Somayeh Noori Shirazi, "Mandana Moghaddam Chelgis II and the Iranian Woman," *Woman's Art Journal* 33, no. 1 (May 2012): 10–16.

The significance of my dissertation is to show that the selected artists' works can enhance an appreciation of the complexity of the contemporary work produced by artists from Iran, and highlight their contributions to feminist artistic practice. The selected artists have created artworks that deal with their personal and embodied experiences of living in Iran. They mostly articulate *how* their lived bodies are formed within the creation of their works instead of expressively displaying *what* they have experienced as a woman who has lived in or continues to live in Iran. Thus, they broaden their art to matters such as corporeality, femininity, and memory, all issues raised by the artists and their artworks, and thus explored in the chapters of my dissertation.

Methodology and Approach of the Dissertation

I collected the key data for this dissertation by means of interviews. I conducted a series of interviews with each artist in 2016 and 2017. Since Keramati was in Toronto and Karami and Hedayat were in Tehran (their biographies are below), and I was in Edmonton, I did the interviews over the phone with them in Persian. As there are little published and written materials about the selected artists, I found conducting semi-structured interviews the most appropriate method for collecting information about their artistic approaches and the details of their artworks. During the first interviews with each artist, I asked broad questions about their education, artistic experiences and goals, but also brought up concerns about depictions of cultural identity and the artists' reactions to such issues, as well as their interactions with art galleries outside of Iran. Since my research focus is how the works are received within global art scenes, our conversations mainly surrounded how they had dealt with the expectations of

galleries outside of Iran, not the reception of their works in Iran, and how such expectations had (or had not) affected their art. These questions are attached in the appendix of this dissertation, but as semi-structured interviews, our discussions followed the natural flow of conversation. The artists responded as they wished and sometimes raised issues I had not explicitly addressed. The artists were active participants in the interview process, and were not positioned as sites from which knowledge was extracted.

My initial conversations with the artists were followed up by discussions that focused on the artists' works. I invited them to talk about their artworks in detail in terms of their subject matter, materials, formal features, and conceptual characteristics. These later interviews were more open-ended than the earlier ones. I asked the artists to explain each of their works done by the time of our interviews. I listened closely to their words and was guided by them in my production of the analyses in this dissertation; I explore the themes that they raised, and analyze the priorities that they identified. Though I strive to foreground the voices of the three artists as much as possible in this text, they are present even when not quoted directly. When the artists emphasized key issues, I followed up on them, considering, for example, how their artworks are received in the art galleries they have participated in outside of Iran, how they respond to prevailing stereotypes about Iran, avoid reductive identity-based interpretations of their works, and resist the "Orientalist gaze." Other topics, such as the global art market and auctions, the reception of their works in Iran, and the politics of race, were not highlighted by the artists during our conversations, and are therefore less dominant in the chapters of my dissertation. After the interviews, I selected six works (two from each artist) to analyze in which the artists share common themes and concerns.

I facilitated a feminist form of interviewing. According to feminist scholars Kathryn Roulston and Myungweon Choi, this qualitative research method is meant to produce knowledge about women's lives while at the same time enabling egalitarian relationships among researchers and participants.[3]Researchers who conduct feminist interviews work with participants in respectful and ethical ways that emphasize women's voices; they also present the results in a way that can be understood by audiences new to feminist work. Though my own interviews explored artistic practice more than the daily lives of the selected artists, I have tried to present my research in a clear and straightforward manner that could be understood by readers both within and beyond the academy.

During our discussions, the artists consistently emphasized the formal elements and content of their art works. In effect, they asked me to describe carefully and look closely at the works themselves, putting them at the centre of my chapters. As Karami stated in my interview with her, "When I want to say something, I try to make it visual in the simplest form I can. I like to engage in a visual and simple dialogue with my audience."[4]She continued, "I like to express what I have experienced to the audience. I share my lived experience in my works."[5] In my interview with the artists, the notion of articulating the personal lived experiences is expressed by Keramati and Hedayat as well. In order to undertake this concentrated research, I decided to examine only two works produced by each artist. In each of the three chapters of this dissertation — one chapter is devoted to each artist — I start with a formal analysis of particular works and examine how the artist articulates embodied selfhood through her art, which in turn, reflects the relative autonomy of that work and its art historical aesthetic properties. Since all the three artists

[3] Kathryn Roulston and Myungweon Choi, "Qualitative Interviews," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, ed. Uwe Flick (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2018), 233–249.

[4]Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 30 December 2016.
[5]Ibid.

highlighted the usage of their bodies in their works, I consider how these artists position themselves as subject in their self-reflective photographs and videos. In my analyses of the works, I aim to draw attention to what the art historian Kobena Mercer calls the "dignity of objecthood" and "the relative autonomy of the art object itself."[6] When contemporary art practices from Iran enter international art venues, in the art critic Rosalind Krauss' sense, "no one is *looking* at the work,"[7] and the audiences may hold assumptions about the artist's identity instead of thinking carefully about what those artists have created. My dissertation encourages such careful thought about the artworks examined in its chapters.

In the second part of each analysis, I move on to discuss how the selected artists challenge conventional ways of viewing, especially when their works are located in a global context. My purpose is to show that the selected artworks are good examples of challenging the hegemonic lens, described below, through which such artworks are still too often viewed and circulated within the global art scenes. These visual artists mainly live and work in Iran while they have participated in art exhibitions outside of Iran.[8]The works I focus on here are shown both in Iran and abroad, though one work by Karami, *Being There*, has so far only been exhibited in Iran. Exhibiting their artworks internationally, however, does not cause these artists to prioritize mainstream art establishments located in, for example, Europe or North America, to receive aesthetic approval. Rather, they critically observe and respond to the expectations that affect both international art venues and the local art scene.

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[6]Kobena Mercer, "Iconography after Identity," in *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, ed. David Bailey, Ian Baucom, and Sonia Boyce (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 53.
[7] Rosalind Krauss expresses this sentence in the *October* roundtable regarding the identity-based Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City in 1993. See also Hal Foster et al., "The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial," *October* 66 (Autumn 1993): 21.
[8]In 2012, Keramati immigrated to Canada, but she still works with art establishments in Iran. Please see her biography, below.

I have not seen all six of the works analyzed in this dissertation in person during the exhibitions of these works. I watched the videos through the links the artists shared with me, and have seen the photographs on the artists' websites. In this regard, I am informed by the artists' occasional comments on the reception of their works and what they indicated about their audiences' experience in the interviews. My chosen research method emphasizes the artworks, the voices of the artists, and their artistic goals. To a degree, I discuss the site of reception for the selected artworks while bearing in mind that audiences cannot be generalized, and that audiences with different social and cultural backgrounds in Iran and abroad might have different perceptions of the works. In addition, I do not aim to show that my interpretations are the only and proper readings of the works. Rather I argue that my viewpoint is one of the readings of the works, and it is reflected what were highlighted by the artists during the interviews in terms of the reception of their works in the international art exhibitions.

As mentioned earlier, there has not been extensive research on the selected works of the artists that I analyze in this dissertation. In a few books published recently about the contemporary art of Iran, there are brief overviews or short articles and chapters about some of the works of the selected artists.[9] In 2020, however, I published a full chapter on one of Karami's

[9]Julia Allerstorfer, "I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile, I am an artist," in *Künstlerunterwegs: Wege und Grenzen des Reisens*, eds. Harald Pechlaner and Elisa Innerhofer (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2018), 150. Allerstorfer has also written an article and a book about Keramati's works see: Julia Allerstorfer, *Visuelle Identitäten : Künstlerische Selbstinszenierungen in der zeitgenössischen iranischen Videokunst* (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2018); Julia Allerstorfer, "Performing Visual Strategies: Representational Concepts of Female Iranian Identity in Contemporary Photography and Video Art," in *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity*, ed. Staci Gem Scheiwiller (London, UK; New York, NY: Anthem Press, 2013), 173–192. For other articles and chapters about Keramati see her webpage https://siminkeramati.com/cv/, accessed March 14, 2022. Regarding the published articles and chapters about Hedayat see Rose Issa, "Ghazaleh Hedayat," in *Iranian Photography Now*, ed. Rose Issa (Ostfildern: HatjeCantz, 2008), 90–93; Foad Torshizi, "The Unveiled Apple: Ethnicity, Gender, and the Limits of Inter-discursive Interpretation of Iranian Contemporary Art,"*Iranian Studies* 45, no. 4 (July 2012): 549–569; Foad Torshizi, "The Affective Feminism of Ghazaleh Hedayat," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 41, no. 1 (May 2021): 106–121. Regarding Karami, some of her works are mentioned in such books as Chris Flood, Stephen Hutchings, and Galina Miazhevich, eds., *Islam in its International Context: Comparative Perspective* (Newcastle upon Tynne: Cambridge Scholars Pub.,

works in a book published by the Oxford University Press.[10] I refer to and expand upon this previously published essay in Chapter Three of this dissertation. The chapters that follow offer an original contribution to introducing lesser-known but influential figures in the contemporary art of Iran, promoting multivalent images of women artists from Iran in the globalized art world.

Theoretical Framework of the Dissertation

The key theoretical concepts raised by the artists and their works can be introduced with reference to an artwork by Simin Keramati. In keeping with a statement Keramati made during one of our interviews— "I like to challenge the cultural stereotypes and resist them in my works"[11]—the video artwork described below introduces some forms that such resistance can take. The video made by Keramati was exhibited in a European venue, raising issues of the globalized context and expanding market for the contemporary art of Iran. The video also addresses the difficult position of artists from Iran, for they are often expected to display a particular ethnic identity in their works, one that can be characterized as "Iranian-ness."This concept of "Iranian-ness" is informed by a set of both historical and current stereotypes about Iranian culture, including an assumption that Iranian women are oppressed by the mandated wearing of the veil. This section of my introduction presents an overview of such concepts, covering globalization, Orientalism, neo-Orientalism, the Orientalist gaze, and the veil, in order to provide a backdrop for the close visual analyses of the artworks featured in the chapters of my

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2011), 179–180; Abbas Daneshvari, "Expression of Gender in Contemporary Iranian Art," in *Amazingly Original: Contemporary Iranian Art at Crossroads* (Costa Meas, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2014), 101; Talinn Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 91.

[10]Somayeh Noori Shirazi, "The Articulating-self Inside Out: Katayoun Karami and Becoming a Woman," in *Under the Skin: Feminist Art and Art Histories from the Middle East and North Africa Today*, eds. Ceren Özpinar and Mary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 73–86.

[11]Simin Keramati, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 23 December 2016.

dissertation. I also consider subjectivity and embodiment as key theoretical concepts to explain here and then in more depth when I use them to illuminate the artworks analyzed in the chapters of my dissertation.

The *Kvinnor Film ochMotstånd* (Women, Film, and Resistance) festival, which was held in Gothenburg, Sweden, in May 2014, screened work by six contemporary visual artists and filmmakers from Iran. One video, by Keramati, was titled

من یک زن هنرمند از خاورمیانه در غربت نیستم؛ من یک هنرمند هستم (I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; ***I am an artist****,* 2014. The sentence "I am an artist" is originally written in bold in the video's credit).[12] The video starts by showing the face and naked shoulders of Keramati. She directly stares at the camera, and consequently at the viewer, while listening to a selection of pieces of instrumental music, the recorded voices of people speaking Persian, and famous songs that are played during the course of the fifteen-minute-long video. Each piece is played for a few seconds, and then after a long silence, the next piece is played. Some of the songs are internationally recognized, such as *I want to break free* by the British rock music band, Queen, and some are Persian pop songs such as *من آمده‌ام* (*I have come to you*) by Googoosh (a celebrated Iranian female music icon) and still others are famous revolutionary songs such as *ایران ایران* (*Iran Iran*) and *قسم* (the vow). These revolutionary songs belong to the early years of the 1979 Islamic Revolution that took place in Iran, and they are well-known in Iranian pop culture. As the video progresses, Keramati's constant stare at the camera establishes reciprocal eye contact between her and the audience. Frequent stopping and skipping to the next track invites the viewer to listen to a new fragment of music and wonder what might come next.

[12] For more information about this video, see "I AM NOT A FEMALE ARTIST FROM THE MIDDLE EAST IN EXILE, I AM AN ARTIST," Simin Keramati, accessed February 4, 2022, https://siminkeramati.com/portfolio-posts/i-am-not-a-female-artist-from-the-middle-east-in-exile-i-am-an-artist/; Glenn Harcourt, *The Artist, The Censor and the Nude* (Los Angeles, CA: Doppelhouse Press, 2017), 127–131.

Suddenly, the terrifying sound of a siren disrupts the scene, and blood starts flowing from the artist's nose, worsening as the video continues, leaving Keramati's face covered with blood (figure 1).

According to Keramati's conversation with art historian Julia Allerstorfer based in Vienna, the name of this video indicates her rejection of the reductive labels often attached to female artists with Middle Eastern backgrounds. Jean-Michel Basquiat's assertion, in fact, inspires her title: "I am not a black artist, I am an artist."[13] His phrase refers to the politicization of racial identity during the 1980s in the United States. During that period, the interpretations of non-white artists' artworks were usually limited to racial issues, and the visual qualities were overshadowed by highlighting politicized subject matter in such works.[14]Keramati explains that she has had similar experiences; her art has been viewed through the lens of ethnic group identification, something she flags in the first part of her title "I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile," a statement which both highlights and refuses that position. Her experience with international art institutions is especially complicated because there the understandings of her artworks are affected not only by her ethnicity, but also by such factors as nationality, gender, and immigration status. Keramati notes that she has been addressed as "an exotic product of the Middle East" by some art critics, and that the status of being in exile is

[13]Allerstorfer, "I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile, I am an artist," 150.
[14] Regarding the politicized identity of "non-white" artists in the contemporary art discourses of the 1980s, see Charles A. Wright, "The Mythology of Difference: Vulgar Identity Politics at the Whitney Biennial," in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, eds. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 263–279; Derek Conrad Murray and Soraya Murray, "Uneasy Bedfellows: Canonical Art Theory and the Politics of Identity," *Art Journal* 65, no.1 (2003): 22–39; Jacqueline Francis, *Making Race: Modernism and 'Racial Art' in America* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2012).

attached to her even though she was not forced to leave Iran and her immigration to Canada was for personal reasons.[15]

While Keramati, Karami, and Hedayat exhibit their works mostly in Iran, they have participated in many art exhibitions abroad. In my interviews with these artists, they all referenced experiences such as those Keramati mentions above. In some of the exhibitions they had participated in outside of Iran, curators and viewers assumed that the expression of politicized subject matter was the primary intent of these artists. In their experience, too often curators and viewers look for the representation of politicized and cultural identities in their artworks, analyzing the work on this basis and failing to give adequate attention to the *visual qualities* of the artworks. In my personal interview with three artists, in response to the questions of "Why do you resist the reflection of Iranian-Islamic identity in some of your recent works? What are the reasons behind this turn in your work? Do you have any experience with local or international art venues regarding the depiction of cultural identity in your work? Do any of these art venues or galleries emphasize that you should reflect cultural identity if you want your works to be exhibited in this venue?" they answered as follows:

> Keramati: It is common for the art of the artists with Middle Eastern backgrounds to be viewed as exotic by non-local audiences. I do not acknowledge this presumed vision. I prefer my art to be viewed without such presumptions. For example, in 2009, I portrayed myself with red lipstick smeared around my face and the work was read in relation to the death of Neda Agha Soltan, [the girl who was killed on the street during the post-presidential election demonstrations in Tehran in 2009.] I did not intend to refer to that incident, but such reference was given to my work.

[15]Allerstorfer, "I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile," 150. In my interview with Keramati, she mentioned Basquiat's assertion, touching on how her ethnic background had influenced the way her works had been read outside of Iran by some art curators or audiences.

However, in one of my later works, *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist*, I intentionally referred to Agha Soltan's death.[16]

Hedayat: At the San Francisco Art Institute, my instructors did not insist on representing cultural identity in my artwork, so I found this opportunity to distance myself from my Iranian identity. But, most of the time, when other students saw my works and university projects, they were looking for cultural references. The discussions about my works were usually around the matters outside of the works not the aesthetic values of the works. The matters such as cultural identity and the social conditions for women in Iran. Those experiences led me to avoid visual references to Iranian culture as much as I could and made my art more abstract.[17]

Karami: I do not have specific experience with art curators and audiences outside of Iran regarding the reception of my art in terms of exoticism. However, sometimes art curators have selected certain works to show overseas that were not my choices. Exotic art is sold very well at international art auctions, but I do not like my art to be categorized as exotic. I prefer to think of Iranian audiences first, and exotic art is not for Iranian audiences. I always like to show my works in Iran at first and then in the art venues outside of Iran.[18]

In order to counteract this process, my analyses in the chapters that follow explore how the three artists challenge reductive identity political mandates in the global art scene. In spite of the development of post-identity, post-black, post-queer, and post-feminist arguments in the 1990s and the increasing presence of international artists in the global art scene, categorizing artists based on simplistic and essentialist readings of identity still exists.[19]The artists I present in my

[16]Simin Keramati, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 23 December 2016.
[17]Ghazaleh Hedayat, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 19 December 2016.
[18]Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 30 December 2016.
[19]For more information about identity politics in mainstream art scenes, see Todd Gitlin, "The Rise of 'Identity Politics'," *Dissent* (1993): 172–177; Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State

dissertation have borne the brunt of such reductive and overt politicized interpretations, and they are critical of them. Following the art historian Hans Belting's discussion of the inclusion of "artists from formerly neglected cultures" within mainstream art scenes, the subject that I elaborate on in the following section, I address the selected artists as artists *from* Iran throughout the dissertation, not *Iranian* artists. Belting argues that when artists from neglected cultures enter mainstream art scenes that are mainly located in Western European and North American countries, they "discover their ethnicity as a personal identity that no longer is encumbered with a racial bias."[20] In Belting's view, the increasing presence of such artists in globalized art scenes "has been followed by a liberation from ethnic identity that defines ethnicity as a role rather than as a rule," which in turn results in abolishing "the exoticism of 'the other'."[21] For example, Belting mentions that V.S. Naipaul, in his autobiographical novel, *The Enigma of Arrival,* and Chéri Samba, in his self-portraits, perform their post-ethnic roles as "an 'artist from Africa' rather than to suffer the label of an 'African artist'."[22] This is the approach that I adopted to represent the selected artists problematize ethnicity in their works.

Globalization, Contemporary Art, and the Global Art Market

Within at least the last thirty years, contemporary art practices have been affected by the social, cultural, political, and economic changes caused by globalization. Globalization in a broad sense

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of Permanent Transition," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, eds. Okwui Enwezor, Terry Smith, and Nancy Condee, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 207–234; Rasheed Araeen, "The Artist as Post-Colonial Subject and This Individual's Journey Towards 'The Centre'" in *Views of Difference: Different Views of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 231–255; Chin-Tao Wu, "Worlds Apart: Problems of Interpreting Globalised Art," *Third Text* 21 (2007): 719–731.

[20] Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate," in *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums,* ed. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 57.

[21] Ibid., 58.

[22] Ibid.

concerns the interactions that different parts of the world have between one another in all areas of human life and activity.[23] In terms of culture, Mike Featherstone, a cultural studies scholar, believes globalization should be seen as "trans-national or trans-societal cultural processes."[24] By referring to Featherstone, Marc James Léger explains these trans-national processes are those "in which diverse cultural flows are mediated by the exchange of goods, capital, people, information, knowledge and images."[25] When it comes to art historical discourse, one can see the impacts of globalization on art in relation to the canon of art history. This canon has long been oriented to the Global North, but now includes artistic practices with origins in cultures from the Global South, a change that expands the discourses of global contemporary art.[26]In keeping with recent scholarly changes, I am primarily using the terms Global North and Global South in this dissertation, instead of the terms "West/East" or "Western and non-Western." Though the new terms continue to suggest a binary distinction between geographical areas, they are less

[23] On the meaning of globalization, see Jonathan Harris*, Art History: The Key Con*cepts (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 133; Jonathan Harris, introduction to *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 3–7. He explains globalization on the basis of five identifiable global networks: the distribution of goods; electronic transfer and trading of capital; transpiration; satellite communication; and the internet. Judith Rodenbeck discusses globalization in relation with other terms such as internationalization, liberalization, universalization, westernization, and global village. See Judith Rodenbeck, "Working to Learn Together: Failure as Tactic," in *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, 161–163. Fredric Jameson defines globalization in terms of its difference from international relations before 1980 and its difference from cultural imperialism. See James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim, eds., *Art and Globalization* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 13–15. Robertson argues that globalization is mainly applied to the description of historical processes of dispersing the idea of "Western" modernity worldwide. See Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London: Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995), 27.

[24] Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization & Modernity: a Theory, Culture & Society Special Issue* (London: SAGE Publications, 1990), 1.

[25] Marc James Léger, "Art and Art History After Globalisation," *Third Text* 26, no. 5 (2012): 515.

[26] There are many scholars who view contemporary art from a global perspective and challenge the art historical canon. For instance, Jean Fisher talks about the persistence of art scholarship from the Global North in seeing modernism as the invention and property of the so-called "West." She believes in the existence of many modernisms with their own local inflections that contribute to the reconfiguration of global aesthetics. See Jean Fisher, introduction to *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, eds. Jean Fisher and Gerardo Mosquera (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 2–8. See also, James Elkins, "Art History as a Global Discipline," in *Is Art History Global*?, ed. James Elkins (New York, London: Routledge, 2007).

embedded in historical stereotypes and point to broad and uncertain categories instead of fixed ones.[27]

Viewing contemporary art within a global perspective increased during the late 1980s and the early 1990s, when curators from the Global North decided to "enrich the larger culture" by featuring artworks that were "marginalized from the mainstream."[28] In the Global North, the shift in art institutional reception towards the artists from the so-called marginalized artists caused artists of color, artists from gender and ethnic minorities, and artists from the Global South to find more opportunities to exhibit their works in mainstream art venues.[29] This shift was the result of what art historian and art critic Terry Smith refers to as a worldwide cultural change and he calls it "the postcolonial turn,"[30] while Okwui Enwezor, a curator and art critic, names it

[27] For more information about the terms Global North and Global South see : D. Hill A. McGregor, "North–South," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, eds. Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009), 473–480.

[28] These statements were written in the catalogue of Whitney Biennial held at Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City in 1993. See Lisa Phillips, "No Man's Land: At the Threshold of a Millennium," in *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993), 61. This biennial was one of the controversial exhibitions that dealt with the theme of identity held in the United States in the early 1990s. Two groundbreaking international exhibitions which played great roles in bringing artists from the Golbal South into the Global North contemporary art context are: *Documenta 11* curated by Okwui Enwenzor held in Kassel Germany in 2002 and Franceso Bonami's *Dreams and Conflicts: The Viewer's Dictatorship* exhibition held at the Venice Biennale in 2003. See Okwui Enwenzor, ed., *Documenta 11, Platform 1:Democracy Unrealized* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002); and Franceso Bonami, *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer: 50th International Art Exhibition* (Venice: Marsilio, Biennale di Venezia, 2003). However, the first attempt to exhibit contemporary art in a globally inclusive manner was *Les magiciens de la terre* held in Paris in 1989. See Reesa Greenburg, "Identity exhibitions: from Magiciens de la terre to Documenta 11," *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (2005): 90–94. Although these exhibitions were successful in introducing of so-called marginalized artists and the artists form the Global South to the audiences and institutions in the Global North, there are many criticisms against the curatorial policies of these exhibitions, especially Whitney Biennial. These exhibitions are criticised in terms of the politicized selection of artworks dealing with the issues such as race and sexuality. Among critical reactions, see: Charles A. Wright, "The Mythology of Difference: Vulgar Identity Politics at the Whitney Biennial," in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since* 1985, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 263–279; Hal Foster et al., "The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial," *October* 66 (Autumn 1993): 3–27.

[29]For a discussion of changing policies in mainstream art exhibitions, see Monica Amor et al., "Liminalities: Discussions on the Global and the Local," *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (1998): 29–49, which features the discussion of six curators, artists and scholars about the interplay between contemporary art production and globalization. Monica Amor, in the section of this special edition, entitled "Whose World? A Note on the Paradoxes of Global Aesthetics," emphasizes the role that globalization plays in the distribution of contemporary art from the Global South.

[30] Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 7.

"the postcolonial constellation."[31] A development closely linked to this turn is that the contemporary art of Middle Eastern countries like Iran is now viewed in a globally inclusive manner by dominant art historical discourses. In Enwezor's view, "contemporary art today is refracted, not just from the specific site of culture and history but also —and in a more critical sense — from the standpoint of a complex geopolitical configuration that defines all systems of production and relations of exchange as a consequence of globalization after imperialism."[32] In addition, Smith argues that the postcolonial turn resulted when "art from the second, third, and fourth worlds, as well as art concerned with traffic between them and the first world, took up the most space and set the agenda for the whole."[33]

This globalization and focus on the contemporary art of the Global South might seem positive, offering more opportunities and visibility to a range of artists, including those from Iran. Yet the apparent inclusion of diverse artists cannot be separated from the expanding global art market and its emphasis on selling artwork for profit.[34] In the view of Hans Belting, auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's that opened their branches in the United Arab Emirates in the 2000s went hand-in-hand with the expansion of museums like the Louvre in Abu Dhabi, ensuring that the Middle East would have an impact on the circulation and perception of contemporary art.[35]His observation is commonplace, for the art historian Talinn Grigor, in her

[31] Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition," 208.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art,* 152.
[34]See Tim Griffin, ed, "Global tendencies: globalism and large-scale exhibition," *Artforum International* 42, no. 3 (November 2003): 152–167; Noel Carroll, "Art and Globalization Then and Now," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65 (2007): 131–143; Julian Stallabrass, *Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11.
[35] Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate," 38. The development of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, located in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, was based on an agreement signed between the government of Abu Dhabi and France in 2007. Another important museum in Abu Dhabi is the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. This museum developed by collaboration between the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the Abu Dhabi government, and it opened in 2013. See Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico, *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 101.

book *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio*, published in 2014, argues that there "seems to be a general consensus that international interest in contemporary Iranian art began with the opening of Western auction houses in the Persian Gulf states."[36]She goes on to note that this assumption gives too much agency to those auction houses, for a number of scholars, artists, and curators point to the long history of artistic production in Iran, and the active role of the privately owned galleries there. Grigor argues that since 1998, economic policies in Iran shifted to an open-market system and support for cultural dialogue in the arts, laying the groundwork for the reintroduction of a global art market into the Middle East, and thus for the increasing sales of artwork made in Iran.[37]

Regardless of how the origins of the contemporary global art market in the Middle East are characterized, many scholars see its impact as far from positive. The work of artists from Iran is often assessed according to the values and expectations of institutions from the Global North, which is discussed in the following section, and commercial organizations that act as gatekeepers. According to art historian Staci Gem Scheiwiller, the dominance of American, European, and Arab art markets, can force "Iranian artists to conform to styles and motifs that their foreign audiences and collectors would like to see as opposed to what they would like to express."[38]These foreign audiences demand work that they can understand; they have a "minimal tolerance for artworks that are not easily decodable," a position that art historian Foad Torshizi argues can favour more superficial artworks with recognizable motifs rather than complex, challenging, or ambiguous ones.[39]This demand impacts artists living both within and outside of

[36] Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art*, 200.
[37]Ibid.
[38]Staci Gem Scheiwiller, "(Neo)Orientalism: Alive and Well in American Academia: A Case Study of Contemporary Iranian Art," in *Middle East Studies after September 11: Neo-Orientalism, American Hegemony and Academia,* ed. Tugrul Keskin (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2018), 204.
[39]Torshizi, "The Unveiled Apple," 553.

Iran, though Hoda Afshar, a documentary photographer from Iran now living in Australia, has analyzed the particular impact that the hegemonic global art market has on those now living outside of Iran.[40]

The impact of the global art market was not raised during my interviews with Keramati, Hedayat, and Karami. But, as mentioned above, they indicated that curators and audiences expected their artworks to portray a certain ethnic identity, especially within an international context. As my focus in the interview was not the local market and their experiences with local art venues, the artists did not mention such restrictions in relation to exhibiting within Iran. However, the local market and art galleries in Iran have been affected by international expectations towards the art of Iranian artists.[41]As noted above, art galleries in Iran have been mostly privately owned, and there are many of them.[42] Grigor describes their expansion and argues that they should be considered "liminal spaces that negotiate the complexity of the relation between the public domain and the art world."[43]She places such art galleries in Iran at the edges rather than the centre of the global art market. Yet Iranian art galleries are influential; they focus on selling work to a broad audience, with gallery owners and curators selecting what works will be exhibited and which ones excluded from display, decisions informed by multiple factors, including the likely impact of global auction houses and art institutions. At least one exception to this focus on profit is the Sazmanab Project Space, founded in Tehran in 2009, and

[40]Hoda Afshar, "Visibility and Veiling: Iranian Art on the Global Scene" in *Seen and Unseen: Visual Cultures of Imperialism*, eds. Sanaz Fotouhi and Esmail Zeiny (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 172–195.
[41] In the first chapter of his dissertation named "Global Expansions and Local Claustrophobia: Contemporary Iranian Art and the Globalized Art World," Foad Torshizi elaborately explains the impact of global market and international art venues expectations on the local art market, private galleries, and Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in Iran. See Foad Torshizi, "The Clarity of Meaning: Contemporary Iranian Art and the Cosmopolitan Ethics of Reading in Art History" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2017), 1–86.
[42] For more about the galleries in Tehran, See Staci Gem Scheiwiller, "Disrupting bodies, negotiating spaces: Performance art in Tehran," in *Performing Iran: Culture, Performance, Theatre*, ed. Babak Rahimi (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 121–122.
[43] Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art*, 140.

analyzed by anthropologist Leili Sreberny-Mohammadi, who argues that the non-profit organization promotes dialogue within what she calls the "lively" art scene in Iran.[44]Though it is debatable to what degree the art galleries in Iran enforce the expectations of the global marketplace and the preferences of non-Iranian audiences, the interviews with the artists analyzed in this dissertation did not engage in such a debate. Instead, the three artists emphasized their efforts to, in Keramati's words, "challenge the cultural stereotypes" in works often displayed in international as well as Iranian spaces.

One such work meant to resist stereotypes is the video by Keramati introduced above. The title of this work announces the centrality of artistic identity, indicating the potential limitations of the expectations of her audiences, an issue I discuss more fully in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Keramati's artwork may also, however, resist the global art market. After all, it is not easy for collectors to purchase or possess a video work. According to Scheiwiller, in "contemporary Middle Eastern art markets, video art is not a major player at all; when it rarely shows up, it is mostly in singular film stills that can be bought as photographs and hanged in institutional and private spaces."[45]In that sense, Keramati both participates and intervenes in the global art market, even if she rarely discusses her work in these terms. Yet, unlike the video artists discussed by Scheiwiller, Keramati has not (yet) made her work freely available on such platforms as Vimeo or YouTube. Audiences must see the work at exhibitions such as the one in Sweden, or be granted access to the work online, as I was. Keramati retains some control over

[44]Leili Sreberny-Mohammadi, "The Practice of Art: An Alternative View of Contemporary Art-making in Tehran," in *Arts and Aesthetics in a Globalizing World*, ed. Raminder Kaur and Parul Dave-Mukherji (London, New Delhi, and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 61–71.
[45]Staci Gem Scheiwiller, "The Online Avant-Garde: Iranian Video Art and Its Technological Rebellion," in *Social Media in Iran: Politics and Society after 2009*, ed. David M. Faris and Babak Rahimi (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 279.

the distribution of this video, even if she insists on its role in refusing the stereotypes of "Iranian-ness" without explicitly denouncing the limitations of the global art market.

Iranian-ness, Orientalism, and neo-Orientalism

The presence of Middle Eastern artists in major international art venues and exhibitions has become ever greater in recent decades. The enthusiasm for the contemporary art of Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, can be detected in the proliferation of exhibitions organized in the Global North during the early years of the 2000s. Some of the pioneering and high-profile exhibitions were: *DisOrientation* held at Berlin's House of World Cultures in 2003, *Word Into Art: New Art from the Middle East* organized by British Museum in 2006 in London, *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2006, *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* held at *Saatchi* Gallery in London in 2009, and *Islamic Art Now: Contemporary Art of the Middle East* held at Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2015. The organizers of such exhibitions claimed that they introduced a new aspect of the art of these countries that differed from the conventional notion of Islamic art in disciplinary frames of art history.[46] The category of Islamic art is conventionally associated with decorative art and crafts. The use of the term Islamic for the artistic practices and architecture of the countries with Islam as their official religion reduce these practices to the religion of Islam and spirituality.[47]

[46]Venetia Porter and Isabelle Caussé, *Word Into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East* (London: British Museum, 2006); Fereshteh Daftari, *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006); Lisa Farjam, *Unveiled: New Art From the Middle East* (London: Booth-Clibborn, 2009).

[47]The term "Islamic art" in traditional art historical canon connotes religious and traditional art. This term is not accurate for describing all artistic practices that have been done in Islamic countries since the expansion of Islam. In traditional art historical canon there is a difference between "fine arts" as "high art" and "crafts" which are considered "low art", whereas such distinction is not defined between art and craft in Islamic culture. That is why the study of Islamic art mostly includes the examination of art objects produced by craftsmen and craftswomen. However, since the introduction of artistic style practices in the Global North into Islamic countries in the 19th

Nevertheless, the success of such exhibitions in introducing contemporary art as practiced in the Middle East is subject to criticism.[48]

The critical debates on the reception of the contemporary art of the Middle East in the Global North pivot around the representation of visual codes. These codes are called *visual regimes* through which the artworks become legible and intelligible within the Global North context.[49]Under these ideals and paradigms, the Middle Eastern artists are assumed to depict patterns, motifs, colours, forms, and any visual elements referring to Islamic civilization and certain cultures of the Middle Eastern countries. Despite the appearance of variety and difference, the mainstream international art exhibitions reinforce stereotypical understandings of the contemporary art of Islamic countries by featuring artworks that explicitly recall Islamic or local cultures in the region. The exhibited artworks usually include contemporary practices such as photography, video, and installations. But the Islamic decorative elements such as calligraphy and rhythmic linear and geometric patterns are discernable in the forms of most of the works. In terms of the content, such matters as political oppression and conflicts in the region are usually repeated in the selected works.[50]

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century, the issue of what is art and what is craft have largely affected the artistic practices in Islamic countries. This approach is also affected the modern and contemporary artworks of artists from Islamic countries. For more information see Oleg Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 1–14; Silvia Naef, "Reexploring Islamic Art: Modern and Contemporary Creation in the Arab World and Its Relation to the Artistic Past," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 164–174.

[48] Regarding the criticisms against these specific exhibitions see: Erin Macnab,""Passages Between Cultures": Exhibition Rhetoric, Cultural Transmission and Contemporaneity in Two Exhibitions of Contemporary Middle Eastern Art" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2011); Toni Laviece Calder, "Curating Cultures: An Empirical Inquiry" (MA diss., Stony Brook University, 2011).

[49] For the mechanism of the creation of these visual regimes and their roots in the legacies of colonialism, globalization, and art market see Terry Smith, "Visual regimes of colonialism: Aboriginal seeing and European vision in Australia," in *The Visual Culture Reader,* ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 1998), 483–494; Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Prita Meier, "Authenticity and Its Modernist Discontents: The Colonial Encounter and African and Middle Eastern Art History," *The Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2010),12–45.

[50]Nada Shabout, "Are Images Global?," *Tate Papers* 12 (Autumn 2009), accessed April 25 , 2021. http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/are-images-global; Nat Muller, "Contemporary Art in

When it comes to the reception of the artists who have Iranian backgrounds in the globalized art world, Iranian nationality and the religion of Islam are often expected to be explicitly referred to.[51] Not only is Iranian content expected of Iranian artists, but it is expected that this content be depicted through easily recognizable visual regimes and stereotypical signifiers. Some of the most repeated and decodable references to Iranian-Islamic cultural identity are: the images of the veil, mosques, Shia rituals, Persian miniatures and rugs, calligraphy, traditional and decorative motifs and abstractions such as arabesques. These visual regimes are not limited to stereotypical forms. They also include subject matter such as the portrayal of war and its dire consequences, the suppression of Iranian women under Islam, and a bold and critical stance against the regional political situation. All these forms and issues aim come to delimit how Iranian artists are expected to represent Iranian-ness for consumption on an international stage.[52]This demand does not only affect artists who usually participate in international art auctions and exhibitions, but also has considerable influence on artists who mainly work and exhibit in Iran.[53]

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the Middle East," in *Contemporary Art in the Middle East*, ed. Paul Sloman (London: Black Dog Pub., c2009), 12–25; Jessica Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam and the War on Terror, " *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2008): 651–681; Finbarr Barry Flood, "From the Prophet to Postmodernism? New World Orders and the End of Islamic Art," In *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (New York: Routledge, 2007), 31–53.

[51]Samine Tabatabaei, "Western Expectations and the Question of Self-Exoticism in the Works of Contemporary Iranian Photographers," in *Beyond Boundaries: East and West Cross-Cultural Encounters*, ed. Michelle Ying Ling Huang (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 152–169; Barbad Golshiri, "For They Know What They Do Know," *e-flux Journal* 8 (2009),accessed July 1, 2021, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/08/61377/for-they-know-what-they-do-know/;

[52] For more information about how Iranian-ness is defined by mainstream art institutions, see Torshizi, "The Unveiled Apple," 549–563.

[53]As the examples of how Iranian artists respond to the depiction of Iranian-ness and cultural identity, see Hamid Keshmirshekan, "The Crisis of Belonging: On the Politics of Art Practice in Contemporary Iran," in *Contemporary Art from the Middle East: Regional Interactions with Global Art Discourses*(London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 109–134; Hamid Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives* (London: Saqi, 2013)181–332; Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Contemporary or Specific: The Dichotomous Desires in the Art of Early Twenty-First Century Iran," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 4 (2011): 44–71; Hamid Keshmirshekan, "The Question of Identity vis-a`-vis Exoticism in Contemporary Iranian Art," *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 4(2010): 489–512; Sussan Babaie, "Voices of Authority: Locating the 'Modern' in 'Islamic' Arts," *Getty Research Journal* 3 (2011): 133–149;

As defined by the *Oxford English Diction*ary, a stereotype is not entirely false; it is partial and limiting. A stereotype is "a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.; an attitude based on such a preconception. Also, a person who appears to conform closely to the idea of a type."[54]Stereotypes are often used to think about imagined national types and their related personalities. In the view of art critic Craig Owens, the stereotype functions as a "system of subjection"; it produces "ideological subjects that can be smoothly inserted into existing institutions."[55]Scholars have studied the stereotypes that generalize about people from Iran, noting how they change over time depending on historical contexts, and are circulated by the mass media.[56]The stereotypes applied to works made by artists from Iran are related to such broader preconceptions about "Iranian people," but also draw from the visual conventions associated with the culture of Iran, including the decorative motifs noted above. These motifs are certainly meaningful and important in many circumstances, as is the practice of veiling in Iran. This content is nevertheless limiting when audiences expect to find it in artworks, a presumption that can undermine artistic agency and result in the production of superficial works that can be easily digested by audiences, as noted above.

Understandings of Iran and its visual culture are informed by the paradigms of Orientalism. As a theoretical structure, Orientalism explains the "Western" regime of

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Anthony Downey, "Diasporic Communities and Global Networks: The Contemporaneity of Iranian Art Today," in *Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art*, ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), 48–51; Fereshteh Daftari, "The Tip of the Iceberg: Contemporary Art in and out of Iran," in *Persia Reframed: Iranian Visions of Modern and Contemporary Art* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2019), 115–192; Fereshteh Daftari, "Introducing Iranian Art Abroad: A Curatorial Perspective," in *Persia Reframed*, 193–235; Abbas Daneshvari, "The Poetics of Knowledge, Knowing, and Identity: Seismic Shifts across Political Zones in Contemporary Iranian Art," in *Amazingly Original*, 6–81; Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art*.

[54]"stereotype, n. and adj.," *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), accessed July 21, 2022: https://www-oed-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/view/Entry/189956?rskey= vl0BfN&result= 1&is Advanced =false.

[55] Craig Owens, "The Medusa Effect, or, The Specular Ruse," in *Beyond Recognition. Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 194.

[56]See, for example, Sam Fayyaz and Roozbeh Shirazi, "Good Iranian, Bad Iranian: Representations of Iran and Iranians in 'Time' and 'Newsweek' (1998–2009)," *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 1 (January 2013): 53–72.

representing and constructing so-called "Eastern" cultures as the imagined Other. Cultural theorist Edward Said systematically explored this regime in his 1978 seminal book named *Orientalism*. He studied the power relations that shaped the conceptual production of the "East," especially the school of thought dominant among European colonial administrators and scholars during the colonial era. Said defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between the 'Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'."[57]In his understanding, the Orient was shaped under the superiority of the Occident as an "imaginative geography," and it was represented through sexist and racist fantasies, given voice in scholarship and literature but also in visual artworks.

Said's critical scholarship has been generative, inspiring responses that both expand on and critique his argument about how the Global North shaped knowledge of the Global South in order to create a fantasy of the "West" as unified, reasonable, and progressive. Some scholars have argued that Said overestimates the ability of the "West" to represent the "Orient," claiming that he potentially reinforces notions of the "Orient" as passive and outside of understandings of modernity. According to historian Mansour Bonakdarian, Said's arguments suggest that Orientalism was an "entirely Western generated mode of knowledge," and thus entirely oppressive in it impact, a point he contests.[58]

A number of scholars have studied how people from the so-called "Orient," including Persians, participated in the production of knowledge about the "Orient" and also the so-called "West" during their travels. Historian Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, for example, analyzes Persian travel literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to show how a diverse and global

[57]Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2.
[58] Mansour Bonakdarian, "(Re)Orienting Orientalism," *Radical History Review* 92 (Spring 2005): 175–183.

form of "Persianate" modernity was created in a way that was neither simply opposed to nor derived from the Global North.[59]Another work that highlights the agency of Persians in the production of knowledge about themselves and others is by Hamid Dabashi, an expert in Iranian studies. He examines the ways in which nineteenth-century Persian travelers interpreted their voyages around the world, including Europe, to challenge binary thinking about the "East and West" in the past as well as the present.[60]

Wael Hallaq, a scholar of Islamic legal studies, finds that these responses to Said, and indeed Said's arguments themselves, do not go far enough.[61]According to Hallaq, there is a much broader structure of knowledge to dismantle rather than merely critique or finesse. He states that:

> Unlike Said, I will argue that Orientalism is not just a structured system but also, and far more crucially, a *systemic* structure, which is to say that it was embedded in, defined by, corralled into, and driven by a larger structure that extended horizontally and vertically throughout the modern project and its Enlightenment (notwithstanding the fact that the latter was neither a single event nor, by any means, a host of consistent narratives).[62]

The extent of the structure identified by Hallaq can be undermined and perhaps even replaced by returning to a certain kind of Orientalist practice. Among other strategies, the author suggests analyzing the "spiritual richness" of the so-called "non-Western" world, to appreciate how it

[59] Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
[60] Hamid Dabashi, *Reversing the Colonial Gaze: Persian Travelers Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[61] Wael Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).
[62]Ibid, 9–10.

managed to avoid the fact/value division that is now dominant in the often violent forms of contemporary modernity.

This reevaluation of the Global South could be considered a positive form of neo-Orientalism, though it is quite different from the current revival of Orientalist ideas. Contemporary political, cultural, and ideological conflicts involving Muslim countries, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Afghanistan war, have contributed to a renewal of the colonial and imperial beliefs informed by Orientalism. According to Dabashi, neo-Orientalism has been enabled by what he categorizes as "native informants" and "comprador" immigrant intellectuals who promote inaccurate portrayals of their home countries to seek favour and rewards from their imperial hosts, especially in the United States.[63] Others, such as cultural theorists Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams, find that Dabashi overstates the complicity of these "informers" but agree that more or less new versions of Orientalism are increasing. They insist that:

> Although the term "neo-Orientalism" designates a shift in the discourse of Orientalism that represents a distinct, and in ways novel formation, it nonetheless entails certain discursive repetitions of and conceptual continuities with its precursor. Like its classical counterpart, for example, neo-Orientalism is monolithic, totalizing, reliant on a binary logic, and based on an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the Oriental other.[64]

One difference that Behdad and Williams identify in the "new" version of Orientalism is that there is no longer any pretense to objectivity or historical accuracy in binary fantasies about the

[63]Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).
[64]Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams, "Neo-Orientalism," in *Globalizing American Studies*, eds. Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 284.

"East," while some disseminators of neo-Orientalism overstate their experiential knowledge of Iran or other "Oriental" places.[65]

In contrast, a range of scholarship and artistic production draws on historical research and lived experience to present images of the Global South that are less monolithic and binary. One key issue that can illustrate this point is the shifting understanding of "race" in Iran. Equating Persian with Iranian is inaccurate, for Iran is a multiethnic nation comprised of Persians, Azeri Turks, Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs, Armenians, and other groups. Yet, as anthropologist and editor Alex Shams argues, Iranians are encouraged to embrace their "Aryan" blood and "white" skin, while distinguishing themselves from supposedly lowly Turks and Arabs. He argues that many Iranians have adopted a European system of racial hierarchy, and some even see themselves as "white," especially within the United States.[66]In her examination of the politics of race and American Iranians, sociologist Neda Maghbouleh finds that immigrants from Iran (and the Middle East more broadly) are invited to identify as "white/Caucasian" by the classificatory systems in the United States. Although those who check this box on government or other official forms may indeed consider themselves to be "white," they are subject to racialization and discriminatory practices within the United States, depending on their appearance and skin tone (i.e. on whether or not they can pass for "white").[67]Maghbouleh discovers cases of Iranian identities that shift from "white" to "non-white" or "brown," at odds with historical cases in

[65] For more information on the term neo-Orientalism and its impacts see Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in a Time of Terror* (New York: Routledge, 2017) and Scheiwiller, "(Neo)Orientalism."
[66]Alex Shams, "Are Iranians People of Color? Persian, Muslim, and Model Minority Race Politics," *Ajam Media Collective* (December 3, 2013), accessed July 21, 2022: https://ajammc.com/2013/12/03/are-iranians-people-of-color/.
[67]Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: American Iranians and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

which groups originally considered "non-white," such as the Irish, gained privileges and moved into the category of "white."[68]

Discussions of shifting racial identities in and outside of Iran are in keeping with a vast and influential body of scholarship that reveals "race" as historically specific and culturally constructed, rather than biologically determined.[69]People from Iran are classified differently in Canada, for instance, where statistical data links those from the Middle East with "Asia," and more specifically "West Asia," though it is possible for respondents to add another identification, such as "Iranian," to the census form. Canadians from Iran might also be identified as members of a visible minority group, in which a person is "defined as someone who is non-white in colour/race, regardless of place of birth."[70]This category, used to track employment equity, highlights the flexibility of racial categories, while recognizing that identity is often determined within social settings by means of perception and relational forms of looking.

The Orientalist Gaze and the Veil

The concept of the Orientalist gaze, key to the chapters that follow, draws on both the discourse of Orientalism, introduced above, and discussions of the gaze. Just as Orientalism is a complex and debated concept, so too is the concept of the gaze. The gaze, in its most basic definition, refers to a conventional type of looking, one that is informed by hierarchies related to class,

[68] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
[69] For an excellent overview of this research, see Ian F. Haney López, "The Social Construction of Race," *in Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013), 191–203.
[70] See the Government of Canada, "Census in Brief. Ethnic and Cultural Origins of Canadians: Portrait of a Rich Heritage," accessed July 23, 2022, https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016016/98-200-x2016016-eng.cfm and "Visible Minority of Person," accessed July 23, 2022, https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DEC&Id=45152.

identity, sexuality, race, gender, and a host of other factors. To gaze is to engage in an activity that makes meaning and can shift according to context; it depends on who is looking, who is being looked at, and the circumstances within which such looking takes place. The term implies the hierarchy of seer/seen, and it is often linked to issues of power and the superiority of the seer.[71]

In visual discourses, debates about the gaze and its function originate in feminist film theory and arguments about the "male gaze" made by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey. Mulvey affirms that "an active-passive heterosexual division of labour has...controlled narrative structure" in mainstream Hollywood cinema, making clear how this active-passive dichotomy frames two opposite points in the hierarchy of seeing.[72] The first one is the viewer as the active subject, who is presumed to be a male, and the second one is the passive object of representation, who is presumed to be a female. In this voyeuristic mode of looking, the passive female body as a spectacle becomes a source of visual pleasure, or scopophilia, for the active male viewer.[73]

One of the key responses to and revisions of this gendered understanding of the gaze was the analysis of the related Orientalist gaze, which enriched theories of gendered looking with considerations of racial and ethnic categories. The Orientalist gaze recognizes differences in who is looking and who is set up to be looked at within imperial and colonial settings; this gaze is often created and reinforced in forms of visual media, including "Orientalist" paintings and

[71]For a range of understandings of the gaze, see Ann Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?" in *Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Routledge, 1988), 24–35; Joan Copjec, "The orthopsychic subject: Film theory and the reception of Lacan," *October 49* (1989): 53–71; Mary Ann Doane, " Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator, " *Screen* 23, no. 3–4 (September/ October 1982): 74–88; Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 125–227. See also Kaja Silverman, "What Is a Camera?, or: History in the Field of Vision," *Discourse* 15, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 3–56.
[72] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1976): 12.
[73]Voyeurism, fetishism, and scopophilia are most famously described by Sigmund Freud, and later they are developed by other psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan and Luce Irigaray. For more information, see Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen, *Female Fetishism: A New Look*(London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994).

photographs. The term Orientalism refers not only to a structure or broader system of knowledge construction, as noted above, but, within the discipline of art history, to an artistic style produced during the nineteenth century in Europe. Paintings and photographs made largely by white, privileged European men conveyed an imaginative, romanticized, and objectifying depiction of colonized cultures and peoples, especially women from the so-called "East." In these Orientalist paintings, Middle Eastern women were exoticized and essentialized by being depicted as either sexually mysterious women covered by the veil, or as seductive women located in such places as *harems* and baths.[74]In Orientalist photography, the colonizer's camera acted as a cultural apparatus to corroborate the production of Oriental imagery and essentialized representations of female bodies through a racialized and phallocentric gaze.[75]These images both reflected and created a mode of seeing, an "Orientalist gaze," that shaped, and continues to shape, how spectators from the Global North have observed and understood other cultures. As an apparatus of looking, the camera has participated in the creation of this way of looking and observation. In the case of Middle Eastern cultures, the long history of Orientalist painting, photography, and documentary filmmaking, has affected this mode of looking, and it has been maintained by the contemporary circulation of such imagery in mass media and pop culture.[76]This longstanding

[74]Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Judy Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths: Western Travelers' Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991); Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi, eds., *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[75] For more information about the function of Orientalist photography and its history in the context of Iran, see Ali Behdad, *Camera Orientalis: Reflections on Photography of the Middle East* (Chicago, IL; London: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2013).

[76]See Clifford, James, "On Orientalism," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 255–276; Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson, eds., *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (New York: Routledge, 2002);Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003); Matthew H. Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, eds., *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press, 1997); Robert Stam and Louise Spence, "Colonialism, Racism and Representation," *Screen*24, no 2(March/April 1983): 2–20.

gaze has a range of names; it is called the "postcolonial gaze" (Peter Beardsell), the "imperial gaze" (Ann Kaplan), the "Orientalist gaze" (Reina Lewis), the "disciplinary gaze of empire" (Ella Shohat), and the "ethnographic gaze" (Fatimah Rony).[77] I choose the term Orientalist gaze in order to maintain its historical references, while recognizing that this gaze is neither unified nor unchanging. Moreover, in my analyses of the works, I do not aim to dichotomize the selected artists and the audiences viewing the works at the global stage into two separate racialized groups; non-white and white people. I do not intend to show that the artists identify their racial identity as "non-white" or presume that all audiences viewing the works in international art exhibitions would identify as "white." When it comes to the reception of the works within globalized art scenes, I discuss how the artists employ the practices of photography and video to challenge Orientalist epistemologies made through the camera in the Global North over time. These Orientalist epistemologies have affected the lens through which their artworks are viewed in a global context. I investigate how the selected artists resist accepting the representation of ethnicity as an ontological phenomenon, which can be turned into a spectacle by those audiences who might adopt the system of looking of the Orientalist gaze.

Understandings of the practice of veiling have been central to articulations of the Orientalist gaze in both the past and the present. This gaze has often been directed at women, a configuration famously analyzed by literary critic and author Malek Alloula, in his book *The Colonial Harem*, first published in 1981. He argues that the commercial photographs and postcards of Algerian women produced during the early twentieth century — the women were often shown veiled and with their breasts exposed — promoted French fantasies about "Oriental"

[77]Peter R. Beardsell, *Europe and Latin America: Returning the Gaze* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge,1996); Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*; Ella Shohat, "Imaging Terra Incognita: The Disciplinary Gaze of the Empire," *Public Culture* 3, no. 2 (1991): 41–70; Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

women both to portray Algeria as a strange and backward place and to justify the French colonial conquest of Algerian land.[78] In an earlier publication, "Algeria Unveiled," the political philosopher Frantz Fanon had already linked colonial goals with efforts to look at and possess Algerian women, insisting that the veiled Algerian woman "who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer," when he strives to transform her into a possession.[79]Photographer and artist Jananne Al-Ani has similarly viewed images of veiled Algerian women as portraying the gaze of the French photographer who usurps the position of Muslim men by displaying his supposed control of Algerian women.[80]These scholars agree that historical representations of veiled Algerian women were produced and viewed within a context informed by aggressive colonial efforts and gendered acts of domination.

Scholars recognize that veiling is far more than a dress practice; it has a range of meanings that can change according to context. Literary scholar Alison Donnell argues that using the word veil is itself homogenising, for a range of terms, including *hijab*, *niqab*, *chador*, *burka*, and *tarha*, attest to the diversity of practices and places in which veiling occurs.[81]Various practices of veiling have often been linked with the oppression of Muslim women, especially by liberal feminists from the Global North, but also by women from the Global South, as when Egyptian feminists supported the removal of the veil during the early twentieth century.[82]Yet at other times, the veil can defy oppression, as when, according to Fanon, it was a form of

[78] Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
[79] Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, eds. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 77.
[80]Jananne Al-Ani, "Acting Out," in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, eds. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003),100.
[81] Alison Donnell, "Visibility, Violence and Voice? Veiling Post-11 September," in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, eds. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003),132.
[82] Fatemeh Fathzadeh, "The Veil: An Embodied Ethical Practice in Iran," *Journal of Gender Studies* 30, no. 2 (2021): 150–164.

resistance to French colonial oppression in Algeria during the 1950s and 1960s.[83]In Iran, during the 1979 Islamic Revolution, some groups of women adopted wearing the veil as a tool for the expression of Muslim women's agency, and Islamic revolutionaries promoted veiling as a symbol of revolutionary resistance against the westernization enforced by the Pahlavi monarchy.[84]More recently, according to Donnell, the image of the veil has been renewed with negative connotations:

> The familiar and much-analysed Orientalist gaze through which the veil is viewed as an object of mystique, exoticism and eroticism and the veiled woman as an object of fantasy, excitement and desire is now replaced by the xenophobic, more specifically Islamophobic, gaze through which the veil, or headscarf, is seen as a highly visible sign of a despised difference.[85]

Scholars have studied the shifting understandings of the veil in relation to Iran in particular. Feminist researcher Azadeh Fatehrad argues that compulsory veiling and the segregation of men from women in post-Revolutionary Iran "charges the act of looking" and has the effect of sexualizing women's "mysterious" bodies.[86]In her thorough discussion of veiling in Iran, feminist scholar Fatemeh Fathzadeh insists that veiling is neither oppressive nor liberating; instead, Iranian women make "ethical and theological choices within specific contexts," even as enforced veiling in public creates a strong Islamic image within public space, and regulates women's bodies in the private space of the home, inscribing them with a gendered

[83] Al-Ani, "Acting Out," 103.
[84] See Zoreh T. Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in Twentieth-Century Iran." in *Global Feminisms since 1945: A Survey of Issues and Controversies*, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2000), 245; Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, eds. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1997), 265–266.
[85] Donnell, "Visibility, Violence and Voice? Veiling Post-11 September," 122–123.
[86]Azadeh Fatehrad, "The Veiled Body: The Alienated System of 'Looking' in Post-revolutionary Iran (1979–Present)," in *Revisiting the Gaze: The Fashioned Body and the Politics of Looking*, eds. Morna Laing and Jacki Willson (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 78.

difference.[87]Women engage with and reshape the veil, sometimes with small resistances and sometimes with more daring statements and images posted online, not simply as a form of self-expression but in relation to a range of factors.[88]

Veiling is just as complex when portrayed within the contemporary art world. The veil has been used as a recurring image by many women and men artists from Iran alike.[89]Amirali Ghasemi, a well-known Tehran-based artist and curator, uses the term "chador art" to refer to the sheer abundance of this imagery.[90] The *chador* is a full body-length veil that covers the female body from head to foot. It is made from a range of fabrics in plain or patterned black or in modest colours with a variety of motifs and patterns. A black chador is worn mainly outdoors, and it has been promoted by the revolutionary government as the best form of hijab since the early years of the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Although wearing the veil and covering the body are mandatory for women in public places in Iran, wearing a chador is not mandatory. A black chador is usually adopted by women who prefer to follow stricter religious values in public. Among these women, there are some who participate in state-sponsored demonstrations such as the demonstration of the Islamic Revolution's Victory Day or public religious gatherings, and they wear black chador in such public gatherings. In addition, women

[87]Fatemeh Fathzadeh, "The Veil: An Embodied Ethical Practice in Iran," *Journal of Gender Studies* 30, no. 2 (2021): 150–164.

[88]For more information about various forms of hijab in Iran and the connotations of different styles of veiling in Iran, see Hamideh Sedghi, "Women, the 1979 Revolution, and the Restructuring of Patriarchy,"in *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199–220; Azadeh Fatehrad, *The Poetics and Politics of the Veil in Iran: An Archival and Photographic Adventure* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2019); Asef Bayat, "Feminism of Everyday Life," in *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2010), 96–114.

[89] The images of the chador and other forms of *hijab* practising in Iran are used by many well-known women and men artists who work in or outside of Iran. Although these artists visually refer to the practice of veiling, they adopt various approaches towards this theme. Some of the female artists are Sonia Balassanian, Shirin Neshat, Parastou Forouhar, Ghazal, Shadi Ghadirian, Haleh Anvari, Houra Yaghoubi, Shirin Aliabadi, Newsha Tavakolian, and Gohar Dashti. Among men artists who have used the images of veiled women are Ahmad Morshedlou, Shahram Entekhabi, and Afshin Pirhashemi.

[90] Pamela Karimi, "When Global Art Meanders on a Magic Carpet: A Conversation on Tehran's Roaming Biennial," *The Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 294.

who have high-level official positions or work in specific state-run and religious organizations have to wear a black chador as the mandatory dress code.[91]That said, the chador cannot be identified with all Iranian women.

Wearing the veil and various forms of hijab, including chador, has a long history in Iran.[92] The practice of veiling has been affected by various factors — personal, social, cultural, religious, and political. Hence, it has generated various meanings, and ascribing limited meanings such as oppression or exoticism to the image of the veil is reductive. That is why some art critics in Iran, such as Ghasemi and Barbad Golshiri, critically analyze the reception of the images of chador and veiled bodies in Iranian contemporary art practices, asserting that such images homogenize diversity and obscure reality.[93] Ghasemi claims that chador art is the epitome of the visual codes in many curators' canonization of Iranian contemporary art in the Global North. It signifies those stereotypes about Iran populated by the mass media. In his view, chador art is the sign of "the Iran-Iraq war, the post 9/11 world, terrorism, Sufi approaches to Islam, the position of women in Iranian and Islamic societies, etc."[94]

Shirin Neshat is the most famous artist from Iran (now based in New York) who regularly represents veiling in her work. She has exhibited internationally and has received a great deal of critical attention. Neshat's works are often considered emblematic of Iranian-ness in

[91] For more information about the chador and its status in post-revolutionary discourses, see Sedghi, "Women, the 1979 Revolution, and the Restructuring of Patriarchy,"199–220.
[92]Regarding the history of veiling in Iran and the social and cultural denotations and connotations that are conveyed through the practice of veiling in Iran see Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads," 251–254; Mehran Kamrava and Manochehr Dorraj, eds., *Iran Today: An Encyclopedia of Life in the Islamic Republic* (Westport,CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 501–508; Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 39–73.
[93]Karimi, "When Global Art Meanders on a Magic Carpet," 288–299; Barbad Golshiri, "For They Know What They Do Know."
[94]Karimi, "When Global Art Meanders on a Magic Carpet," 294. As an example of reading the images of veiled Iranian women in relation with the post-9/11 context, see Jared Ahmad, "Nightmarish Visions? Shifting Visual Representations of the 'Islamic' Terrorist Throughout the 'War on Terror'," in *Seen and Unseen: Visual Cultures of Imperialism*, eds. Sanaz Fotouhi and Esmail Zeiny (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 55–78.

its stereotypical meaning because her well-known photographs feature a juxtaposition of imperturbable female bodies concealed by a chador alongside phallic-shaped rifles and calligraphic inscriptions. The main theme of her work is the impact of institutionalized power and patriarchal culture on the construction of gendered identity in Iran. She uses the female body to represent issues such as the treatment of women in the frame of a political reading of Islam, the construction of gender and cultural identity, and strategies of resistance and control policies (figure 2 and figure 3).[95] The ambiguity in Neshat's works, however, makes it difficult to pin certain meanings to them. That is why her artworks have a considerable number of proponents as well as opponents. Some critics accuse Neshat of self-exoticism, promoting stereotypical representations of Iranian-ness, and the deployment of the image of the veil as the symbol of exoticized and oppressed Iranian women.[96]According to the viewpoint of Neshat's critics, she has become one of the most well known Middle Eastern artists to live and work in the United States precisely because her art complies with the stereotypical presumptions about the image of Muslim women.[97] Other art critics, however, believe that these political and reductive readings are not intended to be conveyed by the works.[98]In Hamid Dabashi's view, such interpretations may distort appropriate art historical analyses of Neshat's work.[99]

[95] See Melissa Chiu and Melissa Ho, eds. *Shirin Neshat: Facing History* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2015); Farzaneh Milani, "The Visual Poetry of Shirin Neshat," in *Shirin Neshat*, eds. Shirin Neshat and Farzaneh Milani (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2001), 6–13

[96] As an example see: Iftikhar Dadi, "Shirin Neshat's Photographs as Postcolonial Allegories," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 34, no. 1 (2008): 125–150; Igor Zabel, "Women in Black," *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (2001): 16–25; Ana Finel Honigman, "Against the Exotic," *ArtReview* 3, no. 9 (September 2005): 96–99.

[97] See Wu, "Worlds Apart," 719–731; Zabel, "Women in Black," 16–25; Dadi, "Shirin Neshat's Photographs as Postcolonial Allegories," 125–50; Honigman, "Against the Exotic," 96–9; Martha Schwendener, "Shirin Neshat," *Artforum* 40 (2001): 195.

[98] Hamid Dabashi, "Shirin Neshat: Transcending the Boundaries of an Imaginative Geography," in *The Last Word,* ed. Octavio Zaya (San Sebastián: Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 31–85; Arthur C. Danto, "Shirin Neshat by Arthur C. Danto," *BOMB* 73 (2000): 60–67.

[99] Dabashi, "Shirin Neshat," 49.

Continual debate about the representation of veiling suggests that the veil could be considered a "super-sign." Negar Mottahedeh, a cultural critic and film theorist, and Sara Saljoughi, a media scholar claim that the image of veiled female bodies in the contemporary art of Iran is turned into a "super-sign," with reference to the definition of that term by Lydia Liu.[100]In her book, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making*, comparative literature scholar Liu investigates how the cultural interaction between the British powers and China can be traced at linguistic and semiotic levels, where the imperialists attempted to establish sovereignty over China while China tried to maintain its own authority. Liu presents the super-sign as "a linguistic monstrosity that thrives on the excess of its presumed meanings by virtue of being exposed to, or thrown together with, foreign etymologies and foreign languages."[101]Referring to a historical incident, Liu claims that British people insisted on translating the Chinese word *yi* into "barbarian," whereas before that time, they had known the word itself meant foreigner in Chinese, and it did not have an insulting meaning. Associating *yi* with derogatory meanings, and prohibiting the use of this word by the British in Chinese official documents, resulted in the elimination of this word from the Chinese language. Liu calls the creation of this new denotation a "hetero-linguistic super-sign."[102] This term means that a new concept can connect two ideas from two different cultures, influence both of them, and suggest the dominance of one over the other. The new meaning finds its place in the local language by camouflaging itself in the unchanged face of the existing indigenous word.[103] Along these lines, the veil and its visual significance as a super-sign can connect cultures, create new meanings,

[100]Negar Mottahedeh and Sara Saljoughi, "Rethinking Gender in Contemporary Iranian Art and Cinema," *Iranian Studies* 45, no. 4 (July 2012): 501. Lydia Liu*, The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, 2004), 8.
[101]Liu*, The Clash of Empires*, 13.
[102] Ibid., 8.
[103] Ibid., 14.

and yet continue to promote hierarchies within the globalized art world. Though some artists, consciously or not, potentially absorb the hegemony of these visual regimes by engaging in self-exoticization, I contend that the three artists discussed in this dissertation renegotiate conventional expectations in relation to the veil, and adopt oppositional approaches to this super-sign as strategies of resistance.[104]

Subjectivity , Embodiment, and Mutual Subject-to-Subject Recognition

The three artists analyzed in this dissertation produce photographic and video works that feature images of themselves. They thus invoke the genre of self-portraiture and its tradition in the Global North. There, self-representational artwork is conventionally interpreted within the frameworks of autobiography, and it is linked to the concept of the artist and the artist's knowledge of their identity.[105] Since the meaning of the artist and the self have changed significantly over time, what entails a self-portrait has gone through changes as well. Feminist art historian Marsha Meskimmon, in her discussion on women artists' self-portraiture in modern and contemporary art styles mainly practiced in European and North American countries from the late twentieth century onward, argues that considering self-portraiture as a mere personal history in the traditional sense is reductive. This consideration undermines "contextualizing self-

[104] For more reading on self-exoticism in the contemporary art of Iran, see Scheiwiller, "(Neo)Orientalism: Alive and Well in American Academia: A Case Study of Contemporary Iranian Art," 194–213. For different approaches towards the depiction of the visual regimes related to the veil in the artworks of Iranian women, see: Hamid Keshmirshekan, "The Question of Identity vis-à-vis Exoticism in Contemporary Iranian Art,"489–512; Afshar, "Visibility and Veiling: Iranian Art on the Global Scene" 172–195; Daneshvari, "Expression of Gender in Contemporary Iranian Art," 82–117; Allerstorfer, "Performing Visual Strategies," 173–192.

[105] See Joanna Woodall, ed., *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Shearer West, *Portraiture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013); James Hall, *The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2014); Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves Photography and Autobiography* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 1997).

portraiture as an art historical genre" in terms of the relationship between the artist and her image.[106] In Meskimmon's view, self-portraiture reveals how the artist sees herself, rather than portraying what she looks like. The selected artists of this dissertation adopt Meskimmon's view in their self-reflective works. In these works, they do not represent a faithful likeness of their appearances. Their works are not a representational act. Rather, they are performative creative practice to portray them as women occupying the role of the subject.

The artist's self-portrait illustrates their inquiry into the self. Here, the question is what is the meaning of the self? Hamid Naficy, a media scholar, in his article "Women and the Semiotics of Veiling and Vision in Cinema," explains that in many countries located in the Global South such as Iran "the self is not fully individuated or unified as it is purported to be in the West," and it is more "familial and communal."[107] This is because of the strong familial relationships and the hierarchical structure of communal relationships. This definition of the self is more associated with the outer aspect of the self, and its importance in shaping self-awareness in societies like Iran. In his view, the different senses of the self stem from various everyday experiences and personal and communal relationships of people living in different societies. But he claims that "psychic life is to a large extent universal."[108]Naficy uses "Western theories cross-culturally" to develop his argument about the construction of the self and the codes of looking in Iranian cinema, but he does not "intend to Westernize the psyche or the unconscious or to posit any inferiority or superiority."[109] Meanwhile, he pays "attention to the play of differences and

[106] Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Scarlet Press, 1996).
[107] Hamid Naficy, "Women and the Semiotics of Veiling and Vision in Cinema," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 8, no. 1-2 (1991): 47.
[108]Ibid., 48.
[109]Ibid.

sameness across cultures and cultural discourse."[110] I adopt such an approach to discuss how the selected artists perform the notions of the self and subjectivity in their art. While I consider the artists' distinctive personal experiences and their Iranian cultural and social backgrounds, I base my arguments on feminist theories about the self and subjectivity.

In my analyses of the articulation of subjectivity and the concept of subject, I rely on feminist theories of subjectivity that question the notion of the self as a given essence or a fixed entity.[111]These theories view the self from the diverse range of women's experiences, and they emphasize the role of embodiment in the construction of female subjectivity. I use the definition of subjectivity offered by feminist philosopher Linda Martin Alcoff as "a lived experience of self."[112] In her article, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" she defines subjectivity as "my own sense of myself, my lived experience of my self, or my interior life."[113] In this dissertation, I look for the relationship between the lived experiences, embodiment, and the construction of subjectivity in the selected artworks. The artists of my dissertation deal with the subject matter of lived experiences in different ways. As will become clear in the chapters that follow, in Keramati's and Hedayat's videos, the lived experience is performed during the running time of the video, where the artists experience giving an unblinking stare or listening to music. But in

[110]Ibid.
[111]See Diana Tietjens Meyers, "Introduction," in *Feminists Rethink the Self* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, eds., *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997);Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (New York: Routledge,1999); Morwenna Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge 1995); Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin, eds., *Embodiment and Agency* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvannia State University Press,2009); Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
[112] Linda Martin Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Paula Moya and Michael Hames-Garcia (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 336.
[113] Ibid.

Karami's work, the lived experience refers to her personal experience of the practice of veiling in real life.

All the three artists I discuss here perform their embodied subjectivities. Keramati and Hedayat perform their subjectivities in relation to temporality in their videos. They demonstrate how their bodies are involved in listening to the music and staring without blinking during the time of filming. Karami refers to the role of temporality in the work concerning the practice of veiling and aging. She also focuses on the role of spatiality in the construction of her embodied subjectivity. In one of her works, she situates herself in a domestic space to represent how that place affects her body. In an interview with me on December 30, 2016, Karami stated: "I like to express what I have experienced with the audience. I share my lived experience in my works."[114]

Regarding the role of embodiment in the construction of subjectivity, I rely on the theoretical inquiries of feminist phenomenologists, such as Elizabeth Grosz, who recognize the body as the site from which women construct and know the world. [115] In her book, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism,* Grosz introduces "embodied subjectivity" to explore the corporeal roots of subjectivity.[116] Grosz refutes the separation of mind from body to describe how consciousness and corporeality are intertwined to shape the process of gaining knowledge and being aware of the existence of ourselves and the world in which we live. In terms of the description of female subjectivity, she emphasizes the importance of women's lived bodies and embodied experiences in the construction of female subjectivity. Grosz regards temporality and spatiality as two main parameters of this construction. In her view, the female embodied subject

[114]Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 30 December 2016.
[115]Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).
[116]Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*.

is fluid and volatile. This volatility suggests that subjectivity is an ongoing process, and it is not a finished product.

By offering in-depth analyses, I explore how these artists interrogate, re-define, criticize, and conceptualize Iranian-ness in a personal way based on their lived experiences. All three artists provide their audiences with the performance of diverse Iranian-ness instead of the representation of simplistic, single, and decodable Iranian-ness. They introduce themselves as embodied subjects instead of objectified bodies. Their works lead to the construction of an intersubjective relation between the artist and the viewer in which both occupy the position of being subject. I demonstrate how they use the camera-based art of photography and video to perform the role of artist-as-subject and change their voices from the third person *one* into the first person *I.*

Media scholar Ann Kaplan in her book, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*, claims that the Orientalist gaze is a phallocentric objectifying gaze that "refuses mutual gazing, mutual subject-to-subject recognition."[117] She proposes a looking relation as a resistance strategy against this gaze. In her view, while the gaze implies a fixed type of looking under the control of one viewing subject, a looking relation seeks for a mutual and intersubjective relation between two viewing subjects. In this dissertation, one of my main purposes is to show how the artists I discuss build such a mutual subject-to-subject recognition while challenging the Orientalist gaze. In other words, through this challenge, they build a looking relation in which both the artist and the viewer are subjects. These subjects are heterogeneous, relational, embodied, and situated.

[117]E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 79.

I contend that Ghazaleh Hedayat, Simin Keramati, and Katayoun Karami undermine the Orientalist gaze by deploying visual codes and formal techniques that bring attention to their embodied subjectivity, thereby, literally in some cases and figuratively in others, returning the gaze. In their self-reflective works, they are both the subjects and objects of their art. But they do not let their bodies to be turned into objectified racialized bodies through the Orientalist gaze. In other words, they try to not let the viewers turn their bodies into a spectacle ready to be voyeuristically observed. This attempt is challenging as, as art theorist Amelia Jones puts it, "the body is always already gendered, sexed, and raced. The body is always already *in* representation, even when presented 'live'."[118] In order to deal with such issues, the artists apply various strategies to hinder ascribing presumed meanings to their bodies. They apply visual strategies such as repetition and the usage of blurred images, or they generate tactile sensations in the audiences by performing a nosebleed or vulnerable eyes refusing to blink. I explore how these artists visually and affectively challenge the identification of their bodies by engaging the audiences' bodies and minds and placing the audiences in relation to their bodies. In addition, they undercut the self-possessive and all-encompassing properties of the Orientalist gaze by returning the Orientalist gaze and disrupting its continuity. In particular, in Hedayat's and Keramati's works, where the artists intentionally gaze back at the viewers, and their flowing tears and blood interrupt the continuous gaze of the viewer at their faces. In this regard, they destabilize the mastery of the Orientalist gaze, unsettling the dichotomy of the viewer as active subject and the female bodies as passive objects of representation.

[118]Amelia Jones, "1970/2007: The Return of Feminist Art," *X-TRA: Contemporary Art Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (2008), https://www.x-traonline.org/article/19702007-the-return-of-feminist-art/

The artists featured in this dissertation

The selected artists, Ghazaleh Hedayat, Simin Keramati, Katayoun Karami, on whom I focus this dissertation, share critical approaches towards the issues of self-exoticism, Iranian-ness, and the illustration of stereotypical cultural and national symbols in their artworks. This section of my introduction provides biographical information about each of them, while referring to their artistic practice quite broadly before I analyze specific artworks in each of the three chapters of this dissertation.

Ghazaleh Hedayat

Born in Tehran in 1979, Ghazaleh Hedayat received a BFA in Photography from Tehran Azad University in 2002. She continued her major at San Francisco Art Institute in the United States, where she completed her MFA in New Genre in 2005. After graduation in 2005, she came back to Iran, and since then she has worked and lived in Iran. Her practices span photography, video, and assemblage with a focus on photographic methods. Hedayat adopts certain aspects of minimalist and post-minimalist aesthetics in most of her work, including the repetition of forms with some degree of variability, as well as the use of abstraction, hand-made replication, irregular forms, and different mixed materials. In her assemblages, she uses fragile materials such as parchment, nylon stocking fabric, and human hair, juxtaposing them with such sharp objects as nails, pins, and scissors. In my interview with her, she highlighted the impact of minimalism and post-minimalism on her work. I asked these questions: "Could you please talk more about your education? and Have you ever been inspired by any non-Iranian artists who are critical of the depiction of cultural identity?" She answered:

> During my master's in New Genres at the San Francisco Art Institute, I had a class with Paul Kos, who inspired me a lot. He is a conceptual artist who adopts minimalist aesthetics in his works. His vision and approach have influenced my works.[119]

> When I was at San Francisco Art Institute, I studied the artworks of Eva Hesse and Doris Salcedo and was inspired a lot by them. The visual qualities of their works have directly and indirectly affected my works.[120]

Hedayat deals with self-identification, representation, the depiction of the female body, and embodiment in her works. Although these themes has been repeated in some of her work, in my interview with Hedayat, she expressed that she does not aim to intentionally and consciously follow one common idea in all of her works. She stated that, "I start to work unconsciously, but when I look at the finished product and compare it with my other works, I can find a pattern and concern shared among them."[121]

I focus on two works by her, namely*بدون عنوان* (*Untitled,* 2005) and *بدون عنوان* (*کاغذ دیواری*) (*Untitled,*2004, since this work is rendered as wallpaper, it is usually referred as "wallpaper"). The first one is a video featuring a close-up of Hedayat's face. In six and a half minutes, she engages her audience with an unblinking gaze (figure 4). The second work features several paper rolls attached to the gallery's walls. A tiny image of Hedayat's identity card photograph is repeated across these rolls (figure 5).

Hedayat's video is important in terms of challenging viewers to discard their stereotypical expectations about a Middle Eastern woman. In my interview with Hedayat, she touched upon

[119]Ghazaleh Hedayat, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 19 December 2016.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

how the small image of a headscarf and her flowing tears are read as signs of oppression for women in Iran. I demonstrate that her video is not *about* veiling or other restrictions for women in Iran. Rather, it captures a form of being in time caused by her struggle to avoid blinking. It is about her specific embodied experience, not a generalized ethnic or national identity.

Hedayat's wallpaper is another important work in terms of challenging the representation of identity and the reflection of what is considered Iranian-ness. But this challenge is provided at a different level because the work proposes a multilayered view of the notion of the representation of identity. In my interview with Hedayat, she indicated that the launching point for creating this work was a surveillance and recording program that obliged the citizens of announced Muslim countries to be fingerprinted and photographed in 2004 in the United States. That said, thus far she has not mentioned this issue publicly, in statements linked to the exhibitions of this work. Hedayat does not wish to limit her work by attaching it to a certain political stance against that surveillance program. Her work encompasses a broader range of concerns, such as the representation of the self in self-portraiture, the indexicality of identity in photography, and embodied viewership.

The trajectory of Hedayat's works shows a critical concern over the gradual adopting an abstract style in contrast to the earlier figurative works. Her works also gradually have distanced from the explicit cultural visual references and shifted to more personal concerns and abstraction. In my interview with Hedayat, she indicated that she chose abstraction as a visual strategy to resist the depiction of cultural identity when her art found its way into art exhibitions outside of Iran.[122] For example, *My Isfahan* series (2002), one of Hedayat's earliest works, features her body located within the historical sites and traditional interior places in the city of Isfahan in

[122] Ibid.

Iran. Not only does the name of the series refer directly to the name of a well-known city in Iran, but also the photographs in this series are full of recognizable elements recalling Iranian-Islamic culture (figure 6). Hedayat, in this series, considers the embodied understanding of emplacement, trying to discover her bodily presence in private and public places shaped by culture and tradition.

In contrast to *Isfahan* series, which displays iconic and familiar places in Iran, *Taxiography* (2009) is a series that conceals explicit references to culture and location, though the work is about the city of Tehran. Hedayat in *Taxiography* returns to the subject matter of the body's relation to its surroundings and its interaction with the city, but this time she depicts her kinetically experienced movements. Instead of representing her body's physical presence within the interior cultural and historical spaces through photography, Hedayat in *Taxiography* visualizes her embodied experience of living in Tehran on seventy seven pieces of notebook papers by letting her hand freely draw continuous lines on paper while she goes around the city by cab. The lines show how Hedayat's hand responds freely to the motions caused by car tires hitting the road while the taxi travels across the city.[123]

Hedayat's self-representational works can be divided into two groups. One group of her works are photographic self-portraits that contain her tangible presence as the subject matter of these works. In the other group, she indirectly recalls her presence. By incorporating the fleshiness of animal skin and employing the strands of her hair as the material of her works, Hedayat "examines the body as a tactile object that can be acted upon,"[124] and put the body at the

[123]For more information about this project and viewing the images of this work see, "Ghazaleh Hedayat, *Taxiography*, 2009," accessed June 22, 2022, https://www.taranehhemami.com/ghazaleh-hedayat.
[124]"Haptic visuality and experience: embodied ways of seeing in GhazalehHedayat's artworks," Somayeh Noori Shirazi, accessed June 22, 2022, https://awarewomenartists.com/en/magazine/voir-et-sentir-lhaptique-un-regard-incarne-sur-les-oeuvres-de-ghazaleh-hedayat/.

intersection of the haptic and optic.[125] She also brings the marginal and liminal status of hair into her works —hair that is both body and not-body. For example, in her work *The Sound of My Hair* (2008), she nailed four strands of her hair directly on the wall of gallery (figure 7). The strands remind musical ledger lines or a stringed musical instrument. In another work, *The Strand and the String* (2008), she has woven some strands of hair together with a network of threads over a piece of cloth. By stretching and sewing her hair, she implies the investigation of her corporeal limits while she generates tactile sensations in the audiences and triggers their sense of touch.

The sense of touch is also stimulated in some of her works in which her skin or the concept of skin is the subject matter. It is conveyed by materials imitating skin such as nylon stocking fabric or animal skin, or she has photographed from her body parts and represented her skin. In *The Crust* series (2013), Hedayat juxtaposes nylon stocking fabric with sharp objects such as nails and scissors, covers the images of her navel and crotch with parchment (figure 8). In a group of photographs named *The Paper and the Skin* from *The Strand and The Skin* series (2008) she scratches the close-up photograph of her skin. By employing these mixed media and rendition techniques, Hedayat engenders skin sensation in the viewers, engaging their sense of touch to bring the viewer's attention to the surface, the skin itself, and its vulnerability. She "rediscovers and deconstructs the function of skin as the separator of interior and exterior;" as the boundary between self and other; and "the determinant of what is visible and what is

[125]Haptic is related to the sense of touch. It is "one of the major forms of touch, involving active exploration, usually by the hands, or the experience that arises when one's hands envelop an object and explore its surface freely." See Andrew M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), 331. In her books, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* and *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Laura U. Marks deploys the term "haptic" to discuss how cinematic images can generate tactile sensations in the viewers. See Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). In Chapter Three, I elaborate more on how the haptic is understood in Marks's discussions.

invisible."[126] In fact, the body as a holistic entity turns into fragmented body parts in Hedayat's works, and the specified female body becomes an abstract body.

In most of her works, Hedayat suggests the representation of invisibility, the role of absence, and elimination as a way of construction. For example, Hedayat scrapes away her face and body from the photographs with a sharp edge or something rough. Hence, the status of the self-portrait as the emphasis on presence is changed to what has been eliminated; to what is not present. In my interview with her, she indicated that this process of defacing was rooted in a personal matter representing her body parts were being gradually eroded away.[127]In such works, for Hedayat, self-representation as an attempt to self-discovery turns into elimination as a means to explore inner being and challenge outer facade. Through this shift, she calls for attention to the act and process of removal.

Bygone (2014) and *Photo Essence* (2017) series are two other series in which Hedayat deals with the process of removal and the representation of invisibility. But in these series, instead of self-portraits these are memories that have gone through the process of obliteration, and the indexical relation between the subject represented and the anchored memories is traced off. Trough the exhibition of twenty-six photographs featuring almost faded scripts, blank envelopes, and wrinkled papers in *Bygone* series, Hedayat disputes the function of photography as a means to capture reality, questioning how photography fails in recording the reality underneath the surface and the reality that is personalized and subjective (figure 9). In my interview with Hedayat, she touches upon how she likes to make the process of photography

[126]"Haptic visuality and experience," accessed June 22, 2022, https://awarewomenartists.com/en/magazine/voir-et-sentir-lhaptique-un-regard-incarne-sur-les-oeuvres-de-ghazaleh-hedayat/
[127]Ghazaleh Hedayat, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 19 December 2016.

longer, alter it, and make it close to the medium of painting. She expressed, "I want to reproduce one photograph but make each production different from the other."[128]

Simin Keramati

Simin Keramati was born in Tehran in 1970. She is a Toronto-based multidisciplinary artist who uses a variety of mediums, including painting, installation, and video art. Keramati received her BFA and MFA in Painting and BFA in Translation when she was in Iran and received a postgraduate degree in Teacher Training in Toronto. Keramati is best known for her video artworks, which have been shown in many international exhibitions in Asia, Europe, and North America. Some of her artworks take a critical approach to the social and political conditions of Iran, but her works are not limited to such topics. The female body and its relation to its surroundings and other bodies is a repeated theme in her work. Most of her videos and paintings are self-reflective works in which she deals with such concepts as identity, memory, and isolation.

In some of her videos, Keramati's bodily situations and what she acts upon her body are the obvious features. Some of these works have social or political matters as the intensives for creating them, but Keramati does not use explicit references to those matters, trying not to limit her audiences by focusing on one subject matter. For example, she displays herself doing jump rope, her body sinking in sand or floating in the air, and her face splashed by red paint. Through these actions and bodily movements, she activates the audiences' bodies, inviting them to feel the works, and not just see them from a distance.

[128]Ghazaleh Hedayat, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 19 December 2016.

The video named *Tehran* (2010) is the one she features herself jumping rope. The video is about three minutes, and we only see Keramati's full body as she is jumping rope, and the strokes of her boots and the rope on the floor make a loud and echoing sound that draws the attention immediately. Since her outfit is black and she is standing in front of glass doors with metal bars viewing the garden during the day, her body is almost silhouetted against the light.[129] In my interview with Keramati, she mentioned that she showed the work without any statement, but the launching point for creating this work was the oppressive atmosphere that was dominant in Tehran after street protests against the disputed presidential election in 2009. This work, like some other ones, does not have explicit references to those political issues.

Like Hedayat's artwork, generating affective responses and engaging tactile sensations are repeated features of Keramati's works. For instance, in a series named *The Edge of the Blade*, she attaches sharp and shiny objects such as blades and spangles to the canvases representing her self-portraits, the images of butterflies, and the images of children playing outside. These collages of photographs, paintings, and real blades simulate the sense of touch as well as sight.[130]The blades are attached perpendicularly to the surface, and the collages are enclosed within a glass case to avoid injuries while installing. In some of these collages, there are blood stains on the canvases that were dripped from Keramati's fingers while she was attaching the blades to the canvases.[131] Since these thin blades are perpendicular to the surface, they are not obvious at first glance. If the viewer moves and looks at the works from different angles, the blades are shown up. According to the interview that I had with her, she juxtaposes the images

[129] For more information about this video and viewing the still frames of this video see the artist's website. "TEHRAN 2010," Simin Keramati, accessed June 23, 2022, https://siminkeramati.com/portfolio-posts/tehran-2010/.
[130]For more information about this series see the artist's website. "THE EDGE OF THE BLADE," Simin Keramati, accessed June 23, 2022, https://siminkeramati.com/portfolio-posts/the-edge-of-the-blade/.
[131]I learned about these stains when I interviewed Keramati. Simin Keramati, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 3 March 2017.

such as children happily playing outside and her self-portrait in a wedding dress with blades and the dripped blood to recall how a terrifying incident can lurk in every moment. In my interview with her, she indicated that this sense of fear is rooted in her memories of war. In particular, she mentioned the sound of the siren and its effect on her as a schoolgirl. During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the sound of the siren, which was called Red Alert, suddenly went off if there were air aids, and people were forced to leave their places and find safe locations. As she stated during the interview, the history of Iran is full of the moments when people feel their joy and everyday lives accompany a hidden fear.[132] *The Edge of the Blade* is a series about fears Keramati have experienced in her life, but she does not explicitly represent them. By using sharp blades and blood stains, she tries to imply how danger lurks around, conveying the sense of fear to audiences. The war memories and the sound of a siren are themes that have been repeated in some of her works as well as the work, *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist*, which I discuss in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

Another work with a war-related theme is a video installation named *School diary* (2009). This work is a photograph representing two pages of a diary that is printed in a large size of 2 x 1 metres. This image is attached to the wall of gallery, and three separate videos are projected on the photograph. The videos are projected in three frames resembling the attached photograph on two pages of a diary. The videos are documented videos from two massive school shootings that happened in Russia and the United States in 2004 and 2007. The other video is a scene from a documentary recorded during the Iran-Iraq in the war zone. In this video, a young teenage soldier is talking about his motivation to participate in the war. During the war, it was common for national television to broadcast such documentaries. There are also some written texts in English

[132]Simin Keramati, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 3 March 2017.

and Persian around the frames on the wall describing these videos. In this work, Keramati uses explicit visual references to the war and school shootings. She puts her war-related memories at the intersection of international violent attacks in order to draw the attention to such violence that can remain and store in the memory of a generation of people. The schoolchildren who were in terror and recorded those past memories in their diaries. But the violence of those memories are still alive, and they are played in front of today's people.[133]

The theme of recollecting past memories is repeated in another video named *Music and flowers* (2010). In my interview with her, she stated that how the video clips were shown in national television after the Islamic Revelation were remindful for her, and she was inspired by those clips to create her video.[134] In the early years after the revolution, television advertisements were banned, so the video clips showing the images or videos of flowers or natural scenery filled the time between different programs. The soundtrack of these videos was usually famous European classical music such as the pieces by Antonio Vivaldi, an Italian Baroque composer lived in the seventeenth century, and Keramati chose one of Vivaldi's pieces for her video.[135] Using classical music and the reminiscence of the early years of the Islamic Revelation are also used in her video, *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist,* and I explain more about the relation between listening to music and recalling memories in Chapter Two. Like *The Edge of the Blade* series, in which everything looks normal but blades show the presence of an imminent threat, the flowers in this video are suddenly burnt into the fire.

[133]For more information about this video see the artist's website. "SCHOOL DIARY," Simin Keramati, accessed June 23, 2022, https://siminkeramati.com/portfolio-posts/school-diary/.
[134]Simin Keramati, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 3 March 2017
[135]For more information about this video see the artist's website. "MUSIC AND FLOWERS," Simin Keramati, accessed June 23, 2022, https://siminkeramati.com/portfolio-posts/music-and-flowers/.

I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist is a moving video. In the video, we hear the sound of the siren, frightened people speaking Persian and screaming, and various Iranian and non-Iranian songs and pieces of music. Meanwhile, Keramati fixes her look at the camera, experiencing a nosebleed and smoking a cigarette. This work is a good example of how the artist shifts attention from what her work signifies to how it generates affective responses. While some historical incidents such as the Iran-Iraq war and the 1979 Islamic revolution are referred to, she challenges the audience to not stereotypically interpret her video. In other words, she challenges the audience to not read her work as *another* work *about* war and revolution in the Middle East. In *The Painless Method,* Keramati adopts the same strategy. While it seems that her work is related to the subject matter of capital punishment and decapitation, her video is not limited to this subject matter.

Apart from *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist,* the other work by Keramati discussed in this dissertation is شیوه بدون درد (*The Painless Method*, 2013). This work is a video featuring the back of Keramati's head and neck. During the eight-minute video, her voice can be heard reading prose in Persian while the images of her body are interspersed with images of beheading and hanging (figure 10).

Katayoun Karami

Katayoun Karami was born in 1967 in Tehran. In 1987, she started her undergraduate education in Architecture in Ankara, Turkey, but did not complete a bachelor's degree. Karami is currently based in Tehran. She primarily works in photography, assemblage, and installation. Her imagery includes both original photographs and those she deconstructs after printing by stripping, tearing, and brushing them with ink and marking them with handwritten scrawls and lines. Some of these

photographs are self-portraits featuring her face or body. She creates abstract and geometric assemblages with ordinary objects such as paper, books, glass, and with such discarded building materials as plaster, metal, and fibrous blocks.

While some of Karami's work focuses on social, cultural, and political issues such as war, social protests, and gender-related restrictions in Iran, Karami's artworks are multilayered and complicated, and they are not limited to these matters. Like Keramati and Hedayat, Karami articulates how she has perceived and experienced her body within the culture and society of contemporary Iran, covering broader concerns such as the recollection of personal and collective memories, embodied experiences, and identity formation.

In my interviews with Karami, she talked about the concept of artist activist that has prevailed in the recent years. She also mentioned the impacts of socially-engaged art on people who has become the audiences of such works on the street. She stated that what is appealing to her regarding the practices artist activist is the emphasis on the collective experience of a society and the attention to cover of the social and political matters in artistic practices.[136] Although she has not involved people on the street in her artwork to create a socially-engaged art, in her works, she is inspired by socially-engaged art in terms of participating the audiences to accomplish the artwork and drawing the attention to social and political matters. For example, some of her installations, which have social and political references, are interactive, and audiences can engage in them actively by performing such activities as dropping something on the work or walking on its surface. In *Have A Break* (2012), Karami put a large self-portrait of herself that was covered by glass on the ground of the gallery. Above the glassed self-portrait, many metal plumb lines were suspended from the ceiling. The audiences were allowed to tear the

[136]Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada,30 February 2016.

string and let the heavy and pointed tip drop on the glassed self-portrait. At the end of the day, the glassed self-portrait became full of cracks, and it was installed on the wall, and for the next day a new glassed self-portrait were put under a new set of suspended metal plumb lines. [137]

In my interviews with Karami, she indicated that she did not show *Have A Break* with a statement to not bias her audiences' perception of the work. She also stated that normally she does not choose a statement for her works. However, in some cases, she comes to the conclusion that choosing a statement can help audiences to engage better with the work, she shows her work with a statement.[138] In the case of *Have A Break,* she decided to not choose a statement for her work. According to her, the work had references to stoning as a method of capital punishment in Iran, but she did not mention that reference during the time of the exhibition.

Regarding embodiment and the body's presence in Karami's works, she refers to the female body in most of her works. But this bodily presence is sometimes tangible and visually evident; at other times, it is signified in different ways. For example, in a series of photographs named *Resurrected* (2009), Keramati portrays herself in a crucifixion gesture.[139] She is almost naked. Her long hair, however, covers her breast. Her arms are wide open and her head is tilted downward. She is wearing a barbed wire ring on her head resembling Jesus's crown of thorns. Her averted gaze and inward-looking eyes avoid the gaze of the camera and the viewers. This work consists of four photographs featuring Karami in the same crucifixion gesture but each photograph is covered with a glass with cracks, patterns, scripts, or blood stains on it. Karami shows her body to the viewers, but she applies different filters on it and distracts the viewers to

[137]For more information about this work see the artist's website. "دمی بیاسا – Have A Break 2012," Katayoun Karami, accessed June 23, 2022, https://katayounkarami.com/%d8%af%d9%85%db%8c-%d8%a8%db%8c%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a7-have-a-break-2012/

[138]Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada,29January 2017.

[139]For more information about this series see the artist's website. "2009 Resurrected رستاخیز۱۳۸۸," Katayoun Karami, accessed June 23, 2022, https://katayounkarami.com/2009-resurrected-%d8%b1%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%a7%d8%ae%db%8c%d8%b2-%db%b1%db%b3%db%b8%db%b8/.

focus on her body. The filters such as the scripts written in Persian with the translations of those words in English beside the blood stains on the glasses can make the viewers curious about the relations between the female body in a crucifixion gesture and the applied filter on it. In my interview with Karami, she stated that she had shown the work without any statement in the local and international by then but she talked some gender issues in Iran were the triggers for her to create this work.[140]

In *Painting* (2012), Karami creates a work with a different approach compared to *Resurrected.* Not only does not she explicitly employ her body in the work, but also this work does not have any references to cultural or social issues in Iran. To create this work, she mixed two different kinds of the paint on the wall of gallery to let the paint flake off. In my interview with Karami, she stated that the flaks, peelings, and cracks on the wall had created various shapes resembling female gentile.[141]According to the conversation she had with audiences, many of them found the shapes erotic. Karami stated that she intended to give such an impression to audiences, and she wanted the walls to have a reference to the female body. She stated that walls are always interesting things to her and they draw her attention. She continued that she believes the plain gallery wall can be an art object itself without an object. In this work, Karami provides her audiences with a spatial experience and her work can be compared to Hedayat's wallpaper in terms of the pivotal role of wall in creating those works. The concept of wall and providing audiences with a spatial experience are repeated in the work *Being There,* which will be explained in detail in Chapter Three.

Two of her works that I analyze in this dissertation are برعکس (*The Other Side,* 2007) and یکی بود یکی نبود (*Being There,* 2013), which has different names in Persian and English. In my

[140]Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada,15 February 2017.
[141]Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 29 January 2017.

interview with Karami, she indicated that she deliberately chose two different names in Persian and English for the same work.[142] The translation of the Persian name to English would be "once upon a time."*The Other Side* is a photo installation consisting of nine small double-sided frames installed perpendicularly on the gallery's wall. There is a repeated photograph of Karami's face on one side, and on the other side, the image of long dark hair fastened in different styles (figure 11). I argue that, when it comes to the subject matter of veiling, *the Other Side* can be regarded as a good example of a work in which the artist refers to the practice of veiling while eschewing the clichéd depictions of the veil. In my view, this work functions as a counterpoint to "chador art" or any explicit representation of veiling.

Being There is a series of four photographs. Each photograph shows Karami sitting in a dining room alone. The setting is similar in all of the photographs, but there are minor differences in Karami's face and body. Only one of these photographs, however, was printed on a large-size plaster panel and exhibited (figure 12). All the four photographs are available on the artist's website.[143] In *Being There*, Karami adopts an approach like Keramati and Hedayat regarding the articulation of her personal experience. In my interview with her, she indicated how she talked with about forty women to collect their experiences about the Iran-Iraq war and how she related her war experience with those women's war experiences.[144] Yet, she has not mentioned this matter in the exhibitions of her work. This strategy helps her avoid restricting the reception of her work to one specific subject. I demonstrate how this work can be read as the

[142]Ibid.
[143]"یکی بود یکی نبود – Being There 2013," Katayoun Karami, accessed February 4, 2022, https://katayounkarami.com/%db%8c%da%a9%db%8c-%d8%a8%d9%88%d8%af-%db%8c%da%a9%db%8c-%d9%86%d8%a8%d9%88%d8%af-being-there-2013/
[144]Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 29 January 2017. This interview was done over the phone with Karami who was in Tehran, Iran.

articulation of embodied memories and spatial experiences, and indicate how the war was a starting point to create a multilayered work that extends beyond the confines of the war itself.

The works I discuss in this dissertation share much in common in terms of the formal features and conceptual themes. Regarding the formal features, the artist's face or the back of her head is displayed in all of the photographs and videos I analyze. In four of them, the artist looks directly at the viewer, and in the other two, the look is averted, or the eyes are not represented. The artists do not eliminate embodied features such as facial elements or the colour of their eyes, skin, and hair. But they are not highlighted, and in some works, they are blurred. The selected works similarly lack an emphasis on local origins. None of them makes explicit visual references to a specific location that could remind viewers of Iran. Nor do they make stereotypical references to easily recognizable motifs borrowed from either ancient or contemporary Iranian culture. However, in one work, *The Untitled* by Hedayat, she is wearing a headscarf, and in another one by Keramati, *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist,* she is wearing Middle Eastern style eye makeup. By analyzing the way these elements are depicted in the works, I argue that these images are not intended to be identified as exoticized and stereotypical markers of Iranian-Islamic culture.

Chapter outlines

Chapter One starts with the analysis of Hedayat's video, *Untitled*, and then moves on to the analysis of her other work, the wallpaper. I position *Untitled* at the intersection of body art, endurance art, and video art discourses since she amalgamates the features of these distinct mediums to express her concerns about embodiment and the gaze. I examine her enduring act of

keeping her eyes open and its relation to the construction of female subjectivity and the lived experience of her body. In my view, Hedayat's act of endurance is not aimed to signify symbolic meanings; it is about bodily experience. Drawing on phenomenological readings of the body, I explore how Hedayat introduces herself as an actively seeing subject who experiences a mode of self-presence grounded in *having* a body instead of *being* a body. At the end of my discussion, I show how this subjectivity is constructed in relation to other subjects, which in turn results in the formation of an intersubjective dialogue between two embodied subjects, the artist and the viewer. In the second part of my discussion of *Untitled*, I argue that Hedayat's returned gaze can be regarded as a gesture of resistance to the intrusive and possessive gazes projected upon her through the camera. In doing so, I rely on feminist critical race scholar bell hooks's account of an oppositional gaze to investigate how the artist unsettles the Orientalist gaze in terms of satisfaction and superiority.

The second part of this chapter belongs to the analysis of Hedayat's wallpaper. I examine how Hedayat appropriates wallpaper as a medium of her artwork to express her concerns regarding subjectivity, indexicality, and identity. I contend that Hedayat proposes a critical inquiry into the authenticity of identity photography and the epistemological reliability on photography in depicting a real person. By locating her work within the framework of the theories of photography about objectivity and the agency of the camera, I investigate how Hedayat tries to return the agency to herself as the sitter of the photograph and the photograph itself. This part is followed by a discussion of how she creates embodied viewership and challenges the Orientalist gaze through the rendition of her self-portrait as wallpaper.

Chapter Two discusses two videos by Keramati. The first video I analyze is *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist.* I investigate how she places the

articulation of embodied subjectivity at the intersection of the recollection of memories. For my discussion of how she enacts as an agentic subject in the process of reminiscence, I draw on the research that reveals the relation between listening to the music and the recollection of memories. In terms of memories and how they generate affective and embodied responses, I mainly refer to art historian Jill Bennett's debates about the expression of traumatic memories in art. Then I move on to the site of the viewer, exploring how the viewer might experience the construction of embodied subjectivity through affective reactions. Recounting the strategies used by Keramati to challenge the Orientalist gaze, I argue how she creates an intersubjective relation between herself and her audiences.

In the second part of this chapter, I demonstrate how embodiment and generating affective responses are reflected in *The Painless Method* through the subject matter of beheading. By applying a phenomenological reading of the lived body and subjectivity, I argue that Keramati does not limit the work to the discussion of decapitation. Rather, she prioritizes the representation of the construction of the embodied subject, performing the corporeal knowledge she gains by situating herself in an urban space.

This part is followed by explaining how she destabilizes the voyeuristic position of the audiences, generating affective responses and arising haptic sensations to undermine the possessive and disembodied Orientalist gaze. I apply the notion of "haptic visuality" coined by philosopher and media scholar Laura Marks to argue that Keramati provides audiences with the experience of embodied viewership, which in turn, results in the construction of intersubjective relation between the artist and the viewers. In this reciprocal intersubjective relation, both the artist and the viewer are embodied subjects.

Chapter Three contains the analyses of Karami's works, *The Other Side* and *Being There*. In my view, both of these works can be read in terms of the construction of female subjectivity in relation to embodied memories. My concern is with how Karami frames her hair and stages her body through serial strategies to portray herself as an active subject and represent her lived body. In the first section, I look at *The Other Side* from a feminist phenomenological perspective to explain how Karami enacts embodied experience and constructs her subjectivity by repeating the act of veiling. I explain how the rendition of the work unveils her lived experience and challenges the Orientalist gaze, which in turn, results in the establishment of an intersubjective relation. Here I also show how the work critically approaches the clichéd readings of the image of the veil and how it is not limited to the subject matter of veiling.

In *Being There,* I explore how the artist reflects the temporal and spatial construction of subjectivity in relation to memory by drawing on feminist phenomenological readings of the female body living at home. This part discusses how she represents memory as a process of situating, which is an intercorporeal relation between human and nonhuman bodies. After addressing the strategies Karami uses to undermine the Orientalist gaze, I explain how the Iran-Iraq war acted as a trigger for creating her work.

The last chapter is a brief conclusion, which reflects on my research, and summarizes the ways in which the selected artists deal with embodiment, the articulation of subjectivity, and challenging the Orientalist gaze. I explain how the strategies these artists have applied in their works can pave the way for opening a constructive dialogue between the artists from the less discussed cultures in the global art context and the viewers.

Chapter One: Ghazaleh Hedayat

Introduction

This chapter analyzes two works by Ghazaleh Hedayat. These works have been shown in Iran and abroad. The first section of this chapter analyses her video named بدون عنوان (*Untitled*, 2005). *Untitled* is a six-and-a-half-minute video featuring a close-up of Hedayat's make-up-free face. The video's frame is cropped insomuch as only a small section of the artist's hair and a headscarf on her head are visible. For the next six and a half minutes, she keeps her head still and maintains a blank expression while engaging her audience with an unblinking gaze. As the video progresses, her eyelids twitch unintentionally, her eyes become slightly red and shed tears. Then, tears gently begin to flow down her face, flowing from her staring, wide open and vulnerable eyes (figure 4). The video does not have sound. Nor does it have a name. The use of "untitled" to designate the video suggests that it does not aim to convey an identifiable meaning. This video was designed to be shown in a darkened room, projected life-sized, and played on a loop during the run of the show. However, it was shown under the gallery's room regular lighting in *Southern Exposure* gallery in San Francisco in 2010.[1]

Though *Untitled* is not a recorded video taken from a live performance that happened in front of participating audiences, Hedayat incorporates the features of endurance art. Endurance art at first glance implies resistance as the artist struggles against a force such as breathing, hunger, and sleeping, throughout the performance.[2] This term is used for the endurance-based practices of both artists from the Global North and Global South. Nevertheless, while the works

[1]For more information about this exhibition, see "TIME AFTER TIME: ACTIONS AND INTERACTIONS," accessed March 4, 2022, https://soex.org/events/time-after-time-actions-and-interactions

[2] The definitions of performance art and endurance-based performance art are discussed below.

of artists from the Global North, for example, most of north American and European artists, usually receive a wider range of interpretations, the works of artists from the Global South or African American artists' works are usually subjected to reductive interpretations such as showing the resistance against the state or local social, cultural, and political suppressions and limitations.[3] In Lydia Liu's view, these ascribed political interpretations root in the fact that "the agency of non-Western cultures is reduced to a single possibility: resistance."[4]Hedayat's videos have received similar overt cultural and political readings that label her works as merely a resistance against social restrictions for women in Iran.[5] I argue these overt readings are misleading, and they are in contrast with what Hedayat articulates in her video.

In my interview with the artist, she touched upon how the small section of the image of the dark coloured scarf in *Untitled* is misread by some art curators and audiences in and outside of Iran as the sign of repression, and her act of endurance was read in relation to the limitations for women in Iran.[6] Contrary to this reading, the artist states that she merely wore the veil to assure herself of the public exhibition of the video in terms of the regulations for the for the representation of women bodies in public. In order to get a better understanding of why and how Hedayat covers her hair in this video, I briefly explain the domestic regulations relating to the representation of Iranian women in visual works such as video. Then, I show that Hedayat does not use the veil to express a critical position on social, cultural, and political matters regarding

[3]For example, regarding the different reception of the endurance-based artworks of the artists with different racial and national backgrounds see Valerie Cassel Oliver, "Putting the Body on the Line: Endurance in Black Performance," in *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, Valerie Cassel Oliver et al., (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2013), 14–19, Hentyle Yapp, "Chinese lingering, meditation's practice: reframing endurance art beyond resistance," *Women& Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 24, no. 2-3 (2014): 134–152, Amy Bryzgel, *Performance art in Eastern Europe since 1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 223.
[4]Lydia He Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), xvi.
[5]Torshizi, "The Unveiled Apple," 564 and 568.
[6]Ghazaleh Hedayat, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada,19 December 2016 and 17 January 2017. These interviews were done over the phone with Hedayat who was in Tehran, Iran.

gender-related restrictions in Iran. In fact, although she covers her hair, her video is not *about* the veil and the issues surrounding the practice of veiling in Iran. In this section, I explain how she applies some visual strategies to eschew the stereotypical representations of the sociocultural construction of a gendered body within the society of Iran.

My main argument is that Hedayat's unblinking stare is a voluntary act against frequent involuntary blinking to re-discover her agency. In other words, I read her act of endurance as an assertion of agency in the face of forces like involuntary blinking that are beyond her control. Hedayat situates her body in an unusual condition of keeping the eyes wide open to produce a new bodily experience. This notion is overlooked by those who read the image of the headscarf together with her struggle to not blink as a symbolic gesture signifying women restrictions in Iran. In *Untitled*, temporality and endurance are experienced instead of producing meanings. They are used as a vehicle by the artist to discover the limits of a lived body and display another form of being in the moment.

In my analysis of Hedayat's video, my foci are her enduring act of keeping the eyes open and its relation to the construction of female subjectivity and the notion of the lived body. I show how she articulates a subjectivity that is relational, embodied, and in the process of construction. Drawing on phenomenological readings of the body, I argue that this embodied experience paves the way for cultivating new forms of cognitive and physical self-inspection and self-awareness. At the end of this section, I demonstrate how this subjectivity is constructed in relation to other subjects, which in turn, results in the formation of an intersubjective dialogue between two viewing subjects, the artist and the viewer.

From my viewpoint, Hedayat's stare at the camera looks more like fixing her eyes on a point to not blink, rather than gazing intentionally or looking at an actual thing to comprehend

what it is. That is why I read her endurance act for the camera as the performance of her agency and lived body. In addition to a phenomenological reading of the work, I explore the connotations of her unblinking stare at the camera itself. In this regard, I investigate the possibility of claiming agency through the act of gazing back at the camera, examining the video through the discourses of the gaze and resistance strategies against the gaze.

Although Hedayat does not highlight the presence of external forces in her performance, I read Hedayat's impersonal stare fixing at the camera's lens as gazing *at the camera*. I discuss how Hedayat's gazing at the camera can be read as a gesture of resistance to the intrusive and possessive gazes projected upon her body through the camera and by the audience in the globalized context. In such contexts, her body might be viewed through a racialized and objectified gaze. I argue, however, that she instead performs her body as the site of resistance to being looked at as a passive and objectified woman through the Orientalist gaze. In doing so, I rely on a feminist critical race scholar bell hooks and what she calls the "oppositional gaze."[7] I also investigate how Hedayat unsettles the position of the viewer, who might adopt the position of the bearer of the gaze, and show how she challenges the Orientalist gaze in terms of satisfaction and superiority.

Throughout this section, my approach is to show how Hedayat understands her body as an object that can be acted upon by herself while resisting her body being objectified by the Orientalist gaze. I show how Hedayat performs a phenomenological understanding of keeping her eyes open while rejecting the objectification of her body through the gaze of the camera and consequently that of the viewer. In addition, by using the term resistance in this section, I do not mean to recall the creation of symbolic meanings and intended political gestures or read

[7]bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Hedayat's work as a mere reactionary resistance against the stereotypical interpretations of the artworks of the artists from the Global North. Rather, I aim to examine how an artist like Hedayat applies resistance as a tool for experiencing a new form of self-recognition and prioritizes such experience over signifying political resistance.

In the second section of this chapter, I analyze another work named *Untitled* (2004) as well. Since it is rendered as wallpaper, it is usually referred to as "wallpaper." This work consists of a number of paper rolls applied onto the walls of the gallery with wallpaper paste. The paper rolls feature a digitally printed self-portrait of Hedayat. The self-portrait is an approximately 1 cm photograph, and it is repeated across the rolls (figure 5). This photograph was taken for a driving license when Hedayat was in the United States. The finger-size photo is not recognizable at first glance. But if the viewer gets close enough to the wall, they can see it. The photograph follows the standard style of identity card photos. The face is in frontal view, the background is white and plain, and the photo is cropped such that three-quarters of the photo is occupied by the face and shoulders. Like most identity photographs, the face does not express any emotions. Hedayat does not smile and looks straight at the camera. Her hair is tucked behind the ears to make her face fully visible. This work, for the first time, was exhibited as a university project in Hedayat's studio at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2004, where she was doing her Master's in New Genres. The studio was a small university room without any windows, and all the walls were covered entirely with Hedayat's wallpaper. In other exhibitions of this work, it covered all the walls of a room that had windows, like the rendition of this work at *Forum Schlossplatz* in

Switzerland in 2009,[8] or it was exhibited as a framed paper in 110 x 150 cm size and hung on the gallery wall, as it was shown at *Azad Art Gallery* in Tehran in 2009.[9]

This section explores how Hedayat appropriates wallpaper as a medium in her work. In my close reading of her work, I start with an explanation of how she deploys repetition and mass reproduction in a Warholesque fashion to express her concerns about the representation of the self, the indexicality of identity in photography, and embodied viewership. My claim in this section is that Hedayat proposes a critical inquiry into the authenticity of identity-card photography and the epistemological reliability of photography in depicting *reality*. The epistemic value of photography roots in the discussions on "the objective nature of photography" and a "firmer epistemic connection" associated with the relation between photography and the world in comparison with other visual forms of representations.[10] However, this consideration of capturing the reality for photography has been complicated and contested since the inception of the technology, because there is uncertainty around the nature of photography and its indexicality when it comes to deploying photography for objective documentation.[11]Hedayat's work adds to this critical discussion by challenging the camera as a state apparatus to make people visible in society. Building upon Peircean semiotics and his consideration of photography and its critics,[12] I explain how Hedayat used her identity-card photograph, digital photography, and mechanical

[8]For more information about this exhibition see "inside Teheran out," accessed March 4, 2022, https://www.forumschlossplatz.ch/archiv/2005/ausstellungen+inside-teheran-out/
[9]For more information about this exhibition see "Auto portraits," accessed March 4, 2022, http://azadart.gallery/en/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?Id=146
[10]Jonathan Cohen and Aaron Meskin, "On the Epistemic Value of Photographs," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, No. 2, (2004): 197–210.
[11] Dan Cavedon-Taylor, "The Epistemic Status of Photographs and Paintings: A Response to Cohen and Meskin," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67, No. 2, (2009): 230–235, Gregory Currie, "Photography, Painting and Perception," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, no. 1. (1991): 23–29.
[12]See Andrew E. Hershberger, *Photographic Theory: An Historical Anthology* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 401; Ann Kibbey, *Theory of the Image: Capitalism, Contemporary Film, and Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 154–158.

reproduction and repetition to question the epistemic role of photography in capturing reality and constructing people's identity.

Then I explain how the repetition of a small photograph creates a patterned surface that creates an optical illusion, causing discomfort in the viewers' eyes if they look at the walls for more than a few minutes. Hedayat's wallpaper is neither seductive nor decorative wallpaper. Rather, it becomes a pulsing and vibrant surface due to the infinite repetition of a tiny image. In terms of the exhibition of this work in the globalized context, I claim that this disturbing and disorienting effect both ascribe some sort of agency to Hedayat's work as well as cause confusion for the eye, making the work elusive of the Orientalist gaze. In this part, I build my argument upon the function of the glance in phenomenological philosopher Edward Casey's view and his phenomenological reading of embodied perception of the space. Through such experience of viewing, the viewer can be unseated from their secure position of having a self-possessive gaze, which is one of the features of the Orientalist gaze.

The wallpaper also responds, but is not reduced, to politicized identity being shaped through institutionalized policies of ethnic-racial classification. In my interview with Hedayat, she mentioned that she made this work during her Master's degree in the United States in 2004. This was when a surveillance program was in effect for certain non-immigrant visa holders to further the investigation on probable terrorist attacks that might happen in the future. The registration of fingerprints and photographs was a part of that program. After explaining the program and pointing out some of the critical viewpoints against this program, I contend that Hedayat problematizes the mass objectification of being regulated by the state to differentiate people by nationality. In fact, she relies upon mass production by means of photography and repetition to challenge the state's approach towards depersonalizing and *thingifying* people.

I borrow the word thingify from an article on Thomas Ruff's well-known series named *Portraits*. Thomas Ruff (born in 1958) is a German photographer whose works deal with issues concerning identity representation.[13] In his *Portraits* series from the late 1980s, he captured the photographs of different people in passport photo style and printed most them in large size such as 150 x120 cm. Art curator Colin Westerbeck, in his article on Ruff, refers to the word thingify, where he said "[l]ike the mug shot or surveillance videotape, Ruff's portraits quantify their subjects: 'the person has been 'thingified'."[14] In this section, I do not aim to offer a comparison between Hedayat's work and Ruff's portraits. But since I claim Hedayat's work problematizes the usage of photography to make people visible by the state, I apply the word thingify as it was used to describe Ruff's portraits. I discuss how Hedayat's work implicitly refers to the way that the state turns people into *things* through the bureaucratic procedures of surveillance programs such as the one enacted during her stay in the United States.

In the end, I intend to illustrate that what makes Hedayat's work noteworthy is that she does not directly refer to this surveillance program in the work or in a statement. The lack of visual or textual references to that special program helps her liberate the work from adopting any explicit political stance and receiving reductive interpretations. Therefore, it opens the work to be assessed in a broader context of challenging identity art and the indexicality of photography.

[13] For more information about Ruff and this series, see: Barry Schwabsky, "The End of Objectivity: Thomas Ruff, from "Portraits" to "Other Portraits"," *On Paper* 1, no. 3 (January/February 1997): 22–25; Matthias Winzen, *Thomas Ruff: 1979 to the Present,* ed., (Cologne: König, 2001).
[14] Colin Westerbeck, "Untitled (Ralph Müller), 1986; Untitled, 1988; Untitled, 1988 by Thomas Ruff," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 54.

Untitled

In *Untitled*, Hedayat performs an act of endurance in front of the camera without representing any facial expression that could suggest specific emotion. At first glance, it seems she performs a natural simple act, the act of looking. This unmediated form of address does not need any explanation, and it can interact directly with the viewer without the necessity of any interpretation about what she is doing. But when the viewer establishes eye contact with the artist and their looks lock, the viewer gradually understands that the artist is trying not to blink even as her face does not show any sign of pain and irritation.

Untitled is not a recorded video taken from a live performance that originally occurred in front of a live audience. Instead, she performed for the camera in order to employ the possibilities that both video and endurance-based performance enable. Performance art is generally understood as event-based artwork enacted through actions performed by one artist or other participants in front of audiences in a shared time and space.[15] Body art, in Amelia Jones's conceptualization, as a subset of the general category "performance art" refers to a set of performative practices that use the body as material and work to form intersubjective engagements.[16]Jones applies the term body art instead of performance art to not limit intersubjectivity and embodiment to live performances being enacted in front of audiences.[17]

Endurance art, a subset, in turn, of body art, emphasizes the use of the body-as-material, pushing the body to its physical and mental limits of endurance. Yoko Ono, Marina Abramovic, and Chris Burden are among the pioneer artists whose performances are foregrounded with

[15]See Anthony Howell, *The Analysis of Performance Art: A Guide to its Theory and Practice* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Harwood Academic, 1999); Rose Lee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 3rd ed.(London: Thames & Hudson, 2011).
[16] Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1.
[17] Amelia Jones, "Presence in Absentia," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997), 18.

physical endurance and physicality. These artists were known for intense and time-consuming pieces featuring the artists remaining still and motionless while assaulted by the attendees, or subjecting their bodies to extreme pain.[18]

Performance art was first practiced in Iran in the late 1960s, but only proliferated after the 2000s.[19] Performance art is "more indebted to the anti-art, anti-institution Dadaist experiments," and it is more affected by outside movements instead of originating from traditional and existing performing arts in Iran.[20]According to Scheiwiller, performance art in Iran "is spatially negotiated somewhat differently than in other countries and cultures" due to the political and social circumstances of Iran that are influenced by the governance of the state.[21]

Alireza Amirhajebi, Amir Mobed, and Barbad Golshiri are among well-known artists who put their bodies under the intense pain, and some of their works can be categorized as endurance art. For example, Amirhajebi in one of her performances named *Euphoria* (2013) licks the surface of the gallery and raises issues surrounding the notion of abject body.[22]Mobed usually employs his body in his works to convey his critical political and social concerns. He situates his body in "the position of a victim of torture; the audience either play an active role in his torture or remain indifferent observers."[23]Among Iranian female artists applying endurance

[18] Lara Shalson, *Performing Endurance: Art and Politics since 1960* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Karen Gonzalez Rice, *Long Suffering : American Endurance Art as Prophetic Witness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016); Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Valerie Cassel Oliver et al., *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2013).
[19]Gem Scheiwiller, "Disrupting bodies, negotiating spaces," 117–118. For more information about performance art in Iran see Gem Scheiwiller, "Disrupting bodies, negotiating spaces,"; Pamela Karimi, *Alternative Iran: Contemporary Art and Critical Spatial Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022).
[20] Ibid., 116.
[21]Ibid., 127.
[22]Ibid., 122.
[23]Keshmirshekan, "The Crisis of Belonging," 121. For watching Mobed performances see the artist's website. https://amirmobed.com/. Accessed August15, 2022.

art features in their work, NikooTarkhani can be mentioned.[24]In her video performance *Kohl* (2015), she stitches her lips onto her fingers in front of the camera.[25]

Although Hedayat's endurance act of performing unblinking gaze is not a live performance, her work can be contextualized within the works of mentioned artists working in Iran. She interacts with her audience with the help of the camera as a mediator to approach each person singly. Moreover, by exhibiting her work at international platforms and art establishments located in the Global North, she can interrogate the issues and address the concerns being raised from the question of how her corporeal body is read and perceived in international and non-Iranian contexts. As discussed in my introduction, in the global context, the representation of Middle Eastern female bodies has been affected by stereotypical interpretations regarding the image of the veil and the depiction of cultural identity. Hedayat questions such expectations and does not satisfy them.

In this work, the small section of the dark coloured headscarf on Hedayat's head is not brought into the spotlight to invoke cultural identity. It is merely used by the artist to follow the regulations about wearing the veil in Iran.[26] Regarding the representation of the female body in visual and performing arts, if artists want to exhibit their works in registered and recognized art galleries, they have to follow some regulations about the form and content of their works. After the Islamic revolution in 1979, art-related regulations were remodeled in accordance with the official Islamic values, which were part of the cultural policies promoted during the early days of

[24]Karimi, *Alternative Iran,* 241.
[25] For watching the video see "Kohl - A video Performance by Nikoo Tarkhani ویدیوپرفورمنسی از نیکوترخانی - سرمه," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCHV-pLMTg4. Accessed August15, 2022.
[26] In the interview with Hedayat, she indicated she is wearing the veil to make sure that her work can be exhibited without any repercussions regarding being appeared unveiled. But some stereotypical reception of this work caused her to depict herself without wearing headscarf in her next work, and the gallery agreed to exhibit that work featuring her unveiled.

the revolution. But since then, they have been updated and changed frequently in terms of the enforcement and content, and they are not followed similarly by all galleries and artistic establishments. For example, state-run cultural organizations strictly apply the regulations and censorship guidelines, while private galleries can exercise relaxed regulations based on their own policies.[27]

Hedayat made a deliberate decision about her appearance in this work. While she represents herself unveiled in most of her self-portraits, she preferred to be veiled in this work. But, she made an effort to marginalize the image of the veil as much as she could, in order to not let her work be categorized as a work that is *about* the veil and issues around it. However, as I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, her work has received such readings despite her attempts to diminish the presence of the veil. In the art and visual culture of Iran, there are considerable works in which the image of the veil conveys adherence to regulations rather than the actual experience of veiling in Iranian culture. Hedayat's work belongs to this category. When it comes to the representation of the female body in visual art, mass media, and cinema, specific visual regulations and disciplinary rules dictate how the female body should be represented based on Islamic cultural policies. These rules are usually considered acts of censoring and governing the female body to limit agentic actions.[28]Nevertheless, the presence of the female body is not completely eradicated from cinematic and visual culture imagery. Abiding

[27] Regarding cultural policies after the Islamic revolution, see Ashraf Rahmani, *The Collection of Laws and Regulations Concerning Book Publishing in Iran: 1979-2013* (Hamilton, Ontario: Golden Maple Publications, 2017), Susan Siavoshi, "Cultural Policies and the Islamic Republic: Cinema and Book Publication," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 4 (1997): 509–530.
[28] Kirstie Imber, "Silenced Voices? The Censorship of Art in Iran," in *Censoring Art: Silencing the Artwork*, ed., Roisin Kennedy and Riann Coulter (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 31–47.

by such regulations, artists apply various allegorical strategies to liberate themselves from visual limitations. [29]

The form of veiling Hedayat applies in her work is one of these strategies. She captures her face in a distraction-free frame. She makes her face close to the frame as much as she can to communicate with her audiences and marginalize the image of the veil as much as possible. The frame is cropped in a way to let the viewer see the face completely, but not be attracted to the image of the veil. The limited exposure of the headscarf suggests that Hedayat complies with the regulations while she tries to deviate from representing the act of veiling. She does not cover her hair completely with the scarf and does not tie it around the head or under the chin. She just wears it loosely to perform the act of complying with regulations while enacting the endurance act of giving an unblinking gaze. Through this form of representing herself, she assured the exhibition of her work would not be restricted due to her appearance.

Known body and unknown body

Keeping the eyes open without blinking is an embodied experience through which Hedayat articulates the construction of her subjectivity. Embodied subjectivity is the way that we live phenomenologically through our bodies. This conception is drawn from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reading of the body. This body is both object and subject, being seen

[29]For more information about the function of veiling in cinematic presence of women, how Iranian artists creatively internalize the regulations regarding the compulsory veiling in their works, and how they have developed visual methods to both cover and reveal women see, Hamid Naficy "Poetics and Politics of Veil, Voice and Vision in Iranian Post-revolutionary Cinema" in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, ed. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 138–153; Hamid Naficy "veiled Vision/Powerful Presences: Women in Post-revolutionary Iranian Cinema," in *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-revolutionary Iran*, ed. Robin Morgon (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 131–150; Naficy, "Women and the Semiotics of Veiling and Vision in Cinema," 47-64; Negar Mottahedeh, *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

and seeing, sensible and sentient, and passive and active.[30]In terms of constructions of female subjectivity, the notions of women's lived bodies and embodied experiences are involved in this construction. These constructions are ongoing processes, not finished products. In *Untitled*, the lived body that Hedayat is experiencing is the corporeal effect of looking without blinking. She recorded this embodied experience for about seven minutes and shared it with her audiences. She pushed her body and tested her pain threshold in order to explore her body's tolerance. Through such experience, she discovers the new boundaries of her body, performing another form of having a body and being in a period of time.

Looking without blinking is an embodied attempt to reach self-awareness by confronting the "body unknown" with the "body known" in philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto's account of body art.[31]The body that is known and familiar to Hedayat is the image being looked at through the frame of the camera. At first glance, it seems that the camera has captured a faithful likeness of the artist's face and her normal way of looking. It shows her appearance as a veiled woman who should appear in this way in front of the public and the camera. But the representation of likeness is not the way she approaches the matter of selfhood in her work. Gradually, her unknown body is revealed. She is seemingly lost in staring at the lens and lingering in space and time. Her eyes are locked on the lens, and they do not move. After a while, her eyes shed tears, and her eyelashes move as they resist blinking. This is the experience of the unknown body that Hedayat gains. Although the artist experienced her unknown body in almost seven minutes, the repeated playback of the video during the time of the exhibition made this experience an infinite and unfinished attempt to keep her eyes wide open. In other words,

[30]Scott L. Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self: Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).
[31] Arthur C. Danto, *The Body/Body Problem: Selected Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

there are no clear starting and finishing points to the act. It seems she is caught in this process of the construction of subjectivity, and the video reveals a part of it.

The unknown body discovered by Hedayat uncovers its strength as well as its weakness. The more its power enacts through the resistance to blinking, the more its vulnerability is unveiled through the twitch and reflexive blink of the eyelids and flowing tears. She exhibits how far she is capable of controlling her spontaneous bodily reactions and how her body fluctuates dynamically between fragility and robustness. Hedayat engages herself in the conditions of embodiment to explore how her body reacts and to demonstrate how long she can persist in her action over time. She intersects the articulation of body/self with her focus on duration and the sense of lingering time.

Hedayat's refusal to blink draws attention to the embodied act of looking instead of portraying seeing as a purely conceptual or intellectual activity. She shifts the priority from the optic mode of seeing into its haptic quality by resisting blinking.[32]Her performance represents how seeing can generate somatic senses, and it can be perceived differently through physical contact with the body. Within this demanding bodily way of seeing, she challenges the prioritized role of seeing as a perceptual faculty to gain the knowledge of the self and the world in the Cartesian notion of the subject.[33] In this form of subjectivity, the individual's mind is separate from the body. Hedayat accompanies actively voluntary resistance with passively

[32]Haptic is related to the sense of touch. It is "one of the major forms of touch, involving active exploration, usually by the hands, or the experience that arises when one's hands envelop an object and explore its surface freely." See Andrew M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), 331. In her books, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* and *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Laura U. Marks deploys the term "haptic" to discuss how cinematic images can generate tactile sensations in the viewers. See Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). In chapter three, I elaborate more on haptic in Marks's discussions.

[33]Regarding Cartesian Mind-Body Dichotomy and the formulation of seeing as knowing, "ocular epistemology," see Suren Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

involuntary reactions in the process of seeing to offer a subjectivity that is constructed in relation to embodiment. Her performance signifies the roles of both the mind and the body in body/self-recognition. She applies her body as a site for cultivating both cognitive and physical self-inspection and self-awareness. The body that she looks at and recognizes through her eyes can be re-discovered by resisting blinking.

Hedayat puts her body under duress to recall the unusual corporeality of seeing and confront the mode of self-presence with the "awayness" of her body. From a phenomenological perspective, philosopher Drew Leder applies bodily modes of absence and awayness to talk about the body's tendency to self-concealment from awareness and experience. In his view, "the lived body is necessarily self-effacing" in everyday activities and experiences. [34]He refers to this tendency as the "absence" or "awayness" of the body. It means we do not have conscious perception and control over the body parts that are unused when we do something. Leder terms these parts of the body as the parts that are "placed in a background disappearance."[35] In his discussion of "the presencing the body," he introduces physical pain as a trigger to call back the body from ecstatic engagement to concentrate on its new state. Pain brings the "backgrounded" parts of the body to the centre of attention.[36] By trying to keep her eyes open while staring at the camera, Hedayat brings attention to her eyes and eyelids as sites of bodily of presence. In daily life, we do not notice the spontaneous blinks that interrupt our continuous experience of seeing, and we do not feel the physical presence of our eyes. Sight is perceived as a model of cognition, and we overlook the mediating factors of the eyes and eyelids.[37]

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[34]Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 69.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.,69–83.
[37] For more information about how the eyes construct our visual experience, see Donald D. Hoffman, *Visual Intelligence: How We Create what We See* (New York: Norton, 2000).

Hedayat discloses the embodied presence of the eyes and eyelids in the process of seeing by refusing to blink. She experiences how it will be difficult if she wants to impose control over involuntary bodily reactions. In *Untitled,* seeing as the ability to perceive the world through the impalpable presence of eyes is turned to feeling the tactile sensations of the eyes and eyelids. This is how Hedayat brings the faculty of seeing as an internal experience into the surface of her body and perceives it physically and externally. She performs what Leder explains as *having a body* versus *being a body* in the process of self-objectification. He argues that when the body is turned into an object of perception, it becomes an element of distance. "I no longer simply "am" my body, the set of unthematized powers from which I exist. Now I "have" a body, a perceived object in the world."[38]Hedayat foregrounds her body as a vehicle to act upon it and watch its reactions. She illustrates the objecthood of her body by incorporating it as an object of her experience.

Meanwhile, Hedayat represents herself as agentic subject by resisting closing her eyes, though she does not completely succeed in her attempts. She claims her agency as a subject who is the controller of her action. She confronts her wilful body, the body that is determined to endure by keeping the eyes open, with her willing body, the body that falls into fragility through the tears flowing from the eyes. In the act of seeing, we almost passively perceive the body when it engages in the autonomic act of seeing. Although we have more control over what, when, and where we want to see, we do not have complete control over how to see. We are not capable of largely manipulating the functions of our eyes and eyelids in the process of seeing. Trying to keep the eyes open shows Hedayat's attempt to interfere with the act of seeing wilfully. She participates actively and consciously in the experience of seeing by changing the focus from the

[38]Leder, *The Absent Body*, 77

psychic perception of seeing to the embodied perception of that. This is how she introduces herself as an active agentic subject who can choose what, when, where, and how to see.

Returning the gaze as a gesture of resistance

In *Untitled*, Hedayat performs her act of endurance in front of the camera to articulate her agentic subjectivity. Meanwhile, her gaze focuses on the camera, and consequently, directs itself at the viewer through the camera. In this regard, the camera is not simply a passive recorder of her struggle to not blink when it comes to the reception of the work. Rather, the camera can be read as an ideological apparatus producing a system of knowledge and setting power relations through a regulated gaze.

Hedayat exposes her face to the gaze of the camera as well as the viewer in an exclusive manner. The viewer is invited to stand alone in front of the projected video on the wall in order to facilitate eye contact with Hedayat. *Untitled* is an artwork that places the viewer in a spatial composition with Hedayat's face to establish a one-on-one relationship. Although this work is exhibited in a darkened room, it is not originally displayed on a large screen, like a movie, to address a number of audience members at the same time. Rather, the video is projected onto the wall as a small frame scaled to reproduce Hedayat's life-size head and height. The artist's look at the viewer drags the viewer into the context of the artwork and causing them to be a constitutive part of the work. Hedayat crosses over the boundaries of artwork and the real world, building interplay between the spectator and the spectacle in which they enter into a potentially infinite

exchange of gazes. The viewer looks at the artist, and she looks back at the viewer's eyes, returning their gaze.[39]

As discussed in the introduction, the globalized art world is affected by Orientalist epistemologies made through the camera. The long history of observing Middle Eastern women in the Global North has been affected by the colonial camera. It has shaped the Orientalist gaze through which such women are viewed as objectified bodies. The phallocentric gaze of the camera promotes an objectified form of representation, and this representation is introduced as a dominant and naturalized form of reality. In this mode of looking, the viewer is the bearer of the gaze, the person who has the power to control these women by transforming them into the object of their desire.[40] In *Untitled*, while Hedayat presents a phenomenological understanding of her body as a material object, she attempts to undermine the ideological objectification of her body as constructed through the Orientalist gaze. This attempt can be discerned where her gazing back opens up a possibility to be read as a gesture of resistance to the "dominance/submission pattern"[41] of the Orientalist gaze. Hence, her gaze at the camera can be a model of "domination/resistance."[42]For almost seven minutes, Hedayat tries to keep her eyes open not to miss a moment to gaze back. It seems that she resists the camera's gaze as long as the camera's

[39] The infinite exchange of the gazes is not limit to this work. This interaction between the observer and the observed can happen in looking at many artworks and even objects that return the gaze of the observer. See James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).
[40]See Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1988):12–27; Mary Ann Doane, "Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 209–248; Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 44–64; Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer, "Introduction: De Margin and De Centre," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1988):2–10; Manthia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," in *Black American Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 211–220.
[41] Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?" 26–29.
[42] See Linda Gordon, "What's New in Women's History," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 20–30. By referring to Gordon, Jill Dolan argues that "the gender-polarized dominance/submission pattern can be replaced with a model of "domination/resistance" that implies at least the exercise of power against dominance." Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 134.

eye is open and attempts to exert its dominance over her. It is an attempt to reclaim agency where the Orientalist gaze might be present.

Countering, responding, and returning the hegemonic gaze in Hedayat's work can recall what bell hooks describes as the "oppositional gaze."[43] By initiating this term and explaining the strategic acts of "talking back," hooks attempts to find the ways in which agency can be ascribed to people of African descent in contemporary American visual culture. She explains how the visual hegemony, which is proliferated within American mass media, acts as a "system of knowledge and power reproducing" and maintaining white supremacy.[44] This visual hegemony constitutes imperial power by fostering a "white supremacist gaze"[45]—an objectifying way of looking through which black bodies are perceived and subsequently represented as lesser than. In this context, hooks coins the term "oppositional gaze" to seek what agency is possible in the face of mainstream media, "wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see."[46]This courageous way of looking suggests, "Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality."[47] That is why this gaze is regarded as a site of resistance.

In *Untitled*, Hedayat documents the durational process through which she shapes her new agency of actively seeing subject. By putting her body under duress, she implies that she stares in order to change the constructed reality about how Middle Eastern women should be depicted. Staring directly into the camera and the viewer's eyes is offered as a counter-hegemonic act. Hedayat performs the oppositional gaze by subverting the instrumental gaze of the camera.

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[43]bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," 116.
[44]Ibid., 117.
[45] bell hooks, "In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life," in *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*, ed. Deborah Willis (New York: New Press, 1994), 50.
[46] hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze", 116.
[47] Ibid.

Regarding the scopophilic properties of the Orientalist gaze, Hedayat's work does not bring visual pleasure to the audience. The camera records the image of a woman. The woman who might be identified as Middle Eastern in the Global North context due to the features of her face and the image of a small part of a headscarf, though it is not represented markedly. However, this work does not comply with stereotypical expectations about artworks from the Middle East. The blank stare and a stark close-up portrait of a female artist are far from the exoticized images of Middle Eastern women being rendered in passive situations and decorative locations.

Hedayat's struggle to not blink and her red and teary eyes might make the viewers uncomfortable. This struggle not only engages them affectively with work, it also interrupts the one way fixed looking of the viewer. After standing in front of the work and staring at the artist's eyes for a while, the viewer realizes the artist is experiencing bodily endurance, and she is fighting invisibly against internal forces to keep her eyes open. The flowing tears disrupt the viewer's fixed gaze on the screen, and they do not let the viewer's gaze and imagination run freely over the artist's face. In other words, gaining satisfaction in looking and having a desire pacified are replaced with seeing and thinking about the body undertaking a physical challenge.

As the viewer realizes that Hedayat challenges herself to resist blinking, her stare and her determined will might encourage them to enter into a staring contest with her. After a while, the viewer can become involved in the experience of staring without blinking, finding themselves in a one-on-one competition to keep their eyes open and feel tactile sensations. These sensations provide them with the experience of an embodied viewership, challenging the traditional disembodied gaze through which one views a passive objectified spectacle from a distance. Rather, the viewers become spectators of their own feelings as well as the artist's.

Hedayat engages her audiences through the medium of video, and she employs the formal properties offered by the medium of video. What she has made is not an object or a live performance. According to art theorist and filmmaker Francisco J. Ricardo's discussion of engagement in new media art, Hedayat's video cannot be regarded as "already" finished "work." Rather, it is remade every time it is viewed and experienced by audiences.[48] In his book, Ricardo explains that how this kind of reproduction is possible through the application of new technologies, and how it affects the audience's experience of the artwork. He compares this experience with that of object-based forms of modern art. He argues that experiencing new media art (artworks that are created and perceived through the application of electronic media and technical means) does not heighten "our sense of an object or a work, but on what comes between us and the work—the act of engagement itself."[49] In the case of Hedayat's video, the viewer sees Hedayat's face as a video projected onto the gallery's wall. The viewer is provided with an immediate encounter with the act of gazing without blinking as offered by Hedayat. The viewer is not offered Hedayat's face as an image to perceive through seeing alone, which is referred to as "the normal aesthetic convention" by Ricardo.[50]

Ultimately, what Hedayat executes in *Untitled* results in an intersubjective looking relation. According to Kaplan's argument, a racialized gaze is a phallocentric objectifying gaze that "refuses mutual gazing, mutual subject-to-subject recognition."[51] In her viewpoint, while the gaze implies a fixed type of looking at the control of one viewing subject, a looking relation seeks for a mutual relation between two viewing subjects, and it regards looking as a process. The medium of video helps Hedayat to display the process of the construction of embodied

[48] Francisco J. Ricardo, *The Engagement Aesthetic: Experiencing New Media Art through Critique* (London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2013), 2.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 8.
[51] Kaplan, *Looking for the Other*, 79.

subjectivity. It implies the durational process of the looking relation that is developing. In this relation, both the viewer and the artist are active seeing subjects, and neither of them imposes their control over the other. The artist gazes directly at the viewer, and the viewer's presumed position of the bearer of the gaze is undercut. Instead, the viewer is invited to become involved in the *process* of looking, keeping their eyes open, and experiencing their own bodies' reactions as living material bodies. Thus, the work can be regarded as a critical response to any type of spectatorship in which the looking relation is based on hierarchy.

The wallpaper

Wallpaper with decorative all-over patterns and repeating motifs have traditionally been categorized as crafts decorating our living spaces. Often featuring ornamental motifs and patterns, the classification of wallpaper as craft causes it to be considered as a marginalized form of art that is associated with femininity, decoration, and the interior.[52] During the twentieth century, some modern and contemporary artists started to question objecthood in art, challenging what had traditionally been categorized as the materials for art.[53] In this context, not only did the idea become more important than the material form, but also the definition of an art object as a thing located in space and time was called into question.[54] Wallpaper was one of those new

[52]See Janice Helland, *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880-1935: The Gender of Ornament* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), Anna Katz, ed., *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art, 1972-1985* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019); Pat Kirkham and Susan Weber, *History of Design: Decorative Arts and Material Culture, 1400–2000*, (New York: Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture, 2013); Nazeih Taleb Maarouf, *Woman Developing Dimension in the Field of Islamic Artisanat* (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 2018).
[53]Regarding the definition of objecthood see Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[54]For more reading on how the definition of objecthood is challenged and what new forms are practiced in modern and contemporary art see Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York, Praeger, 1973); James Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as a Critical Form since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017).

forms introduced by some artists to challenge objecthood in art. Among the well-known artists embracing wallpaper in modern and contemporary practices are Andy Warhol, Robert Gober, and Virgil Marti.[55]

Hedayat's wallpaper challenges habitual ways of looking at artworks in gallery settings. Traditionally, a piece of visual art is an object located in a gallery. It is hung from the ceiling, installed on the ground, or put onto the wall. In general, a piece of visual art is usually regarded as an object that is demarcated from its surrounding area, so the viewers easily recognize it as a distinct object. Indeed, the "white cube" gallery creates the space that defines that object as "a work of art", or as Brian O'Doherty puts it, the aesthetic potency of the gallery "artifies" the object.[56] Challenging this process, Hedayat's wallpaper becomes a part of the architecture and integrates with the gallery space to generate immediate impacts on the audience; it embraces and surrounds the audience as soon as they enter the room. Although the room is empty and there is nothing in the room space, it is ironically full. The work is in front, at the back, and on the left and right sides of the viewer; it is rendered in a way to be seen, perceived, and experienced immediately and overwhelmingly.

The excess of the photographic self

Hedayat's wallpaper is composed of a multiply repeated photograph taken for an identity document. The identity photograph should reveal all evident facial features that characterize

[55]For more information on the contemporary artists who apply wallpaper as a medium, see: Donna M. De Salvo and Gill Saunders, *Apocalyptic Wallpaper: Robert Gober, Abigail Lane, Virgil Marti and Andy Warhol* (Ohio: Wexner Center, 1997); Elissa Auther, "Wallpaper, the Decorative, and Contemporary Installation Art," in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 116–134; Judith Tannenbaum, *On the Wall: Contemporary Wallpaper* (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, 2003); Gill Saunders, et al., *The Walls Are Talking: Wallpaper, Art and Culture* (Manchester: University of Manchester, Whitworth Art Gallery, 2010).
[56]Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica: Lapis Press, 1986), 29.

individuals. This form of photography is designed to eliminate all subjective characteristics of the sitter to display the individual's identity without any references to inward feelings.[57] That is why the sitter should have a neutral facial expression, and they are set against a plain and white background in order to have better scrutiny of the face. In addition, the blank background in a neutral shade is meant to eliminate any social, cultural, and geographical significations from the photograph. The identity photograph aims to represent "this is how you look."[58]

In theory, the identity photograph functions as a fingerprint; it is "neutral, indexical and 'objective', without prejudice."[59]The semiotician Charles S. Peirce defines indexical as a physical link between a sign and its referent. In his view, "a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it" is an indexical sign of a shot.[60] Here, the relationship between a bullet-hole and a shot is based on implied physical presence not on iconic resemblance. In his essay on the definition of the icon, index, and symbol, Peirce examines photography to develop the concept of the indexical sign.[61] According to Peirce, photography's optical and chemical processes represent causal connection and physical contiguity between the image and the object it presents. In his view, the photograph gives the viewer the guaranty that they see the object itself. The indexical sign is "discovered rather than created."[62] It offers "an assurance of positive fact, an absolute point of reference, contact with the real through its physical connection to its object."[63] In this regard, what causes the photograph to be considered genuinely representative of a person is its

[57]Davis Bate, *Photography: the Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 67–77.
[58]Ibid., 67.
[59]Ibid., 76.
[60] Robert E. Innis, *Semiotics, an Introductory Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 10.
[61]Kibbey, *Theory of the Image,* 154–158.
[62] Ibid., 150.
[63]Ibid., 148.

ability to capture reality.[64]When it comes to photo identification, the photograph on the ID card is regarded as *true* and *factual* representative of the holder of that identity document.[65]

In Pierce's account of photography and indexical signs, the camera is "a passive *recorder* of the image" because there is no alteration in the photomechanical process of capturing images.[66]This property of photography and the veracity of analog photography have caused the camera to occupy a privileged place in scientific and legal documentation where objectivity and the epistemic virtue of truth-telling play pivotal roles.[67]According to science historians Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, this is not only because of the mechanical objectivity of photography but also the camera's ability to eliminate human agency in the mechanical process of reproducibility.[68] In other words, when it comes to the role of empirical evidence in the formation of knowledge, the agency is deferred to the camera to reduce human intervention in the process of knowledge production.[69]In identification photography and the government-issued biometric documents, the camera's agency and its neutrality are controversial. In art historian John Tagg's view, the camera does not act as a neutral device in the case of taking a photograph for state-issued documents. He examines how the state constructs photographic images to create

[64]The indexical nature of the photograph and the physical link between the object and the photograph is very complex, and the image cannot guarantee how the viewer perceives the meaning. There are several social and cultural factors involve in the process of capturing light, developing a photographic films and understanding the image of an object. That is why some scholars, like John Tagg, Joel Snyder, and Alan Sekula, believe that there is no natural connection between the photograph as an indexical sign and the material world and that the photograph does not refer to a fixed reality. See John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Joel Snyder, "Picturing Vision," *Critical Inquiry* 6 (Spring 1980): 499–526; Alan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," in *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works1973–1983* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 77–101.
[65]Marietta Kesting, "Photographic portraits of migrants in South Africa: framed between identity photographs and (self-)presentation," *Social Dynamics* 40, no. 3 (December 2014): 481.
[66]Kibbey, *Theory of the Image*, 154.
[67]See Lorraine Daston andPeter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007); Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, "The Image of Objectivity," *Representations* 40, no. 1 (Fall 1992), 81–128; Joseph Ransdell, "Semiotic Objectivity," *Semiotica* 26, no. 3/4 (1979): 261–288; Tagg, *The Burden of Representation.*
[68]Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 187.
[69] However, according to Joel Snyder's criticism of Daston and Galison, we cannot simply defer agency to the camera. See Joel Snyder, "Visualization and Visibility," in *Picturing Art, Producing Science*, eds. Peter Galison and Caroline A. Jones (New York: Routledge, 1998), 379–397.

individuals identifying with their photographic image and how photography is practiced as a form of documentation to disperse power within societies. In terms of the identity photograph, he argues, "this is not the power of the camera but the power of the apparatuses of the local state which deploy it and guarantee the authority of the images it constructs to stand as evidence or register a truth."[70]In Tagg's view, when the state issues photo identification, individuals with different subjectivities are subjugated to become readable bodies. The bodies that are disciplined to follow particular instructions are positioned in front of a blank white surface and turned full face towards an apparatus with an unreturnable gaze. Here, the camera is not a neutral device; rather, it is an apparatus that captures the markers of identity on the body to make citizens visible and recognizable to the state's panoptic gaze.

Photographs can also be perceived as iconic signs. From Peirce's semiotic viewpoint, "an icon is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line."[71] This definition of the iconic sign contrasts with that the index, because the relation between the sign and the referred thing should be shaped based on resemblance or likeness. According to Peirce, while an index needs the referred object to exist in the real world in a certain time and space, the referred object's existence is not necessary to the function of an icon.

Although Peirce and some other scholars view the photograph as an indexical sign,[72] the dynamic link between iconic and indexical features makes it complicated to ascribe a fixed type

[70]Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 64.
[71]Innis, *Semiotics*, 9.
[72] For more information about Pierce and other scholars who argue that indexicallity is the main function of photography see Martin Lefebvre, "The Art of Pointing: On Peirce, indexicality, and photographic images," in *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins New York: Routledge, 2007), 220–244; Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part II," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 211–219.

to photography.[73]For instance, philosopher and art historian Jean-Marie Schaeffer introduces the photograph as an "indexical icon,"[74] Art historian Francois Brunet believes the resemblance between the object and its image makes the photograph have two modes of relation with the object; "iconic-analogical and indexical-existential,"[75] and Rosalind Krauss emphasizes the referential status of photograph and its simultaneous iconic feature.[76]

In terms of the identity photograph, like all other kinds of photographs, the two modes of relation, "iconic-analogical and indexical-existential," can be distinguished. Since this photo is the evidence of the light reflected from the card holder's body, it shows indexical-existential relation between the person and the image taken of them. In addition, the identity photo demonstrates iconic-analogical relation when it is used to identify the ID cardholder. For instance, linguist and semiotician Winfried Nöth believes the identity photo is primarily read as an iconic sign. The official authorities look for an iconic-analogical relation between the individual and their photo. In terms of passport photograph, he says:

> The border official who first looks at the photo and then at my face wants to check whether I, the person he looks at, am like (i.e., the icon of) the photo and whether I can prove the correspondence of my face with my photo.[77]

In Nöth's view, since the passport photo is a legal document, and it constitutes the identity of the passport holder, it is regarded as original and a piece of reality. In terms of an iconic-analogical relation, we look mainly at the picture to observe how much it resembles the object

[73]Francois Brunet, "Visual semiotics versus pragmaticism: Peirce and Photography," in *Peirce's Doctrine of Signs: Theory, Applications, and Connections*, eds. Vincent Michael Colapietro and Thomas M. Olshewsky (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 305.
[74]Ibid., 297.
[75]Ibid., 305.
[76]Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 203.
[77]Winfried Nöth, "Metapictures and Self-referential pictures," in *Self-reference in the Media*, eds. Winfried Nöth and Nina Bishara (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2008), 68.

photographed; the object is original, and the photo is read as the true copy of the original. But in the case of passport photos, this photo itself is regarded as original, and the person better be a true copy of their photo if they do not want to get into trouble. Here, it is the passport holder who should look like their photo.

In the wallpaper, Hedayat challenges the "iconic-analogical and indexical-existential" relations between her body and her repeated identity photograph. In the original photograph, the indexical-existential relation between the artist and her photo implies the presence and here-ness of the artist, and the iconic-analogical relation is buried in its function as the driving license's photo. But these relations are not discernable when the audience views the work, because the identity photo is so small as to not be recognizable at first glance, and it is seemingly infinitely repeated all over the walls.

Furthermore, by deploying digital printing techniques, Hedayat challenges the reflection of reality in analog imagery. She demolishes the chemical and physical properties of analog photography that support the epistemic function of this type of imagery. According to photography scholar Mi-Jung Kang, the indexical essence of photography in digital imagery has been undermined because of the wide usage of digital photography since the 1990s. In digital photography, electronic photosensors capture images and they are stored and printed by computer-based techniques and processes. Digitized images do not feature the physical connection between the image and its object that we have in analog photography. A digital photograph is largely regarded as information and data.[78] The images of the people who are

[78]Mi-Jung Kang, "On Digital Photo-Index," in *Charles Sanders Peirce in His Own Words: 100 Years of Semiotics, Communication and Cognition*, eds. TorkildThellefsen and Bent Sorensen (Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014), 257. For more readings on the truth telling quality of photography and indexicality of digital photography see William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Boston: MIT Press, 1992); David Tomas, "From the photograph to postphotographic Practice: Toward a postoptical ecology of the eye," in *Electronic*

digitally photographed can be printed on any surface. These photos can reflect various forms of function and meaning thanks to the various methods and techniques of photo manipulation. Digital photography has paved the way for a better representation of a proliferated identity, which is relational and variable. Digital imagery belongs more to the realm of visuality instead of the realm of verity and fact, and we get something subjective instead of reaching objectivity.[79]

What Hedayat does in her wallpaper is add to this critical discourse against the indexicality of identification-card photography in the age of digital photography. Through the rendition of the works, she creates a self-portrait that is obliterated and distorted. The usage of digital printing on wallpaper assists Hedayat in challenging the natural connection between the traces of light on photographic paper and the developing process of analog photography. When Hedayat becomes a digital image, not a photograph taken as the traces of light on chemically treated papers, she distances herself from being a real person who exists in a certain time and space. Thus, she empties her image of both indexicality and objectivity. Her photograph does not refer to a real person in the real world. It is data and information.

Apart from using digital printing and photography, repetition helps Hedayat augment the lack of referentiality in her work. Repetition transforms the identity photograph into a decorative sheet or screen covering the walls. Hedayat's identity photograph has been extracted from the document, manipulated, and repeated. Now, she is not a real person; she is a virtual and pictorial one. She has become an ornamental element due to the infinite repetition all over the wallpaper.

Culture: Technology and Visual Representation, ed. Timothy Druckrey (New York: Aperture, 1996), 145–153; Louise Kaplan, "Sontag's Regarding and Bataille's Unknowing," in *Representations of Pain in Art and Visual Culture*, eds. Maria Pia Di Bella and James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2013), 58–61.

[79]Of course, analog photographs were also altered using various methods. For more information about manipulation techniques in analog photography see Ann Marie Barry, *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image, and Manipulation in Visual Communication* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 144–148; Michael Shapter, *Are Photographs Truthful? Whence Veracity?* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018); Mia Fineman, *Faking it: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012).

Here, the function of identification is changed to decoration and cover. Thus, repetition results in undermining referentiality and notions of a fixed meaning.

De-centering and the loss of hierarchy caused by repetition create a surface of very tiny faces without portraying the identity they are supposed to bring to the photograph. In philosopher and critical theorist Walter Benjamin's account of mechanical reproduction, *auratic* presence and *originality* fade away when mechanical processes such as printing are used to reproduce a work of art. In such mass production, the original work's unique aesthetic independence and authority, the aura, is diminished. Therefore, the copy of the work of art is empty of the auratic feature of the original work.[80]Through digitally-produced copies of one identity photograph, Hedayat diminishes the unique authority and referentiality of the "one" photograph on her driving license to her identity. This is how the epistemic role of photography is challenged and shifted from showing a real person named Ghazaleh Hedayat to representing a motif on wallpaper.

Repetition in Hedayat's wallpaper can also be considered in terms of a negotiation with seriality. This concept was used in by the minimalist movement in American art in the 1960s.[81]In his essay "The Serial Attitude" (1967), conceptual artist Mel Bochner introduces serial order as a method and attitude, not a stylistic phenomenon.[82] He regards repetition as one aspect of seriality. The repetition can be modular, which is the repetition of the same standard unit, or it can carry some degrees of variation and difference. In the wallpaper, we see an infinite modular repetition of one self-portrait. While repetition creates an unsettling surface and objective form of arrangement, there is a kind of subjectivity buried in Hedayat's repetition. This work suggests

[80]Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1999), 242–55.
[81] See Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art After Modernism* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2004); Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (London: Studio Vista, 1969); James Meyer and James Sampson Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).
[82]Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," *Artforum* 6, no. 4 (December 1967): 28–33.

the endless expansiveness of the solipsistic self. In the chapter named "Hanne Darboven: Seriality and the Time of Solitude," art historian and critic Briony Fer discusses the relation between serial art and the solipsistic. She explains that prominent minimalist and conceptual artists such as Flavin, LeWitt, and Darboven tended to extend a repeating unit to the whole space of a room. But this rendition did not aim to be only formal; it has a solipsistic, self-referential, quality as well.[83]In her explanation of the solipsist, Fer describes that "nothing exists outside the self," and "the self is the only knowable thing."[84] In this regard, "seriality is related to something like an excess of selfhood," an obsessive sense of a subject "who has lost their bearings to an outside."[85] The infinite repetition of one identity photograph in the wallpaper suggests Hedayat's attempts to represent the solipsist self. Here, the repetition empties her photograph of the meaning it once had. The identity photograph is not a signifier referring to a real person outside of the work as the signified. It is a motif infinitely referring to itself on a surface.

Wandering viewers, decentralized gaze

Hedayat's wallpaper, like traditional wallpaper, consists of a repeated item. But the repetition of that item does not create a decorative effect, and it is not designed to elicit visual pleasure in the viewers. In an interview with Hedayat, she explained that the repetition of the tiny photograph was aimed to create the illusion of a pulsating surface for the viewers, making the wallpaper uncomfortable for the eyes.[86] The whole work itself simulates a sense of being in a claustrophobic space. As soon as the viewer enters the room, they find themselves surrounded.

[83]Briory Fer, "Hanne Darboven: Seriality and the Time of Solitude," in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 223–234.
[84] Ibid., 224.
[85] Ibid.
[86]Ghazaleh Hedayat, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 17 January 2017.

She also indicated that during the first exhibition of this work at her studio in San Francisco Art Institute in 2004, some of the viewers expressed that they could not stand for a long time in a room and look across the walls. Such experience was gained because the patterns on the walls made the eyes tired, generating sensory illusions, and therefore the viewer preferred to leave the room quickly.[87] Through this interaction with the viewer, Hedayat allocates agency to the work because it is not received as a passive piece of art under the viewer's control. This work interacts actively with the viewer and compels them to react, move around, and leave. Thus, the wallpaper does not satisfy the voyeuristic and objectifying properties of the Orientalist gaze when it comes to the reception of the work in the global art context. It does not let viewers turn their faces toward spectacle and gain pleasure in looking at a Middle Eastern female body. It repels through excess.

In addition to creating a challenging space that does not satisfy voyeurism, Hedayat unseats the Orientalist gaze in terms of mastery and self-possession. Her work destabilizes the mastery of the gaze and unseats the viewers from the point of the eye/I. By surrounding the viewer and trapping them inside the space, the wallpaper makes itself identical to the architecture and introduces itself as a work without a vantage point. Unlike *Untitled*, which needs the audience to stand at a certain point to engage properly with the work, the wallpaper is a work that is grasped almost immediately. It is a work without a centre — or, rather, it is a work where the viewer becomes a mobile centre. The wallpaper does not give the viewer a fixed position, unseating them from their secure position as an observer of all that they can see. Thus, a centralized gaze on an art object is turned into a decentralized glance on an all-over pattern spread on the walls. When the viewer enters the room, they do not see any wall texts indicating

[87] Ghazaleh Hedayat, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 17 January 2017.

where to find the artwork and what one is supposed to look at. But the wallpaper sticking on the walls is conspicuous enough to excite attention. The viewers find themselves located *within* the artwork, encouraged to move and glance around the room.

Hedayat's wallpaper reduces central visual efficiency by captivating peripheral vision. In an essay on the function of the glance, Edward Casey compares the glance with the gaze, discussing the different possibilities of these two opposite ways of looking in the formation of our perception of the world.[88] He argues the glance is an eccentric form of viewing that breaks down conventional temporal sequence. In his words, the glance "does not settle down but perches precariously."[89] It does not "fit snugly into a gapless continuum of time"; it suggests discontinuity in time and place.[90] The glance, for the glancer, is what takes them "*out of* the before/after enchainment, being its momentary suspension."[91]I suggest that Hedayat's wallpaper functions in just such a way. By engaging the peripheral vision of the viewer, eruptively promoting movement, the work applies the logic of the glance to leave the viewer at "momentary suspension." As Casey puts it, the work causes the viewer to experience "a genuine *moment* of time."[92] In this situation, the lived time that the viewer is experiencing is not a continuous period of time in which a subject gains awareness through the scrutiny of the gaze. Rather it is the immediate experience of a moment of time. Therefore, it does not give an opportunity to scrutinize the subject of seeing and gain mastery over it. This is how the privilege of having a possessive and all-encompassing gaze over the artwork is revoked in Hedayat's wallpaper. In this situation, the emergent subject is not based on one privileged viewpoint; the centre's power

[88]Edward Casey, "The Time of the Glance: Toward Becoming Otherwise," in *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures,* ed. Elizabeth A. Grosz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 79–97.
[89] Ibid., 82.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 83
[92] Ibid.

is lessened, and the subject construction becomes associated with the embodied encounter with the space and movement.

Hedayat's wallpaper provides viewers with the experience of embodied viewership and becoming embodied subject. In the analysis of the phenomenological relation between body and architecture, the embodied subject is defined through "a function of both space-occupancy and movement through space."[93] As the audience steps into the room and walks around, they move their eyes to discover what they should look at as a piece of art. The wallpaper is designed to catch the viewers in the middle of experiencing a disorienting and disturbing atmosphere, and make them feel uncomfortable, forcing them to leave the room. The movement through the space, the interaction with the work, and getting unsettling feelings from the work can cause viewers to become more aware of their physical presence and reaction in the room. Hence, they become participants instead of viewers. The work's framework challenges what the actual subject matter of this work is. Is it the covered walls, the repeated photo, the audience, or the interaction of all three? The embodied experience generated by the wallpaper insists that the work to be perceived in relationship with the viewer's reactions and behaviour rather than being seen as an artwork occupying a specific space. As a result, the viewer is positioned as an embodied-experiencing subject instead of a distanced-seeing one.

Hedayat's wallpaper also can be read as a critical response to ascribing politicized identity to Middle Eastern people. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Hedayat made this work when she was doing her Master's degree in the United States during the administration of George W. Bush. For this work, she deployed a photograph taken for her driver's licence when she was there, and she printed the photograph in a very small size (around

[93] Paul Crowther, *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (even the Frame)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 200.

1 cm in length). The idea of using the identity photograph came from the special program introduced for some non-immigrant visa holders at that time.[94]The *Special Registration* program, also known as *Domestic Call-in Registration*, was a surveillance and recording system. It was introduced for a group of non-immigrant visa holders in the United States between 2002 and 2016. This program was a part of the War on Terror campaign initiated on George W. Bush's order after the 2001 terrorist attacks. According to the program, Muslim non-immigrant visa holders from certain Islamic countries, including Iran, had to register their information such as fingerprints and photographs at designated offices if they had not done the process previously at a port-of-entry to the United States. The program targeted certain Muslims to uncover potential immigration violations and links with radical Islamic groups.[95]

Special Registration has raised considerable objections and criticisms regarding the fundamental nature of the program. Most critics have claimed that the program discriminates against Arab and Muslim minorities, and it classifies people based on race and group membership. The main criticism was that the policy behind the program presumed religion and nationality as potential factors for a terrorist act, and it did not prioritize the intelligence information to observe individual and suspicious behaviour. The critics assert that a group of Muslims became controllable and identifiable by getting their photos and fingerprints registered.

[94] In my personal interview with Hedayat, she mentioned the Muslim registration programme, and she indicated she used her photograph to imply the registration of photograph in that programme.

[95]For more information on the details of this program and targeted nationalities see "'Special Registration' Program,"Maia Jachimowicz and Ramah McKay, accessed February 6, 2022, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/special-registration-program; "Removal of Regulations Relating to Special Registration Process for Certain Nonimmigrants,"The Federal Register,accessed February 6, 2022, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/12/23/2016-30885/removal-of-regulations-relating-to-special-registration-process-for-certain-nonimmigrants,; Also see Louise Cainkar, "Thinking Outside the Box Arabs and Race in the United States," in *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*, eds. Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 53–58; Nancy Murray, "Profiled: Arabs, Muslims, and the Post–9/11 Hunt for the "Enemy Within"," in *Civil Rights In Peril: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims*, ed. Elaine C. Hagopian (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2004), 44–46.

Before being called to register their biometric information, these people had been ordinary people, but suddenly they were subjected to a specific law that was not applied to others.[96]

By creating a flat surface of a repeating photograph, Hedayat critically responds to classifying a racial group of people to controllable and identifiable people. She suggests that the classification flattens the individuals into the emblems of othered groups. She turns her identity photograph into a repeating motif, a thingified entity, wallpaper, a space, and as a result, into an ambiance. Meanwhile, due to this rendition, the single photo cannot be perceived as an object anymore. It cannot be interpreted; it needs to be experienced.

Conclusion

Hedayat's works discussed here take distance from the stereotypical representations of Middle Eastern women in global contexts. *Untitled* is about an embodied and temporary experience of endurance. The wallpaper questions the epistemological reliability of photography and the uses to which it is put under surveillance states. In each of these works, Iranian-ness is not stereotypically conveyed by highlighting cultural, national, and ethnic identity or referring to the issues stemming from living within Iranian culture and society. Rather, these works adopt a critical stance to the notion of Iranian-ness by choosing subject matter that is not directly related to the artist's personal and specific experience of living in Iran. That said, Hedayat does not completely eradicate all the cultural references in her works such as the image of the veil.

[96]For more readings about the criticisms on special program see: Moustafa Bayoumi, "Racing religion," *New Centennial Review* 6, no. 2 (2006): 267–293; Carol Khawly, "Targeting a Community: "Call-In" Registrations and "Voluntary" Interviews," *In Defense of the Alien* 26 (2003): 69–74; Hatem Bazian, "National Entry-Exit Registration System: Arabs, Muslims, and Southeast Asians and Post-9/11 "Security Measures"," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 2, no.1 (Spring 2014): 82–98.

In *Untitled*, Hedayat performs a personal embodied experience. The video presents a different form of being in time experienced through attempting an unblinking gaze. By drawing attention to her act of endurance, she avoids any depiction of gender-related issues such as veiling or limitations for Iranian women. Her video is about the confrontation of the wilful body with the willing body. She invites viewers from different races, genders, and classes to not only think about this confrontation by resisting blinking, but also to imagine having the same experience with their bodies. Through this act, she introduces herself as an agentic subject who persists in the face of involuntary forces.

In the wallpaper, Hedayat challenges the status of photography as a documenting tool and the camera as a knowledge producing apparatus at the hand of the state. She repeatedly prints her identity photograph to imply the endless expansiveness of the solipsistic self. The identity photograph that suggests her personality is relegated to a digitally printed picture and her individuality is eradicated through repetition. The act of repetition challenges the recognition of the real identity and personality through photography. This work is important because Hedayat reflects her personal experience along with the experiences of a racialized group of people, but she does not highlight them. This strategy helps Hedayat create a multi-layered work that encompasses a broad range of interpretations regarding photography, identity, and the reception of the art of the Middle East in the global context.

Importantly, Hedayat's works engage the audiences' phenomenological perception, by permitting them to participate in the artworks' experience embodied viewership. In *Untitled,* Hedayat puts the audience in one-to-one eye contact to present how she can endure the agony of keeping her eyes open. She offers a centre for viewing, and invites the viewer to participate in a looking relation, returning the gaze. But in the wallpaper this relation is inverted. Here, the

locked look on her face is turned into a glance that traverses the surface. The wallpaper decentralizes the point of view, turning the viewer into a mobile one. This work also rejects the penetrating scrutiny of the gaze by creating an intense and pulsating surface.

When it comes to the reception of these works in a global context, Hedayat critically responds to the lens through which artworks from the Middle East are usually viewed, which was discussed in the introduction of this dissertation. She shows that she *can* endure over time without adopting symbolic gestures; she *can* gaze back and stare directly at the viewer's eyes; she *can* make a disturbing surface that repels the gaze. Hedayat applies the mediums of video and photography whose functions and properties are shaped within a dominant canonical framework. They are knowledge-producing apparatuses that are governed by a masculinist racialized gaze such as the Orientalised gaze through history. But Hedayat challenges the epistemic knowledge developed by these mediums. The camera at Hedayat's hands is a tool to undermine the structure of subject/object viewership. Hedayat establishes subject-to-subject recognition in Kaplan's terms, where both of the artist and the viewers are occupying the position of the embodied subject.

The ideas of constructing embodied subjectivity and providing audiences with embodied viewership are also relevant to Keramati's two videos that will be discussed in the next chapter. Like Hedayat, Keramati has recorded her embodied experiences happening in front of the video camera. But Keramati introduces these embodied experiences in relation to her personal and specific experience of living in Iran, which differs from Hedayat's approach. Embodied viewership in Keramati's videos is achieved by generating affective responses in the audiences, which in turn, destabilizes the Orientalised gaze. Hedayat's flowing tears can produce affective responses, but this feature is highlighted to an even greater degree in Keramati's videos.

Chapter Two: Simin Keramati

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze two videos by Simin Keramati:

من یک زن هنرمند از خاورمیانه در غربت نیستم؛ من یک هنرمند هستم (I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; ***I am an artist***, 2014) and *شیوه بدون درد* (*The Painless Method*, 2013). These videos were first screened during a film festival named *Kvinnor Film och Motstånd* (Women, Film, and Resistance), held in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 2014. The videos were projected onto a movie theatre screen, shown with five other films and seven art videos made by other Iranian artists participating in the festival. In 2018, *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist* was projected in a smaller scale on the gallery wall at *Hinterland* gallery in Austria.[1]In the same year, this video was played on a monitor at *Azad Art Gallery* in Tehran.[2]*The Painless Method* is also exhibited at *Hinterland* gallery, but it was shown on a monitor. In 2019, this video was shown in a group exhibition named *No Comments* together with a selection of Keramati's other videos and other Iranian artists at *Galeriile de Artă Reperaj* in Romania.[3]

The first section of this chapter will discuss *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist,* and argue for its importance in conveying the way the artist deals with the recollection of memories. This work is a video montage focusing on the face and naked shoulders of Keramati as she stands in front of a white background. For sixteen minutes,

[1]"Not What You Think," accessed March 4, 2022 ,https://www.hinterland.ag/previous-projects/2018/not-what-you-think
[2]The group exhibition named *Not What You Think* was hold in Austria in 2018 for the first time, and then all the participating works were shown in an exhibition with the same name in Tehran in 2018. For Tehran exhibition see "Not What You Think," accessed March 4, 2022 ,http://azadart.gallery /En/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?Id=10337
[3]See "No Comment," accessed March 4, 2022, http://halidaboughriet.com/2019/08/03/no-comment-oradea/

Keramati looks straight at the viewers' eyes while listening to sixteen separate sound pieces, which range from instrumental music to songs and recorded voices. Each piece plays for only a few seconds, though long enough for it to be recognized. A few seconds of silence marks a clear transition between each piece, indicating that it has been carefully chosen and arranged. In addition, these periods of silence between each track are, for the most part, longer than the period of the playback of each track. After the first two minutes of the video, Keramati breaks from her standard pose to smoke a cigarette briefly. By the third minute, her nose inexplicably starts to bleed. This bleeding gradually worsens and continues until the end of the video, when Keramati again smokes and also coughs sporadically (figure 13).

After offering a detailed description of the video and providing an overview of the most iconic and historical songs that comprise the soundtrack, I analyze Keramati's actions in relation to the soundtrack she is listening to, reading them as embodied reactions to the memories recalled by the sounds. My main argument is that Keramati represents herself as an agentic subject involved in the process of reminiscence, and that she experiences her lived body through this process. Meanwhile, audiences are offered embodied experiences by being invited to feel something within their own bodies as they watch a nose bleed and listen to the soundtrack. In my explanation of how Keramati attaches the recollection of memories to listening to the soundtrack, I briefly refer to research showing how listening to music can trigger specific memories, and how these memories are recalled automatically. Then, by reading the playlist as auditory trigger recalling memories, I demonstrate that Keramati's recollection of her memories is fragmented and involuntary.

In terms of recalling of past memories, in particular traumatic memories, I argue that Keramati senses the present experience of her memories through her body. Responding to such

embodied experiences, I highlight the arguments made by art theorist and critic Jill Bennett in her book, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, about sense memory. Bennett explores the link between cognition and affect in contemporary art practices. In doing so, she examines some contemporary visual artworks in which the artists deal with the articulation of traumatic memories and trigger empathic responses from viewers. My discussion of Keramati's embodied experiences continues with how she displays her body as an agentic body when she senses her past traumatic memories. Bennett defines sense memory as a category of memory that touches and affects the body, triggering emotions in the present. In my view, Keramati's nosebleed, which starts as war-related soundtracks are played and continues to the end of the video, represents how she stages her embodied experiences in relation to the music that evokes traumatic memories.

After my discussion of how Keramati senses her past memories, I move on to consider the site of the viewer, rather than that of the artist. Since the artist has used a variety of Iranian, European, and North American pieces of music and songs, audiences with different social and cultural backgrounds and various listening experiences and musical memories will have different perceptions of the work. For instance, many Iranian audiences may have their own memories attached to iconic songs referring to the early years of the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, or audiences with different musical memories may have listened to famous musical pieces such a classical piece by Bach (*Air on the G String*, arranged in 1871by August Wilhelmj)[4] or pop songs performed by Neil Young (*Dead Man,* 1996) and the rock band Queen (*I want to break free,* 1984). In this chapter, my focus is on how a typical international viewer is set up to respond to this video, because my goal, in this dissertation, is to investigate how works such as

[4]Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 5th edition, 1954, Vol. IX, p. 298, "Wilhelmj, August".

those by Keramati can challenge stereotypical interpretations and reception in the globalized art world. Nevertheless, I bear in mind that various viewers would think or feel in diverse ways, not in keeping with the implied ideal viewer. I explore how a generalized viewer, situated in a globalized context, is positioned to experience the construction of embodied subjectivity when watching Keramati's video. In doing so, I continue to draw on Bennett, specifically her definition of empathy and her discussion of affect theory. Affect theory mostly focuses on embodied ways of knowing and the study of intersubjective bodily sensational transmission.[5] In Bennett's discussion, affect is not equated with emotion or sympathy, and it is defined as "to see oneself feeling"[6] rather than assimilating the other's traumatic experience when encountering trauma-related artworks.

Bennett examines playwright Bertolt Brecht's theatrical model of "alienation effect" and the notion of "crude empathy" to define her usage of the term empathy in her study of trauma-related artworks. By referring to Brecht, she introduces crude empathy as "a feeling for another based on the assimilation of the other's experience to self."[7]In her terms, when an audience looks at a trauma-related artwork, this form of empathy results in overemotional identification with the work. In this case, the audience might be under the illusion that they encounter something that is reducible and accessible to them, and imagine that their experiences are the same as the person with whom they empathize. Bennett claims that such overemotional identification causes the

[5] For more readings on affect theories and the affective turn in cultural studies, see Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Patricia Clough, and Jean Halley, eds. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004); Clare Hemmings, "Invoking affect: cultural theory and the ontological turn," *Cultural Studies* 19, no. 5 (2005): 548–567.
[6] Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 47.
[7] Ibid, 10.

audience to imagine they *are* that other. She explains that this kind of identification should be avoided because it provides such an illusion.

In her book, Bennett elaborates on how selected trauma-related artworks create a proper distance between the audiences and the one they feel empathy for in those works. Keeping this distance causes an audience to become aware of themselves as another person who is different from the person with whom they empathize. In fact, this distance creates an affective *encounter* instead of emotional *identification*, and it maintains intellectual engagement with the artworks. In this regard, Bennett characterizes her understanding of empathy as "a distinctive combination of affective and intellectual operations."[8]In this section, by referring to Bennett's arguments, I investigate what strategies are used by Keramati to affectively engage an audience with her video while keeping them at a distance from the work in order to avoid an overemotional identification. I show how audiences can subjectively experience their own feelings in their affective encounter with Keramat's video.

Then I explain how such strategies can challenge the objectifying possessiveness and the mastery of the Orientalist gaze as defined and explored both in the introduction to this dissertation and in the previous chapter. These strategies are addressed in relation to Keramati's returning the viewer's gaze, trying to encourage viewers to become spectators of their own feelings, not her body. Finally, I conclude that Keramati creates an intersubjective relation between herself and the work in which both herself and the viewer occupy the position of being embodied subjects.

Embodiment and generating affective responses are also part of the second work I analyze, Keramati's *The Painless Method*. But here, the responses are developed in relation to

[8] Ibid.

the subject matter of beheading. *The Painless Method* (2013) is an eight-minute-and-thirteen-second long montage formed from a series of video shots and images.[9] The shots feature the back of Keramati's head and her naked neck and shoulders while she is standing in front of green scenery in an open outdoor area (figure 14). The distant sound of cars and a train passing by in the distance imply that this green scenery is located within an urban area. These shots are alternated with some images of famous early modern European paintings that portray beheading, as well as photographic documentary images from countries such as China, Japan, and Iran that portray forms of capital punishment, including hanging (figure 15). Among these pictures, there are some images featuring drawings with captions in both English and Persian that describe the history of beheading by means of guillotine, explaining why this method was considered to be painless in contrast to other methods of decapitation (figure 16).

The second section of this chapter starts with a formal analysis of *The Painless Method* and a description of its primary subject matter, which is beheading by guillotine. That said, Keramati does not limit her work to a discussion of decapitation. Rather, her work has multi-layered meanings if we do not limit ourselves to interpreting the voice-over, the filmed scenes, and the selection of the images as a whole. These components can be read separately and independently as well. Hence, in my analysis, I consider all parts of the video both together and separately. In my separate reading of each component of the video, my focus is on the filmed scenes. I read these scenes as representations of the embodied subject and the performance of the corporeal knowledge that she has gained by situating herself in an outdoor space. In these filmed sections, Keramati is standing with her back toward the camera, so we do not see her eyes or how much she is engaged with perceiving her surroundings through the act of seeing. What we

[9] I am using the word "shot" in its cinematic definition. In cinema, shot is defined as a continuous "action on the cinema screen resulting from what appears to be a single run of the camera." See: *Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies*, 1st ed., s.v. "shot."

see is her hands occasionally pressing against her neck, her arms stretching, and the way in which a gentle breeze blows through her hair. I argue that Keramati represents a precognitive and sensual encounter with the location in which she stands. Hence, I examine *The Painless Method* through a phenomenological account of the body to demonstrate how Keramati incorporates embodiment into the discussion of beheading. In particular, I draw on Merleau-Ponty's discussions of body-as-subject and body-as-object to show how Keramati performs her situated body within the location.

This part of my chapter is followed by an analysis of how audiences are positioned to perceive the video as a whole, including the montage of a series of Keramati's video shots, images, and the voice-over. I do so to suggest how Keramati's video might challenge perceptions of her body and identity. In my view, she destabilizes a potentially voyeuristic position, generating affective responses and provoking haptic sensations to undermine the possessive and disembodied Orientalist gaze that might otherwise be cast upon her body. In my discussion of how Keramati's video produces affective responses and haptic sensations, I rely on Laura U. Marks' explanation of "haptic visuality" to explore how Keramati's work can provide audiences with the experience of embodied viewership, which in turn, results in the construction of an intersubjective relation between the artist and the viewers. In this reciprocal intersubjective relation, both the artist and the viewer are embodied subjects.

I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist

I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist is a video montage made by combining several shots. The artist makes a smooth transition between them by using techniques such as dissolve, fade-out, and fade-in to overlap the shots. These techniques cause the video to

appear to be one continuous shot instead of a video constructed by means of distinctively separate shots. The first shot of the video starts by showing Keramati fixing her gaze on the viewer. Her facial expression is neutral, and she blinks and swallows normally. It seems that she is making herself ready, waiting for something to happen. After almost a minute, the soundtrack begins. Although Keramati sometimes shows very subtle changes in her eyes and facial expressions as she listens to different musical pieces, her reactions are not explicit and do not clearly demonstrate how she feels. She also does not make explicit gestures and noticeable bodily movements during the video, though she does smoke and get a nose bleed. When the nosebleed starts, Keramati does not try to stem its flow, and the bleeding only gets worse as the video continues. However, she sometimes tilts her head backward, pinches her nose, and uses her hand to rub the blood from her face. Near the end of the video, when her nosebleed and coughing have become worse, someone behind the camera quietly asks Keramati if she wants the video to be stopped. She answers no with a subtle shake of her head and a slight narrowing of her eyes. Then the soundtrack continues playing. The last piece of music of the soundtrack is the same as the first one played, providing a kind of closure. As the video ends, Keramati's nose is bleeding, and she is smoking and coughing, with no clear conclusion to her performance.

Regarding the soundtrack of the video, most of the songs and voices directly refer to Iranian culture and collective memories, or they epitomize turning points in the contemporary history of Iran. These iconic songs and voices are: a famous song by Googoosh named من آمده‌ام (*I have come to you*),[10] a recorded voice from the Shia public mourning rituals,[11] a couple of

[10]Faegheh Atashin is a celebrated female pop music icon with the stage name of Googoosh. Googoosh is referred to as the "diva and dream" of a generation of Iranians. Her popularity is not limited to Iran, and she is very well-known in other Persian speaking Asian countries. See: Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 993–996; Farzaneh Hemmasi, "Iran's daughter and mother Iran: Googoosh and diasporic nostalgia for the Pahlavi modern," *Popular Music* 36, no. 2 (May

famous revolutionary songs that are broadcast every year by the national television and radio to celebrate the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution[12], some of the most iconic songs and voices recalling the Iran-Iraq war,[13] the voice of a viral video showing the bloody face of a woman, Neda Agha Soltan, who was killed on the street during the post-presidential election protests in 2009,[14] and a recorded voice from the first public art auction to take place in Tehran in 2012.[15] Some non-Iranian songs and pieces of music are used in the soundtrack as well. For example, a classical music piece by Johann Sebastian Bach named *Air on the G String* ,[16]*Dead Man*, the soundtrack made by Neil Young in 1995 for a movie with the same name, a song by the

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2017): 157–177; GJ Breyley and Sasan Fatemi, *Iranian Music and Popular Entertainment : From Motrebi to Losanjelesi and Beyond*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 124–133.
The image and song of Goosgoosh have been used in some other contemporary artworks such as a series of mixed media collage named *Googoosh* done by Afsoon, and a sound installation by Jinoos Taghizadeh, *I and U*, in which one of Googoosh songs is played. See "Fairytale Icons," Afsoon, accessed December 30, 2021https://afsoon.co.uk/selected-work/fairytale-icons/; "U & I," Jinoos Taghizadeh, accessed December 30, 2021, http://jinoostaghizadeh.com/2017/05/15/u-and-i/

[11] This Shia ritual is observed annually for the remembrance of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. See Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Peter J. Chelkowski, *Eternal Performance: Ta'ziyeh and Other Shiite Rituals* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2011).

[12] Nahid Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution: The Politics of Music in Iran* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 87–108.

[13]Keramati uses the voice of Morteza Avini who narrates an episode of a war documentary television series broadcasted by the national television in the 1980s. The name of this series is Ravayat-e Fath (The Narrative of Triumph). For more information about this program see Mehrzad Karimabadi, "Manifesto of Martyrdom: Similarities and Differences between Avini's Ravaayat-e Fath [Chronicles of Victory] and more Traditional Manifestoes," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 3 (May 2011): 381–386.

[14] In 2009 street protest in Iran, Neda Agha Soltan was labelled the symbol of protests after the video of her death became viral. See "In a Death Seen Around the World, a Symbol of Iranian Protests," Nazila Fathi, accessed December 30, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/world/middleeast/23neda.html
For more information about Neda Agha Soltan and and her role in symbolising the 2009 presidential protest movement named Green Movement, see Hamid Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 50–65.

[15] In this voice, we hear the voice of an Iranian movie star celebrity, Reza Kianian, who is calling out the price of an artwork as the auctioneer of Tehran Auction in 2012. For more information about Tehran auction seehttp://tehranauction.com/en/

[16]The piece by Johann Sebastian Bach that is used in this video has been played many times in national radio and television of Iran, in particular, during the 1980s 1990s. For more information about how classical European music deployed by media in the 1980s and the 1990s in Iran and how people perceived that kind of music, see: Ann Lucas, "Understanding Iran Through Music: A New Approach," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (June 2006): 79–89; Ameneh Youssefzadeh, "The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 9, no. 2 (2000): 35–61.

British rock band Queen, *I want to break free*, which was released in 1984,[17]and the soundtrack of a movie named *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) composed by Eleni Karaindrou.[18] The video does not have captions or descriptions of the tracks and their historical or personal references during Keramati's performance. At the end of the video, however, the names of the pieces are listed in the order in which they are played.

Listening through the body

The playlist of Keramati's video includes two groups of songs, voices, and pieces of music. One group is some of the most iconic musical pieces and voices referring to a chronology of major historical events in modern Iran. The other is some famous Iranian, European, and North American songs, which seem to be timeless rather than having specific historical references. When audiences, in particular Iranians, first approach the video, they might interpret the playlist as the artist's auditory autobiography. In Michael Pickering's view, a researcher in the fields of music and memory studies, this might be because popular music is potentially involved in "processes of remembering."[19]He explains that a popular song or piece of music can be "intrinsically moving," and listening to music can make us call the past to mind since a song "is so indissolubly tied up with the memory of a person or place."[20]The playlist in Keramati's video

[17] Although rock music was banned in Iran, in particular during the 1980s and 1990s, Freddie Mercury was one of the famous rock singers whose songs have been listened to by many Iranian. See: Kimia Moghaddam, "Rock music fans' subculture in Tehran," *Social Responsibility Journal; Bingley*11, no. 3 (2015): 424–438.
[18]Ulysses' Gaze is a movie directed by a Greek director, Theo Angelopoulos. Some of his movies have shown in movie theatres and national television in Iran. The main theme of this movie is about the past memories and their presences in current life. This theme is related to Keramati's video. For more information about this movie see Behzad Ghaderi Sohi and Adineh Khojastehpour "Beginning in the End: Poetry of Greek Tragedy in Theo Angelopoulos's "Ulysses' Gaze" and "The Weeping Meadow"," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2010): 59–72.
[19] Michael Pickering, "Popular Music and the Memory Spectrum," in *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music History and Heritage,* eds. Sarah Baker, Catherine Strong, Lauren Istvandity, and Zelmarie Cantillon (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 191.
[20] Ibid.

has such potential. But the way Keramati acts while listening to the playlist reveals that this list is not a mere autobiography. Rather, it is an auditory trigger recalling certain memories as she deals with her past.[21]

Research on how music incorporates memories and how it simulates certain emotions has been undertaken in different musical disciplines such as music studies, ethnomusicology, music therapy, or in disciplines like psychology and neuroscience. These memories can range from personal and collective to traumatic and nostalgic.[22]For instance, in his article, "Six reflections on music and memory," Michael Chanan discusses the interaction of music and memory in everyday life and the way people attach memories to the music to which they listen. [23]After explaining the cognitive structure of memory, Bob Snyder, in his book *Music and Memory: An Introduction*, describes how music affects the feelings of its listeners. In this research, music is introduced as an auditory trigger recalling certain memories. Although music can evoke the process of reminiscence, this evocation mostly happens at the personal level, and all people are not affected in the same way when they listen to popular and widely-distributed musical

[21] For more readings on how listening to music can evoke autobiographical memories, see Lauren Istvandity, *The Lifetime Soundtrack: Music and Autobiographical Memory* (Sheffield, UK : Equinox Publishing, 2019); Lauren Istvandity, "Popular Music and Autobiographical Memory," in *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music History and Heritage,* eds. Sarah Baker, Catherine Strong, Lauren Istvandity and Zelmarie Cantillon (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2018), 199–2007; Amy M. Belfi and Kelly Jakubowski, "Music and Autobiographical Memory," *Music & Science* 4 (2021): 1–5.

[22] For example see Neil Gregor, "Music, Memory, Emotion: Richard Strauss and the Legacies of War," *Music and Letters* 96, no. 1 (2015): 55–76; Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Lawrence D. Blum, "Music, Memory, and Relatedness," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 121–131; Bob Snyder, *Music and Memory: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). For more readings on how neuroscience approaches are applied to study the relationship between music triggers, certain emotions, and memories, see Jean Gabbert Harrell, Soundtracks*: A Study of Auditory Perception, Memory, and Valuation* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus books, 1986); Frederick S. Barrett, et al. "Music-Evoked Nostalgia: Affect, Memory, and Personality," *Emotion* 10, no. 3 (2010): 390–403; Emelia Michels-Ratliff and Michael Ennis. "This Is Your Song: Using Participants' Music Selections to Evoke Nostalgia and Autobiographical Memories Efficiently," *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain* 26, no. 4 (2016): 379–384.

[23] Michael Chanan, "Six reflections on music and memory," *Resonance* 10, no. 2 (2005): 50–55.

productions. For instance, Frederick S. Barrett's research shows that people feel nostalgic at different levels when they listen to the same tracks.[24]

In terms of autobiographical musical memories in Keramati's video, when the playlist is examined in detail, it gradually becomes clear that the artist does not impose an accurate chronological order on the playlist to refer to her past. The tracks are played as follows. The first two tracks of the playlist are a famous classical music piece by Johann Sebastian Bach named *Air on the G String* and a popular song by Iranian singer Googoosh named *I have come to you* (1975). After being played for a few seconds, these two songs are followed by a series of revolutionary and patriotic songs and recorded voices. This part of the playlist brings together iconic songs and voices recalling the atmosphere of Iran in the 1980s and the early 1990s. These songs and voices are, for the most part, set in chronological order, recalling tragic moments of the 1979 Islamic revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, which started in 1980. Then a few seconds of a song by Queen, *I want to break free* (1984), is played. This is followed by the voice of an art auctioneer recorded in 2012 and the voice of a viral video showing the death of Neda Agha Soltan in 2009. At the end of the playlist, two pieces by Eleni Karaindrou, (*Ulysses' Gaze*, 1995), and Neil Young, (*Dead Man,* 1996), are played, and the video is finished by repeating the first track of the playlist, the classical piece by Johann Sebastian Bach. This is how Keramati juxtaposes iconic and historical songs and voices with popular songs, placing two historical voices in reverse temporal order to interrupt the smooth flow of naturalized chronology. In addition, the lack of any captions describing the dates and the historical references of some of the songs and voices reiterates Keramati's approach towards lessening the importance of chronology.

[24] See Barrett, "Music-Evoked Nostalgia," 390–403.

Fragmentation is another feature of the soundtrack in Keramati's video. The excerpted pieces of music, songs, and human voices are played for only a few seconds, and the original tracks are not entirely used. The video flits from one piece of music to another, offering a selection of fragmented soundtracks that look unrelated to the audience, especially non-Iranian audiences who do not have any idea about the chronology of the historical events in Iran. When it comes to musically-evoked reminiscence or how we spontaneously recall some excerpts of music, fragmentation is a part of the processes of remembering and memorization. In terms of memorization, sometimes a piece of music tends to be remembered and recorded in the mind in fragmentary form. Regarding recalling a memory attached to a piece of music, listening to such music might bring that memory to mind fragmentarily. In particular, when that memory involuntarily comes into the mind in relation to sensuous triggers such as smelling or touching, and the person does not consciously think about the things related to that memory.[25]For instance, David Howes, in his article "Cross-talk between the Senses," refers to "multisensory organization" in the structure of mind to explain how we spontaneously recall fragments of music because of being triggered by sensory stimuli.[26] In terms of Keramati's video, she does not clearly visualize the fragmentary form of remembering and memorization in relation to listening to music. What she represents is that some fragmented popular songs and iconic music referring to the contemporary history of Iran are played. Among these songs there are some songs that do not refer to historical moments, and they seem have personal meanings for the artist. As the video progresses, we understand that Keramati has put herself in a situation to show that she

[25] For instance Hermann Ebbinghaus is one the first scholars who defines voluntary involuntary memories, expressing how involuntary memories brings to mind spontaneously and fragmentarily. See Hermann Ebbinghaus, *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology* (New York City: Teachers college, Columbia University, 1913); Terence McLaughlin, *Music and Communication* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970); Regarding the structure of the human mind and its cognitive abilities in relation to listening to music and recalling memories, see Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (London: HarperCollins, 1992); David Howes, "Introduction: empires of the senses," in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (New York: Berg, 2005),1–20.
[26] David Howes, "Cross-talk between the senses," *Senses and Society* 1, no. 3 (April 2015); 381–390.

does not have much control over it. As the artist, however, she has set up all these songs and she knows what pieces of music are included in the soundtrack. For instance, she is standing and listening to the soundtrack that is played without her intervention. She cannot stop the soundtrack or replace it as the playback device is out of her reach. Even when her nosebleed becomes worse and someone behind the camera asks if she wants filming to be stopped she inconspicuously signals no. These actions suggest that Keramati is not in charge of controlling the soundtrack, and she can just listen to the soundtrack that is under the control of someone behind the camera. Kermati finds herself amenable to listening to the fragmented musical pieces that come and go. The pieces that are potentially associated with her past memory as a person who has lived in Iran.

Keramati refers to the presence of sensuous triggers when she recalls memories associated with the fragmented songs and pieces of music. In other words, she activates various senses to return to her body as she listens to the tracks. For instance, she accompanies hearing with smoking and bleeding to elevate tactile sensations generated by listening to music. The inhales and exhales of the fume of the cigarette imply that not only her ears receive the sound, but also her body takes in the sound and engages with listening. Her nosebleed starts mildly and then becomes more severe, reinforcing the physicality of her smoking and coughing. She sometimes tries to stop the bleeding, cleaning her bloody face with her hand. This is how her nose, mouth, and skin are involved in listening by smelling and tasting cigarette smoke and blood and sensing the flow of the blood on her face and the hand rubbing off the blood.

Although listening to music can recall past memories, Keramati does not directly disclose the substance of her memories. Throughout the video, except for subtle eye and facial expressions in a few scenes, she does not reveal explicit emotion. She simply presents herself as

a body bleeding, smoking, and listening to music. This lack of expressivity connotes what Thomas Turino argues regarding the indexicality of music when it comes to invoking memories in relation to listening to the music. In his article, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music," Turino applies theories of signification and the Peircian definition of an indexical sign to explain how music refers to memories. He introduces musical indices as "signs of experience and emotion;"signs that can produce "emotional response and social identification."[27] In his view, the affective potentiality of musical indices lies in their ability to consolidate various meanings within a single sign. A musical index signifies its object through "co-occurrence" with that object in the actual situations created in one's life.[28]Turino refers to music as a sign *of* the signified not a sign *about* the signified. In this non-referential form of signification, music is generally read as connotative rather than denotative. When a specific song or piece of music is heard in different contexts, the music itself as a sign is enough for the person to recall its object and experience past feelings. Turino explains:

> When given indices are tied to the affective foundations of one's personal or communal life— home, family, childhood, a lover, war experiences — they have special potential for creating direct emotional effects because they are often unreflexively apprehended as "real" or "true" parts of the experiences signified.[29]

In Keramati's video, she performs her current experiences as she is listening to the soundtrack that is played during the recording. She introduces the songs and pieces of music of her video as if they are the indexical signs *of* her past memories. These pieces do not reveal any meanings

[27] Thomas Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music," *Ethnomusicology; Champaign*43, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 234–235.
[28] Ibid., 235.
[29] Ibid., 229.

about her past as she does not explain her memories. The video manifests how Keramati senses the present experience of her memories. She does not, however, reflect her feelings on her face conspicuously most of the time. Her performance has as much to do with representing how the past intervenes in the present as it has to do with the details of the events and memories recalled. When the video starts, the camera is fixed on her face. She does not talk about her feelings, perform explicit facial expressions, or enact arranged and expressive body movements like a dancer to narrate the stories behind the tracks. When one piece starts playing, Keramati's facial expression is almost indifferent, and it is difficult to read what she is experiencing from her face.

But there are some scenes in the video that give a clue about the content of her memories, though they do not expressively unveil the details of those memories. For instance, her nosebleed coincides with the playback of a war-related voice. This scene starts by showing the unfocused face of Keramati tilting back her head and pinching her nose. As her face becomes focused, the frightening sound of a siren goes off to alert an emergency warning message, and then her nose starts to bleed (figure 17). This message, which is referred to as the Red Siren, was an air raid announcement that was broadcast on national radio and television during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s to warn people to go to the bomb shelters. This correlation between blood flowing and the playback of the siren suggests that Keramati is haunted by memories of war, and the response of her body to bleed is automatic. It seems that she is experiencing frightening memories at this moment that result in getting a nosebleed, and this bleeding continues to the end of the video. Throughout the video, she tries to keep herself unconcerned about her inner emotions and inattentive to the flow of the blood. But the moment her nose starts bleeding as the screeching sound of the siren goes off, a subtle change in her look implies that she is frightened by the sound of the siren, recalling traumatic memories of war. As for many Iranians, the air attack

warning sound and message recall traumatic memories of war, and it generates visceral responses.[30]

The way that Keramati reacts to the war-related sound deals with a form of memory referred to as "sense memory." Borrowing from French poet and Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo, Jill Bennett uses this collocation to describe a category of memory that "retains a capacity to touch and affect, to trigger emotion in the present."[31] This category of memory is an aesthetic category as well, and it aims to identify "the realm of affective memory" that cannot be expressed through words and images.[32] According to Bennett, Delbo differentiates between ordinary or "common" memory and "sense" memory to discuss how traumatic experiences are preserved within memory to resist historicization and how they are felt in the present. Common memory is "representational," and it is associated with the thinking process. It can be communicated with audiences and be easily understood by them. Delbo designates common memory as "a social or popularly discursive framework," as "the site where history is written."[33] Thus, common memory is not simply "a form of narrative memory inherent in the individual subject but the language that enables such memory to be transmitted and easily understood."[34] For Delbo, in writing history, the language of common memory presents history within an

[30] The Red Siren broadcasted by national television and radio in Iran during the war can be heard on YouTube: See "The Red Alarm (an unforgettable sound for those who lived during Iran-Iraq war)," accessed February 1, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uQ3o6v944U,
For more readings on the position of Red Siren the collective memories of many Iranians and the other war-related references triggering traumatic memories of the Iran-Iraq war, see Orkideh Behrouzan, *Prozak Diaries: Psychiatry and Generational Memory in Iran* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 104–117; Orkideh Behrouzan and Michael M. J. Fischer, ""Behaves Like a Rooster and Cries Like a [Four Eyed] Canine" The Politics and Poetics of Depression and Psychiatry in Iran," in *Genocide and Mass Violence: Memory, Symptom, and Recovery*, eds. Devon E. Hinton and Alexander L. Hinton (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 118–136.
[31] Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 26.
[32] Ibid, 25.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

understandable narrative framework, but when it comes to traumatic experiences, such language is unable to transmit them.

Delbo offers sense memory as a solution that transmits traumatic memories through embodiment, manifesting "the physical imprint of the event." In her view, although the past traumatic experience belongs to "past self" and "it segregates itself from the present 'me'," it nonetheless can haunt one in the present.[35]As the physical pain of experienced trauma erupts, it is felt in the present. However, it is not felt continuously.[36] Building upon these arguments by Delbo, Bennett introduces sense memory as a source for a poetics or an art that permeates into the present as sensation instead of representation. Sense memory "operates through the body" not by means of word and image, and it is felt like a wound rather than seen as a past experience.[37] When the sound of the siren goes off and Keramati gets a nosebleed, it implies that the soundtrack is not just an auditory record representing historical events and personal moments from the past—at the level of the traumatic psyche,"[t]he war never ended,"[38] it was internalized. The soundtrack activates certain sensations associated with the war in the present. Keramati senses her past memories of war; the memories that are not otherwise communicable. She cannot talk about such memories. But they are indexed through her body and her affective responses.

Her nose starts bleeding in the early minutes of the video. It continues to do so until the end of the video, overlapping with the playback of other tracks. Although she does not react explicitly to the pieces that recall violent historical moments, a very subtle fearful expression

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid, 26.
[37] Ibid.
[38] In research done by Behrouzan and Fischer about the traumatic memories of Iranians in the 1980s, a participant refers to the sound of siren and its role in recalling her war memories. She indicated that, "[t]he war never ended...It stayed with us. In our dreams, In our collective memories that would make sense to one expect ourselves. It never ended if you ask me. We internalized it." See Behrouzan and Fischer, ""Behaves Like a Rooster and Cries Like a [Four Eyed] Canine",", 119.

flits on and off her face, suggesting that she is haunted by her traumatic memories. Her nose continues to bleed in the coming shots and becomes worse when Keramati listens to the soundtrack of the death of Neda Agha Soltan near the end of the video. The soundtrack recalls "the self" that Keramati experienced in the past, reminding us of how such memories are still alive to the present "her." Through this performance, she elicits the memories that are stored in her body. Letting the blood flow helps Keramti demonstrate how "the human body *is* an agent, inevitably transforming through its actions both the world and itself."[39] Whatever she does to stem the blood is rejected by her body. She tilts her head, pinches her nose, and rubs off the blood. But her agentic body continues to expel blood over and over, and, by the end of the video, the only thing she can do is to smoke and surrender to bleeding.

Empathic responses and affective engagement

When it comes to the reception of *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist*, the actions performed by Keramati have the capacity to activate the audience's body through the affective encounter, inviting the viewer to be "a spectator of one's own feelings" in Bennett's terms. As noted above, Bennett advocates a form of art that contributes to a better comprehension of traumatic experiences by focusing on the unique property of visual language and its affective quality. She talks about those trauma-related artworks that are not clearly indentified by their testimonial function, or they do not directly communicate a specific trauma experienced by the artist who introduces themselves as a trauma survivor. Rather, they indirectly refer to traumatic experiences by generating affective responses in the audiences. According to her, the viewers' affective responses are not provoked by "emotional identification or sympathy;

[39]Letitia Maynell, "Introduction: Minding Bodies," in *Embodiment and Agency,* eds. Sue Campbell and Letitia Maynell (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2009), 1.

rather, they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work."[40]She expands the concept of empathy to explain how audiences can be critically engaged in empathic responses, making connections with people suffering from trauma. This connection draws the viewers close to a work and builds up cooperative and intersubjective relationships between the viewer and affective artworks. Hence, she claims those trauma-related artworks that indirectly refer to traumatic experience by generating affective responses should be considered as "transactive" not "communicative" art. This is because this sort of art "often touches us, but it does not necessarily communicate the "secret" of personal experience."[41]Keramati's video fits within this framework. Not only does she corporeally experience affective responses as she recalls her traumatic memories, but the work invites the audience to affectively engage with her performance, experiencing bodily sensations for themselves as they watch the video. This happens through what Bennett defines as empathy.

The term empathy has been conceptualized differently in psychology and philosophy. Bennett calls for a form of empathy that is simultaneously emotional and cognitive. She looks for an empathy that generates both emotional responses and critical inquiry while it does not provide the viewer with an over-identification with the other's experience. In this regard, she refers to Bertolt Brecht's theatrical model of "alienation effect" or "distancing effect" and his notion of "crude empathy" to introduce her own definition of empathy that differs from crude empathy. Crude empathy is that sort of empathy resulting in over-identification with the other's experience; it is "a feeling for another based on the assimilation of the other's experience to self."[42]By disrupting familiar theatrical elements, the alienation effect, on the other hand, hinders the audiences' over-identifications with the characters, challenging them to avoid being passively

[40] Ibid, 7.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid, 10.

absorbed by the play.[43]The alienation effect makes the representation strange while it is still recognizable. It draws attention to the world outside of the performance, placing the audience at the position of "understanding things so that we can interfere."[44]

In her study, Bennett defines empathy as "a *feeling for* another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible."[45] The empathy that she looks for requires proper distance through which one becomes aware of oneself as another person, differentiating oneself from the person for whom he or she feels empathy. In this form of empathy, Bennett focuses more on affective encounter instead of emotional over-identification with trauma-related art, which in turn, maintains intellectual engagement with the artworks.

In order to draw the viewers' attention to affective experiences of sensation, Keramati adopts some strategies to resist the crude empathic projection onto her body. She tries to locate the audience at a proper emotional distance so as to challenge any over-identification with her performance. The rejection of crude empathy can be traced in the way she depicts herself as well as the name she chooses for the work: *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist*. This name is designed to draw the audiences' attention to her role as an artist-in-general without being marked by gender and geography and to what she has created as an artwork. As the words "I am an artist" are written in bold at the end of the video. This name shifts the focus from the content to the form, to the surface, to the body trying to not let its bodily properties become the spectacle. The title of the work emphasizes that this person is an artist and that what she has done is an artwork. When this video is exhibited in the global art venues, this

[43]John Willett, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theatre*: *The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 91.
[44] Ibid, 193.
[45]Bennett, *Empathic Vision,* 10.

name invites the viewers to look at the video and forget about presumptions, expectations, and inclinations about how a Middle Eastern female body should be represented.

This intention to invite audiences to look at the work qua work is discernable in the camera's movements. The camera repeatedly focuses and un-focuses on Keramati's face during the first few minutes of the video, and it takes shaky shots during the rest of the video. These frequent changes remind the viewers to look at the surface by constantly interrupting their continuous gaze at Keramati's face. These formal features work to undercut a viewer's overemotional engagement with Keramati's nosebleed and to draw their attention to the world outside of the video—that of its production.

In spite of the work's title and Keramati's intention to avoid highlighting her gendered and national identity, embodied markers of identity are present. The dark colours of her hair and her eyes are clearly represented, rather than blurred or effaced. She does not cover her shoulders and face, so the colour of her skin, which is light olive, stands in stark contrast to the white background. In addition, wearing *Kohl* refers to the traditional black eyeliner widely used by women in the Middle East.[46]In my view, the simultaneous rejection of the racial and cultural identities in the work's title while representing the artist's body in the work itself can, through contradiction, serve as a distancing effect. On the one hand, the name asks the viewer to bypass expectations, on the other hand, when the video starts, a body with racial and cultural markers seems to offer itself to an Orientalist gaze. This contradiction can place the audience at a distance from their probable expectations. By operating concurrently through such proximity and distance, this situation dynamically locates the presumed international audience at a proper distance from the work to resist crude empathy — that distance defined by Bennett as a position

[46] For more readings on the usage of Kohl in the Middle Eastern and its origin, see: *The Islamic World: Past and Present*, vol 1. (2004), s.v. "Body Decoration."

in which the audience can be aware of their difference from the person for whom they have empathy. This is what Keramati tries to do. The audience is constantly situated in a condition that enables them to reassess their expectations of her body through the ongoing contradiction between the title and the visual effect of Keramati's body. Thus, they may become able to open up this opportunity to engage affectively and intellectually with the work. Furthermore, the way in which Keramati represent herself can reply that she recognizes and respects the political value of recognizing and marking the specificity of bodies and identities as they are intersectionally and differentially constituted. Keramati draws the viewer's attention pointedly to her embodied identity to refuse the hegemony and normativity of the unmarked and essentialized female body in the stereotypical representations of women from the Middle East.

Another strategy applied by Keramati to lessen the chance of overemotional identification and crude empathy is the return of the gaze. Throughout the video, Keramati stares directly at the camera, and consequently the audience. The returning gaze has a distancing effect as it destroys what Brecht explains as "the illusion of being the unseen spectator."[47]In order to explain the distancing effect and how it undercuts crude empathy, Brecht refers to a convention in traditional European theatrical performances in which an imaginary wall segregates the actors from the audiences.[48] During the play, the actors should pretend they are not aware of the audiences' presence. In this regard, members of the audience can watch the actors through this imaginary wall, but the actors cannot watch them.[49]

[47]Willett, *Brecht on Theatre*, 92.
[48] Ibid.
[49] For more reading on how this imaginary wall is defined in theatre and cinema and how artists break it, see Tom Brown, *Breaking the Fourth Wall* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007), 56–59.

Brecht asserts that a direct address to the audience by the actor immediately demolishes the imaginary wall, and it shows the actor's awareness of being watched as well as making sure that "the illusion of being the unseen spectator" is destroyed. This illusion is more inclined to be fostered in cinema, where movie theatres are mostly kept dark during the movie, and the audiences, "isolated from contact with the world of visible objects,"[50]are more likely to be under such an illusion and feel invisible that they can see but they are not be seen.[51]This sense of invisibility is broken in Keramati's video. In its original rendition, this video was projected onto a large screen in a dark movie theatre like a movie. The video starts with Keramati's conscious stare at the viewer and continues with her fixed gaze on the viewer for majority of the video's running time. Her stare, throughout the video, works to invoke a sense of unease in the viewer, and give them a feeling of both being witnessed and invited to stare back. Her stare is engaging; it does not aim to dissuade the viewers from making eye contact with her. This reciprocal gaze positions the viewer in the place of an observed subject, and their presence is acknowledged by Keramati's gaze. Through this positioning, they are encouraged to think of themselves and perceive their physical presence in the room.

Keramati's gaze addresses the audience in the second person, making them a witness to the memories somatized by her. The viewer is no longer considered a spectator who passively absorbs the video in the darkened room where nobody can see them. They are instead invited to be witness of Keramati's nosebleed as she recalls her traumatic memories of war. The artist incorporates seeing into the act itself and turns the audience as a seer into a witness or active

[50] Vivian Carol Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 297.
[51] For more readings on cinematic spectatorship and the illusion of not being seen, see Regard Allen, *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London and New York: Rouledge, 1993); Michele Aaron, *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking on* (London; New York: Wallflower, 2007).

participant in her recollection of memories. In Bennett's discussion of trauma-related artworks, she talks about the viewer who becomes a "secondary witness." This person is not primarily involved in traumatization, but is the viewer of a trauma-related artwork, and as such is positioned in relation to the content of that trauma expressed through the work. Therefore, the viewer might generate an affective response because of encountering the content of that trauma. Bennett argues that in trauma-related artworks generating affective responses, the viewer as a (secondary) witness can "experience a "muted" dose of trauma"[52] because the artist does not explicitly express and *represent* their traumatizations to avoid the potential issue of crude empathy and overemotional identification. This is how the primary traumatization remains muted: it is not revealed completely, but it still affects the viewer and lets the viewer experience something of the trauma for themselves, as index rather than icon.

Affective response in Keramati's video is stimulated through certain auditory references and visual imagery. As discussed earlier in this section, the artist does not visually or textually represent the exact memories that she recalls when listening to the soundtrack. She deals with the musical piece, bleeding, and smoking as indexical signs without referents. Although she is experiencing a steadily worsening nosebleed, no pain is expressed to the audience. There is no dramatically suffering body offered as a spectacle,[53]and there are no images to visually reveal the memories related to the historical incidents indexed sonically, such as revolution, war, and street protests. The lack of disturbing images related to well-known brutal incidents that happened in Iran lessens the chance of the viewer's consumption of such *familiar* images when the video is exhibited in international venues.

[52] Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 9, 52-53
[53] For the drawbacks of the representation of suffering bodies and turning wounded body into the spectacle, see Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003).

Instead of offering familiar images of suffering with which to over-empathize, Keramati brings the audience close to the imprint of trauma in her body through her nosebleed and moments such as the sound of the siren. She provides her audiences with an opportunity to feel their own emotional states and bodily reactions when they see the flow of blood and hear the sound of the siren, or when they see the inhaling and exhaling of the fume of a cigarette and hear the anxious and nervous voices speaking in Persian. In particular, the image of blood and its flowing and spreading on the skin might produce skin sensations and visceral responses in some viewers.[54]In addition, the affective responses and embodied engagements are more provoked in the audiences if they have their own lived experiences of those musical pieces, nosebleeds, or smoking. In fact, affective responses to visual and sonic stimuli may cause the audiences as secondary witnesses to feel their own feelings, and they can relate themselves to Keramati's experience through their embodied encounters with the work. Hence, the viewers' bodies become connected to the artist's body while they are aware of the otherness of Keramati's feelings and her past and current lived experiences. The audiences may be touched by Keramati's performance, but the secret of her experience is not necessarily communicated. Thus, the artist does not communicate her emotions nor represent them, rather they are largely inaccessible and are transmitted by generating affective responses in the audience.

When it comes to the exhibition of this video in the globalized context, looking directly at the audience can be discussed in terms of how Keramati's direct gaze to the camera challenges the Orientalist gaze, the gaze that is defined based on Mulvey's discussion on the male gaze in cinema. In Mulvey's terms, the male-orientated structure of the gaze in mainstream Hollywood

[54] For more readings on how visual elements can activate embodied responses such as visceral responses and how affective and cognitive processes are involved in visual perception, see Alex Martin, "The Representation of Object Concepts in the Brain," *Annual Review of Psychology* 58, no.1 (2007): 25–45; Anjan Chatterjee, "Prospects for a cognitive neuroscience of visual aesthetics," *Bulletin of Psychology and the Arts* 4, no.2 (2003): 55–60.

cinema limited female bodies within its scope. This gaze turns female bodies into objectified ones that satisfy a heterosexual male desire and assure his own superiority. In this mode of looking, the viewer is an active observer who has control over the spectacle and the spectacle is the passive object of representation, which occupies the position of "to-be-looked-at-ness." As explained in the introduction to this dissertation, in the globalized art world, this structure is usually applied to view artworks in which female artists with Middle Eastern backgrounds represent themselves. Hence, Keramati's returning gaze can be read in relation to hooks's argument for an oppositional gaze, which I discussed in the previous chapter to analyze Hedayat's video.

While Hedayat's stare to the camera in *Untitled* looks more like fixing her eyes on a point to control blinking, Keramati intentionally and consciously looks at the camera and asserts *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile;* ***I am an artist***. This assertion indicates that she not only looks, but also her look can return and repel the Orientalist gaze that might be projected upon her body in a globalized context. Through this returning gaze, she subverts the possessive property of the Orientalist gaze, disrupting the mastery of that gaze and its voyeuristic position. As a result, Keramati builds up "mutual subject-to-subject recognition" in Kaplan's terms. In this form of relation shaped between the artist's body and the viewer's body, each spectator becomes "a spectator of one's own feelings," and both the artist and the viewer are located at the position of being an active subject. Both are involved in an intersubjective interaction; they are involved in the construction of subjectivity that is relational and embodied. However, this intersubjective interaction is mediated through video, and it differs from the kind of intersubjectivity articulated

during a live event. The intersubjectivity conveyed in Keramati's work can be discussed by what Jones refers to as "presence in absentia."[55]

When it comes to incorporating the body into art, video is a medium that can relate issues of bodily endurance, though it does not have all the possibilities of a live performance, in particular, it lacks live artist-audience interactions. Yet Jones argues that the artist's bodily presence can be maintained in a documented performance to some extent. In her view, phenomenological engagement between the audience and the artist in a live performance differs from the kind of experience audiences have while viewing a recorded performance. But the intersubjectivity created between the viewer and the artist is the same in both cases.[56] In Keramati's video, she interacts with her audience with the help of the camera as a mediator to approach the audience. In this intersubjective interaction, she is present in one way or the other. Jones calls it "presence in absentia" in her discussion of subjectivity and the self-reflective features of documented performances. This kind of presence brings the subject to the surface, where it interweaves with the objecthood of the artwork and the personhood of the artist, paving the way for shaping subjectivities that are intersubjective as well as interobjective.[57]

The Painless Method

The Painless Method (2013) is an eight minutes and thirteen second video montage consisting of a series of video shots and still images. The video segments display the back of Keramati's head, her naked neck, and her shoulders. While the close-up of Keramati's head and shoulders appears mostly in focus, the rest of the visual field is out-of-focus and blurry. Every now and then, she

[55]Amelia Jones, "Presence in Absentia," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997), 11.
[56] Ibid., 12. See also Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject,* 10.
[57]Jones, "Presence in Absentia," 11–18.

moves her head, touches her neck, and stretches her arms. Since Keramati is standing in an outdoor area, a gentle breeze sometimes blows her hair, mostly wrapped on top of her head. As with *I am not a female artist from the Middle East; I am an artist*, the camera sometimes focuses and un-focuses very subtlety on the Keramati's body, taking shaky shots, or in some shots, the position of the camera is slightly changed.

The soundtrack of the video is Keramati's voice-over combined with the environmental sound of the location in which she is standing, such as the sound of the breeze, birds, and the distant sound of cars and a train passing by. This soundtrack is synchronized with the filmed shots in this video, and when the images of beheading and hanging are shown no sound is played. The voice-over is Keramati's voice reading selected lines of a work of prose (translated from Persian into English through subtitles). The prose is excerpted from the introduction of Golestan, the most prominent work of prose written by the nationally and internationally recognized poet Sa'di in the thirteenth century AD.[58] This introduction is well-known in Persian literature, and it features praying to God, expressing gratitude, and saying the words of thanksgiving for blessing. Iranians are familiar with Sa'di and his popular works such as this introduction of Golestan. This thanksgiving begins by praising God because our lives are at the mercy of him, and every breath we take is a sign of his kindness and mercy. The video starts with a blank white surface that carries the voice-over of Keramati reading these words:

> Laudation to the God of majesty and glory! Obedience to him is a cause of approach and gratitude in increase of benefits. Every inhalation of the breath prolongs life and

[58]Franklin Lewis, "GOLESTĀN-E SAʿDI," *Encyclopaedia Iranica,*vol. XI, fasc.1 (2001):79–86. https://iranicaonline.org/articles/golestan-e-sadi

> every expiration of it gladdens our nature; wherefore every breath confers two benefits and for every benefit gratitude is due.[59]

The blank image then fades into a frame of Keramati standing outdoors in the fresh air. What might first grab the viewer's attention is the liveliness of the skin in the fresh air, the gentle breeze blowing through her hair, and the sound of that breeze occasionally blowing into the camera's microphone. There is little information given about this body and where it is standing. Unlike the previous video, we cannot see her face or look her in the eye. Moreover, in *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist* both the viewer and the artist hear the soundtracks. Therefore, the viewer is able to see if the artist reacts to those tracks or not, and sense their own feelings generated from listening to the soundtrack while seeing the artist's face. In *The Painless Method*, we do not see the artist's face, and the images of execution and the information about the guillotine are interspersed with the videoed scene of Keramati standing outdoors. Hence, the viewer is left to think on their own about how they can relate the still images in relation to the body in the video shots.

Regarding the images used in this video, the first two paintings are religious paintings by Caravaggio from the early seventeenth century. One is the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, where Abraham is about to sacrifice his son by slitting his throat, and the other one is *David with the Head of Goliath*.[60] Following these images are two documentary photographs of the guillotine in use. These are followed by a piece of text that defines the guillotine and introduces it as a painless method of decapitation. This method is regarded as painless because the blade cuts the head so

[59]Muslih-uddinSa'di, *The Gulistan or Rose Garden of Sa'di*, trans. Edward Rehatsek (Iowa: Omphaloskepsis, 2010), 3.
[60]For more information about this painting see Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Caravaggio: The Artist and His Work* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012), 139–141.

quickly that the brain cannot process any pain signals.[61] However, complete information is not provided by the first textual insert; it is provided gradually by additional written texts that are interspersed between images of decapitation and the videoed scenes of Keramati standing with her back to us. Among the images is a print by Goya from the *Disasters of War* Series made in the eighteenth century that represents a severed head and the mutilated torso and limbs of male bodies on a tree.[62]After these prints and the introduction of the guillotine, there is a photographic image of beheading by a *Gunto* sword in Japan. Then there are two photographic images representing people who were hung in Iran and Saudi Arabia and an explanation about hanging and how it is practiced in some countries. The last image is that of a Chinese woman with a noose around her neck. Her name is Tao Jing, and she was executed in China in 1991 for a drug-related crime.[63]

Through the historical chronology of the images, Keramati indicates the various applications of severing the head, which range from religious and heroic acts to homicide and capital punishment. But, like the previous video, this chronology is not highlighted, and it is not represented explicitly as the paintings do not have captions to give conceptual and contextual information about these works. Therefore, audiences who are not familiar with these images might not notice the historical chronology, though the names of the images are listed at the end of the video without the dates. Since the name of the work is *The Painless Method* and there are

[61]Regarding the execution method of the guillotine and its deference with other methods of performing capital punishment, see Jesper Ryberg, *Neurointerventions, Crime, and Punishment: Ethical Considerations*(New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 139–141.
[62]*The Disasters of War* is a series of prints created in the nineteenth century by Francisco Goya.For more information aboutthis series see Francisco Goya, *The Disasters of War* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967).
[63] For more information about hanging and capital punishment in Iran, Middle Eastern countries, and china, see Roger Hood and Carolyn Hoyle, *The Death Penalty: A Worldwide Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Hong Lu and Terance D. Miethe, *China's Death Penalty: History, Law and Contemporary Practices* (New York: Routledge, 2007); "Known as the first woman worthy of death sentenced to death only 20 years of age," accessed February 1, 2022, https://steemit.com/death/@mzee/known-as-the-first-woman-worthy-of-death-sentenced-to-death-only-20-years-of-age

some texts and images about the guillotine, beheading, and hanging, one's attention is drawn to this method of capital punishment. The frequent cuts to the filmed scenes of the back of Keramati's head, neck, and shoulders draw attention to where the head can be severed from the body. Indeed, most of the time when an image about beheading is shown, the scene after that shows Keramati moving or touching her neck.

The situated body

In addition to analyzing the filmed scenes together with the images, the filmed scenes can be scrutinized separately and independently. In doing so, it becomes clear that the filmed scenes in *The Painless Method* represent a body rather than a specific person. We are offered an unrecognizable individual standing with her back turned, exploring the presence of her neck and its fleshiness by means of her hands. She touches her neck, moves it to the right and left, and stretches her arms to gain a perception that is corporeal not visual (figure 18). This reference to gaining embodied knowledge by touching the body or moving body limbs is rooted in phenomenological understandings of the body. In Merleau-Ponty's account of body, the body is both object and subject, being seen and seeing, sensible and sentient, and passive and active. In addition, there is a reciprocal relation between body-as-subject (the cognitive understanding of the body, the lived body) and body-as-object (the objectified understanding of the body, the dead body); the mind and body are not separate entities. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it."[64] In phenomenological terms, by virtue of being embodied, the subject gets to know itself by knowing that it is an object of sense for itself as well as others. The body "sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for

[64]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 151.

itself."[65] *The Painless Method* displays Keramati's attempt to perceive her body as embodied flesh; the body that is not in front of her; the body that she is, sharing her experience of embodiment with us. Keramati's neck manifests itself to her as an object by being touched. Meanwhile, she presents her sense of agency as a subject who is aware of her own actions by performing the act of touching. The body is a "carnal being," and the skin is a sensible contour of the body; it is "the surface of a depth."[66] By pressing her neck, moving her head, and raising her arms, Keramati forms folds and wrinkles on her skin to show us her skin as the sensible contour of her body. She does not represent her eyes and her look in order to emphasize that she knows this carnal self through skin and the sense of touch.

Keramati is standing in front of green scenery that is blurred. The camera focuses on her body, but it does not immediately provide us with information about where she is standing. Gradually we understand that she might be in a city location as the sounds of distant cars are heard and a train passes by in two shots of the video. The presence of the train and cars relates the body standing in this location to modernity, machines, speed, and dynamism that are significant features of spatial experience in the city. By locating herself in an urban space, Keramati aims to not merely limit the construction of her embodied subjectivity to her neck, arms, and hands that are involved in touching and moving. Rather she incorporates spatial perception into this construction and the way her skin feels the breeze and her ears hear the background sound.

[65]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 162.
[66]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 136.

By standing with her back turned to the camera and keeping her body relatively still, Keramati implies that she is looking at the urban scenery and turning it into a spectacle. We can replicate her vision because we are the ones looking in the same direction. The video, however, does not reveal exactly where her eyes are looking, or if they are open or shut. It seems that its primary focus is to represent how she makes a bodily connection between her body and the space to gain corporeal knowledge. The gentle breeze moving on her skin, the sound of cars, birds, and a train, raising her arms in the air and moving her head and neck help Keramati develop environmental understanding through tangible physical experience with her surroundings.

The environmental sound of birds and breeze conveys the peace and quiet of the location in which the artist stands. The sound of cars in the distance suggests she is far from the hustle and bustle of the city, however the loud sound of the train passing by disrupts this tranquillity a few times. The calm tone with which she reads the prose implies a meditating atmosphere. This state of being in meditation is emphasized by the content of the prose, which is about praising God. Voice-over is usually applied in movies to narrate, tell stories, or look into a character's mind, in particular when the voice of that character is used as a voice-over.[67] In the case of Keramati's work, the video starts with a blank white surface accompanying a disembodied voice-over. When this scene dissolves into the next shot featuring Keramati, it implies the viewer is hearing what the artist is thinking about. The camera is involved in the scene as a passive recorder. It shows someone standing there, and the voice-over implies that Keramati is reading Sa'di's prose to herself, becoming lost in contemplation. Indeed, in one part of this prose, the

[67]*Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Voice over."

poet mentions meditation and contemplation by saying, "plunged his head into the cowl of meditation and had been immersed in the ocean of visions."[68]

The prose Keramati is reading includes some allegories that explain nature by evoking tactile sensations. Thinking about this prose while engaging bodily in not only touching her neck but sensing the place invites the viewer to make intertwined connections among Keramati's thoughts, sensations, feelings, and perceptions with their own feelings and sensation. In particular, the prose draws attention to senses other than sight. For example, the prose begins by mentioning the act of breathing and consequently smelling where it says, "[e]very inhalation of the breath prolongs life and every expiration of it gladdens our nature."[69]The sense of smell is clearly referred to in the last sentence read by Keramti, "the perfume of the flowers intoxicated me so much that I let go the hold of my skirts."One part recalls the sense of taste, "the juice of the cane became delicious honey by his [God] power, and the date a lofty tree by his [God] care."[70]

Haptic spectatorship

Besides articulating an embodied and spatial subject and representing the lived body in the filmed shots, Keramati's actions convey other significations and interpretations if the audiences read them as corresponding with the slides that depict images and written text. From this point of view, she places her body in front of the camera/viewer's eye to create an embodied subject who is at the centre of narrating the painless method of beheading by guillotine.

[68]Sa'di, *The Gulistan,* 5.
[69] Ibid, 3.
[70] Ibid, 4, 5.

In *The Painless Method*, the artist does not give enough information to interpret the representation of her body in this location. Although, as noted, there are some trees, a train, the sound of cars, winds, and birds, the location is empty of any cultural signifiers. The environment is often blurred, so we cannot recognize where it is exactly. The body looks feminine, but it does not give more information to prove this presumption. The skin colour is light olive, and the hair is black, but it is not possible to correctly guess her race or nationality. Even if her face was shown, it would not easy to discern the artist's race or nationality.

The employment of an isolated body without distinctive embodied and geographical signifiers of identity helps Keramati undermine stereotypical readings and presumptions about the representation of female Middle Eastern bodies. By lessening the emphasis on gender, race, and cultural affiliation, Keramati can draw attention to the body qua body as much as possible. In doing so, she turns a distinctive body into a general body to open up an opportunity for the viewer to see what she is presenting instead of who she is.

When the video starts playing, the burred background causes the viewers to focus more on the body, and the turned-away face lets them occupy the artist's private space of quiet contemplation without being watched or disturbed by the artist's look. The camera acts as an intruder into Keramati's privacy, allowing us to enter into her solitude. We see the scenery she is looking at, we see her body, and she does not see us. It seems that the spectator can be located at the position of the controller of the gaze, adopting a fixed and one-directional gaze that builds upon distance. The distance that is shaped as the viewer sets themselves apart from the body represented on the screen. Simultaneously, however, Keramati undermines this possessive and disembodied gaze by destabilizing the voyeuristic position. She does not let the viewer keep this position in a comfortable and stable relation with the body on the screen. As the video

progresses, the viewer understands that they do not have access to the whole body; they cannot gaze freely at its entirety. The camera frames her body closely, limiting the viewer's gaze to selected areas. It locates the neck at the centre of the frame, and consequently, at the centre of attention. The viewer gradually realizes that this video's subject matter is the neck, not an objectified female body placed on display. Through the frequent cuts to various images of beheading, Keramati disrupts the cohesion of the video as a continuous shot of a naked body.[71] Thus, viewers find themselves in the position of wondering how to relate the images with the filmed body instead of being engrossed in watching the body. They start watching the video from the comfortable and desirable position of a voyeur, but end up with their voyeuristic position unsettled, perhaps thinking about the sensation of a weighted blade touching their neck.

Keramati builds an affective bond between the video and the viewer by emphasizing the presence of the neck and encouraging viewers to think about and feel their own necks. In key shots, the artist presses her neck, especially after the images representing beheading briefly appear. Therefore, the viewer perceives the neck as a touchable, visible, and sensible body part that can be cut by a heavy blade and a sword, or be broken by means of hanging. The juxtaposition of these images with the shots in which Keramati touches her neck does not let the viewer read her actions as sensuous ones, or perceive them as if they are giving pleasure. When we read the images and the filmed shots together, it seems that she is pressing her neck's muscle to relax it or to reduce pain and stiffness. Her actions remind the viewers that the neck being cut in the images is a real part of the body. Through such juxtaposition, she strives to activate the

[71]Christian Metz in his article, "The Imaginary Signifier," draws on psychological theories to discuss how frequent disruption in viewing a movie causes the unity of all perceiving subject to be troubled. See Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," *Screen* 16, no. 2 (summer 1975): 14–76.

audiences' bodies and generate affective responses by allowing them to feel something within their own phenomenal and sentient bodies.[72]

There is one particularly striking scene in which the relationship between the images and the filmed shots is shaped affectively to emphasize the neck. The black and white photograph of beheading a man by a *Gunto* sword in Japan is followed by a shot featuring a train passing by in the distance.[73] The train passes in the background, but the camera captures this moment in a way that the train drives right across the artist's neck. The fast speed of the train recalls a guillotine or sword blade that cuts the neck quickly, and the screeching sound of the train wheels running and grinding the railway might make viewers shiver as a result. Almost two minutes before the end of the video, this scene of the train passing by is repeated after the photograph of a Chinese woman is shown. In this picture, the woman is taken to the execution grounds by two guards while a noose is looped around her neck. This documentary photograph cuts to the filmed shot in which a train passes by in front of Keramati. Then, the sound of the train grinding against the railway is heard, and this sound continues as the video finishes and the final credits are played. In the final frames of the video, Keramati reads the following part of the prose saying, "I intended to fill the skirts of my robe with roses when I reached the rose-tree, as presents for my friends; but the perfume of the flowers intoxicated me so much that I let go the hold of my skirts."[74]Letting the hold of the skirt go alludes to concepts such as detachment and liberation. Reading these last words with the subject matter of the video can recall the head being detached from the body.

[72]For more information on the viewer's embodied and affective responses and their engagement with films and moving images, see Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
[73]This photograph does not have date. It is referred as "Execution by Gunto-Sword, Japan" at the end of the video.
[74]Sa'di, *The Gulistan,* 5.

Not only does the representation of the hand touching the neck generate tactile sensations, but also the formal features of the shots simulate the sense of touch in the viewers. These features draw attention to the body and the surface, to the skin, and they can cause the viewers to perceive the body as a palpable flesh, experiencing "haptic visuality" in Laura U. Marks's terms. In Marks's discussion of haptic visuality she discusses how the screen can be regarded as a corporeal skin, and how the viewer perceives the images through their skin not their eyes. What is important in haptic visuality is that the eyes behave as if they are the organs of touch.[75]

Through the tactile engagement of the viewer with the haptic properties of images, corporeal senses such as touch, smell, taste, and kinesthetics are prioritized over sight. However, both optical and haptic visuality are usually involved in the process of seeing "in a dialectical movement from far to near, from solely optical to multisensory."[76] According to Marks, a corporeal screen in cinema and video art is shaped through the representation of textured surfaces arising tactile sensations, blurred images, or gradual figuration. All in all, the aim is to draw attention to the screen rather than to its depth. Instead of distinguishing form, haptic visuality invites an effort to discern texture. Haptic looking is more like grazing rather than gazing; it moves rather than focusing.[77] In Keramati's video, the tactile quality of the video shots are conveyed by the blurred background and the body skin rendered in high resolution. The blurred background foregrounds the presence of the body, and the slight shifts of focus draws our attention more to the liveliness of the skin and the moles and freckles on it. The vitality of the skin invites a type of looking that would travel along with the soft texture of the skin, and our eyes touch the skin and graze across it.

[75] Marks, *Touch*, 2.
[76] Ibid, 3.
[77] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 162.

In Keramati's video, haptic looking undercuts the disembodied properties of the Orientalist gaze when her video is observed in the globalized art scene. The Orientalist gaze entails a disembodied mode of looking and it reinforces the separation of an all-perceiving subject from an object represented on the screen. Keramati applies haptic visuality to destroy the distanced relationship between the viewer and the viewed. Haptic images in her video encourage the viewer to dissolve their "subjectivity in the close and bodily contact with the image."[78]The screen does not divide the self from the other; rather it becomes a dynamic site of interchange between the self and other, where they recognize their "profound reciprocity and even *simultaneity*."[79]This fluctuation between the viewer and the screen creates a constant shift between distance and closeness. In Marks's words, "By engaging with an object in a haptic way, I come to the surface of myself... losing myself in the intensified relation with an other that cannot be known."[80]Haptic visuality "muddies intersubjective boundaries," undermining the construction of subjectivity based on separation and distance between us and other. This is how Keramati brings embodied perception into an intersubjective screen (skin) between the viewer and haptic images. In this regard, the self-possessive, disembodied, and objectifying properties of the Orientalist gaze are interrupted.

By prioritizing the sense of touch, Keramati undermines efforts to gain knowledge through the sense of sight. The sense that tends to *see* differences might read the represented body as marginalized when this video is exhibited in the globalized art scene. Generating such tactile sensations in the audiences activates the viewers' bodies, so they are less likely to interpret Keramati's body through stereotypical presumptions and expectations. *The Painless*

[78] Marks, *Touch*, 13.
[79]Amelia Jones, *Self/image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 141.
[80] Marks, *Touch*, 19.

Method is a video that tries to establish a reciprocal intersubjective relation between the artist's body and that of the viewer, rendering both of them embodied subjects.

Conclusion

Keramati is critical of self-exoticim and the stereotypical definition of Iranian-ness. She clearly asserts this opinion in the name of her work by emphasizing her identity as an artist, *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile;* ***I am an artist***. Her videos reflect how she reconceptualizes Iranian-ness based on her personal lived experiences as an artist coming from Iran. But she does not make visually clear what these experiences are. Like Hedayat, Keramati deals with embodiment in both of her videos. Hedayat's tears flow down because of her struggle to avoid blinking, and Keramati gets a nosebleed as she listens to certain music. Hedayat stands in front of the camera, trying to perform an unblinking gaze during an extended period of time. There is no sound or external trigger for the performance, other than her will to resist the involuntary act of blinking. Keramati deals with embodiment based on her experiences as a person who has lived in Iran. She recalls personal memories and collective memories such as the 1979 revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, and the 2009 post-presidential election. But the lack of visual references to such memories and historical incidents does not allow her video to be read stereotypically as a work with politicized subject matter related to the Middle East.

Keramati creates two montages out of filmed shots, images, and sounds to perform the concept of the lived body and embodied subject. Like Hedayat, she provides her audiences with the experience of the construction of embodied subjectivity and embodied viewership, which can result in a mutual subject-to-subject relationship between herself and the viewer. In one video, she perceives her lived body by listening to some tracks and senses the recollection of past

memories. In the other, she stands in front of urban scenery, communicating with her surroundings through her bodily senses. Introducing herself as an active subject, Keramati insists that she has control over her actions. At the same time, she demonstrates that her body is agentic, especially when she is unable to stop her nose from bleeding.

When it comes to the reception of the works in the Global North, the representation of an active subject undermines the instrumental and objectifying properties of the Orientalist gaze. In addition, Keramati challenges efforts to turn the features of her body into a spectacle by distracting audiences from focusing on her body-as-object. In doing so, she draws the viewer's attention to the formal features of the work as well as how she approaches the subject matter of her videos instead of her nationality and ethnic membership. She does not offer her body in a way that can be easily read as a marginalized body. By watching Keramati's nosebleed and her hands touching her neck, audiences might return to their own bodies and sense feelings inside those bodies. Producing tactile sensations and generating affective responses in audiences are the strategies applied by Keramati to indirectly recall the body. Such responses and sensations pave the way for challenging the logics of the Orientalist gaze.

In Keramati's video, the audiences see the embodied effects of recalling some memories and emotions, which are triggered by listening to the soundtrack, while the content of those personal memories is not revealed for them. Karami has also applied such a strategy in one of her works named *Being There*. Her audiences can see some embodied effects on her body as she is located in a domestic space. But she does not visually make it clear why she has got red eyes, a stain on her clothes, a blister on her face, and a mark on her finger. In my interview with her, she touched upon what memories she is referring to in this work and what memories she is telling in her other work, *The Other Side*.

Chapter Three: Katayoun Karami

Introduction

This chapter will analyze two of Katayoun Karami's artworks, برعکس (*The Other Side,* 2007) and یکی بود یکی نبود (*Being There,* 2013). In my interview with Karami, she indicated that she deliberately chose two different names in Persian and English for this work. In my view, Karami uses her embodied experiences as starting points to create works offering layered and multi-faceted readings in terms of femininity, embodiment, and memory. My concern is with how Karami frames her hair, in *The Other Side,* and stages her body, in *Being There,* to portray herself as an active subject and convey the experience of her lived body. I also demonstrate how she uses visual strategies to prevent audiences from ascribing overt political and symbolic meanings to her works and to dissuade them from reducing her artworks to simplistic or singular interpretations regarding the practice of veiling in Iran.

In the first section of this chapter, I will discuss *The Other Side*, a photo installation consisting of nine double-sided wall-mounted frames. The size of each frame is 44 x 32 cm, and they are installed perpendicularly to the gallery walls. The distance between frames is 1.5 m, so that viewers could easily move between the frames and see both sides (figure 11). An extreme close-up of Karami's self-portrait in colour is repeated on the front side of all nine frames. The portrait is unfocused, blurry, and grainy, but it is clear enough to discern the artist's facial features. In terms of the formal features of the self-portraits, her head is slightly lowered, tilted sideways to the left, and her eyes cast downward insomuch as it is not clear if she is looking down or her eyes are shut. The artist's introverted and inward-looking gesture and her facial

expression are rendered in a way that they can connote feelings such as calmness, desolation, meditation, submission, sorrow, vulnerability, modesty, and humility. On the reverse side, the artist features different monochrome images of long hair in various hairstyles, including a wavy half-bun, braid, and ponytail. The hair images gradually fade to gray one frame after the other (figure 19).

The Other Side was exhibited at *Silk Road Gallery* in Tehran for the first time in 2008 and later it was shown in countries such as Kuwait, France, and the United States.[1] In all of these exhibitions, the work was exhibited with an artist statement, which gave a brief explanation about when Muslim girls start the practice of veiling and how the artist had experienced this practice as she aged. I include this statement in my discussion below, but throughout my analysis, I demonstrate how Karami created a work that does not limit itself to this statement. I start my discussion of *The Other Side* with a formal analysis of the work. My foci in this part are the discussion of embodiment and the explanation of how Karami represents her personal experience of veiling. This section continues with my discussion of veil discourses in terms of gendered seclusion, spatial divisions between men and women, and the process of gendering in the Islamic culture that is prevalent in Iran. I show how Karami critically responds to the rhetoric of veiling, challenging the main functions of veiling in this culture.

In the second part of this section, I investigate how Karami uses specific formal features to challenge the Orientalist gaze and how, through these, she enables audiences to experience an

[1]In 2009, this work participated in 2nd biennale "Photoquai" held at Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, France. See "L'ENVERS ET LE SOUVENIR,"accessed March 10, 2022, https://www.tk-21.com/L-envers-et-le-souvenir?lang=fr; In 2011, *The Other Side* was exhibited in a group exhibition *Body Language* at Fa gallery in Kuwait. See "FA Gallery: Yesterday, The Opening of Body Language," accessed March 10, 2022, http://artkuwait.org/2011/03/fa-gallery-yesterday-opening-of-body.html; In 2014, this work was shown at the Fine Arts Gallery of California State University in Los Angles. See "California State University, L.A. to exhibit Contemporary Iranian Photography," accessed March 10, 2022, http://www.tavoosonline.com/NewsNewsDetailEn.aspx?src=22115.

embodied viewership. By reading the body as a site versus reading the body as a sign, I contend that Karami approaches her body as a site to challenge turning her body into a spectacle when the work is viewed in globalized art scenes. I also refer to my discussion of haptic visuality, offered in the previous chapter, to explain how Karami engages her audiences visually and haptically to undermine the voyeuristic features of the Orientalist gaze, a gaze discussed most fully in the introduction to this dissertation.

The second part of this chapter belongs to *Being There.* Originally, this work consists of four photographs printed on large plaster panels. Only one panel of four has ever been publicly exhibited. However, the four photographs that were supposed to be printed on plaster panels are available on the artist's website.[2] This work was shown at *Azad Art Gallery* in Tehran for the first time in 2013, and in the same year, it was exhibited at *IGREG* gallery in Tehran.[3]In 2016, this work was shown in the second Iran Contemporary Art Biennale, and two years later, it was on display in an exhibition named *Common Borders* held in Tehran.[4]The exhibited panel is 200 cm height and 120 cm length and has a thickness of one and a half centimetres. The photographs feature a room with plain gray white walls in which Karami is sitting on a chair behind a large table with three other empty chairs tucked in. She is wearing a long-sleeved white tunic, and her hair is cascading over her shoulders. Her hands are on the table reaching over and touching empty plates that are beside an empty red wine glass. She engages the viewer via a direct gaze in all the photos, with a relaxed and nonchalant expression. The chairs are covered in white linens,

[2] "یکی بود یکی نبود – Being There 2013," Katayoun Karami, accessed December 16, 2021, https://katayounkarami.com/%db%8c%da%a9%db%8c-%d8%a8%d9%88%d8%af-%db%8c%da%a9%db%8c-%d9%86%d8%a8%d9%88%d8%af-being-there-2013/

[3]See "self-amusement,"accessed March 16, 2022,https: //m.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=440822309356721&id=354819307957022&set=a.440818469357105&source=43

[4]See ""Peace and Paper": Iran Contemporary Art Biennale 2016," accessed March 16, 2022, https:// artradarjournal.com/peace-and-paper-iran-contemporary-art-biennale-2016/; ""Common Borders" to gather Iranian, Turkish artists in Tehran," accessed March 16, 2022,https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/429427/Common-Borders-to-gather-Iranian-Turkish-artists-in-Tehran.

which resemble loose slipcovers protecting the chairs from dust and dirt, and the table is covered with white table linen and a clear plastic tablecloth on top of it. There are some pictures under the clear plastic cover. The two pictures that are on the left side of the table are the family photo of a man in a military uniform alongside a woman and a passport photo of another man. The pictures on the right side of the table are a piece of paper with a childlike drawing and handwritten text on it and a stamped envelope. The subdued lighting flowing across the scene, the dominance of white and light gray colour, and a few pieces of furniture in the room give the interior space a sober and simple appearance (figure 12).

Unlike *The Other Side*, *Being There* is not been exhibited with a description or artist statement about the work. Karami does not provide the audience with a clue about her primary motivation to create this work. In my interview with the artist, she explained that this work is a personal response to the experience of a group of women who lost their husbands in the Iran-Iraq war that happened in the 1980s. Throughout this section, the focus is on how Karami avoids depicting explicit visual references to the war in order to free her audience's imaginations regarding the subject matter of the work.

In the first part of my analysis of this work, I consider all four photographs, though only one has been exhibited so far. I show how Karami captures her self-portrait in a constructed homelike scene through the tradition of staged photography. Drawing on feminist phenomenological readings of the female body living at home, I read Karami's spatial presence in the home in relation to the construction of her female subjectivity and the preservation of meaningful memories. I end this part with a brief overview on the official rhetoric of the war in Iran and how Karami challenges the dominant war imagery in Iran with her work.

The last part of this chapter explains how Karami's work counters stereotypical interpretations regarding the image of war and a Middle Eastern woman when it comes to viewing the work through the discourses of otherness and difference discussed in the introduction. Following this, I mention the visual strategies applied by Karami to challenge the Orientalist gaze and discuss how she provides her audiences with the experience of embodied viewership.

The Other Side

The *Other Side* is an artwork featuring a female face and hair in simple and abstract forms. On one side of the frame, we see Karami's face, which fills most of the self-portraits on the front side, leaving parts of her hair and arms visible. The portraits are blurry, and they do not clearly characterize the represented female face. On the back, since there are no discernible lines between the body and the background, the images of hair seem wig-like and inanimate, hovering in front of white background, rather than like natural hair growing on the head of an identifiable person being posed in a distinctive place. The hair images are captured in black and white. The application of silver emulsion lessens the hair images' resolution from one frame to the other, and they gradually fade into the white background (figure 20).

The introspection of an embodied experience

In her statement about *The Other Side*, Karami writes that this work reflects her personal response to the practice of veiling. Karami begins her statement with the sentences below,

explaining briefly that her hair is graying and recalling that the act of veiling is practiced by Muslim girls when they reach the age of nine:

> Far gone are the years when lullabies caressed my hair and the summer breeze could call it home. And suddenly everything went dark … and now the only brightness is the reflection of my own gray hair.[5]

Although Keramati states that this work is related to the veil, she does not explicitly represent the image of the veil. She mentions indirectly the embodied effects of veiling on her body and hair, and the frame that like the veil marks the see-able from the hidden. By using words such as breeze, lullabies, sun, and their effects on her hair, she elicits somatic responses to the act of veiling to relay a phenomenological understanding of how she has bodily experienced wearing the veil, when her hair is deprived of experiencing those tactile feelings caused by sun and wind exposure. Phenomenology describes lived experiences as the constitutive part of the self. It deals with the perception gained through embodied encounters with the world. Spatiality and temporality are two key factors in the construction of phenomenological understandings.

Temporality and its effects on the lived experience of veiling are highlighted in Karami's work. She explains how she has reached her forties without being able to let her hair blow in the fresh air or be touched by sunshine. The passage of time in the construction of embodied experience is underscored in two ways. On the one hand, we see the effect of time on her hair as its colour is gradually changing from black to gray. Also, hairstyling itself, such as braiding or making a hair bun, can be read as a time consuming and traditionally feminine task. On the other hand, she expresses this durational process by extending the nine frames successively in a

[5] "برعکس۱۳۸۶ The Other Side 2007," KatayounKarami, accessed December 1, 2021,https://katayounkarami.com/2007-1386-the-other-side/

horizontal line. This structure builds a sequence of events that shows the passage of time through aging and performing a feminine task such as hairstyling or covering her hair.

Karami represents two images simultaneously in serial order: the unchanged images of her face, and changed images of hair. On the back, Karami has brushed hair images with silver gelatine emulsion to create shades of gray. She has emphasized the handmade print technique by leaving traces of the brushstrokes on the photographs. By using handmade prints and selecting separate hairstyles for each frame, Karami signifies the uniqueness of every embodied experience taking place on the back side, in her private life. She confronts the mode of continuation, represented by the unchanged images of the front sides of the frames, with the idea of differentiation being disclosed by the reverse.

In terms of reading the work as a personal response to veiling, the reverse images refer to her personal life and her abiding memory of veiling, while the front connotes her social appearance and her conformity with the practice of veiling as a social regulation and a cultural norm. In this regard, the progressive brightening of the hair images can allude to the fact that the collective memory of seeing female hair in public has been fading away in the presence of veiling. As the hair images become consecutively brighter, they become more assimilated to the white background, so it seems that hair is gradually buried into the blank surface of the back, relegated to an unseen part of a wall-hung frame. But this reading cannot be limited to veiling, and it can be furthered to other recollections of embodied experiences related to hair and aging hair that women experience in their private lives.

Apart from expressing her embodied experience of veiling, Karami's work crosses the main boundaries that veiling aims to form: the separation between private and public spaces and covering hair. She demolishes the private/ public dichotomy conveyed in the definition of the

veil, undermining the corporeal surveillance of veiling in terms of controlling the male sexual desire to look at the woman's body and hair. According to Fatima Mernissi, the practice of veiling has three dimensions or functions:

> The concept of the word *hijab* is three-dimensional, and the three dimensions often blend into one another. The first dimension is a visual one: to hide something from sight. The root of the verb *hajaba* means "to hide." The second dimension is spatial: to separate, to mark a border, to establish a threshold. And finally, the third dimension is ethical: it belongs to the realm of the forbidden.[6]

The first and obvious function of veiling is to govern public morality by controlling female sexuality, and consequently male sexual desire. In Islamic cultures, the attribution of sexual power to women is not limited to their bodies. Hair is also sexualized, so it must be regulated by the practice of veiling to prevent men from losing control over their sexual desire and protect women from being the object of the male sexual desire.[7] *The Other Side* is a work that reveals the usually unseen parts of the female body to the public and unveils the forbidden sphere.

By covering her body and hair in public, a woman exercises modesty and virtuous behaviour, protects her decency and limits her sexual appeal. The only space in which her hair and body can be seen is in the private space referred to as *mahrem* in Islam. "*Mahrem* means 'intimacy', 'privacy', 'secrecy', and 'silence'. But at the same time, it is another word for 'unlawful' (haram)—that is, canonically prohibited acts and relations as well as 'concealment from the look of a male stranger'."[8] The only men who are allowed to enter this private space are

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[6]Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Right in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (New York: Perseus Books, 1991), 93.
[7]For more information on sexual attributions to hair in Islamic and Iranian cultures see Ashraf Zahedi, "Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran," in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 250–65.
[8]Göle, *The Forbidden Modern*, 94.

mahram men. *Mahram* means close male family members such as husband and son, grandfather, father, brother, or a paternal or maternal uncle. These are the only men who can see unveiled women in private places. In this regard, the practice of veiling protects personal privacy and intimacy between women and men, resulting in gender-related spatial segregation and the demarcation of private and public spheres. By unveiling both sides of the frames in *The Other Side*, Karami breaks through the gendered seclusion and spatial divisions between men and women. She opens the door of her private space, considering all audiences as her *mahram*, and inviting all of them to come close and see how her inner life is impacted by veiling.[9]

Apart from being the manifestation of Karami's perception of her body through the corporeal experience of veiling, *The Other Side* also refers to how this perception is gained when a woman reaches her maturity. By installing nine frames, Karami refers to the time Iranian girls are supposed to start veiling. In the statement of this work, she mentions that the day a Muslim girl turns nine is the day she is declared a woman.[10]The installation of nine frames aims to recall the coming of the age for girls in Muslim cultures. On this day, a Muslim girl should start the practice of veiling by covering her hair and body when she appears in public, or when she wants to meet men who are not her *mahram*. This transition stage plays an important role in forming Muslim female subjectivity, and it acts as the point of entry to adulthood, because "[i]n the life

[9]The comparison between being veiled in public and being unveiled in private provided in this analysis is based on the concept of hijab and what the Islamic state promotes in Iran as the best form of veiling, that is, that women should cover all their body parts except the face and hands. Beside those women whose practices of veiling abide perfectly with the Islamic dress code and Iran's mandatory hijab law, there is a significant number who do not follow those codes strictly when they appear in public. Most of these women have created their own style of veiling, leaving some parts of their hair uncovered and wearing outfits that do not completely fit with the state-promoted veiling style. Such styles are called bad hijab in the state-sanctioned rhetoric of veiling, which literally means improper veiling. For more information on the aesthetic and history of different types of veiling in Iran, and the cultural, social and political implications of improper veiling in Iran, see Fatehrad, *The Poetics and Politics of the Veil in Iran*; Elizabeth Bucar, "Hijab in Tehran," in *Pious Fashion: How Muslim Women Dress* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 24–73; Asef Bayat, "Feminism of Everyday Life," in *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 96–114.
[10] "بر عکس۱۳۸۶ The Other Side 2007."

of a Muslim, a person is categorised as either a child or an adult. There is no stage of adolescence."[11] In order to place a value on this turning point in the life of a Muslim girl, this year is celebrated and observed in many Islamic cultures with a coming-of-age ritual.[12] Two years after the 1979 Revolution, the Islamic government in Iran began to encourage the practice of this ritual—called "Celebration of Worship"(jashn-e ebadat), also commonly referred to as "Celebration of Responsibility" (jashn-e mas'uliyat or jashn-e taklif) and "Celebration of Puberty."[13] This celebration is considered to be a puberty ritual and it is not limited to veiling; girls should start performing other religious practices such as prayer and fasting. However, biological puberty usually occurs a few years later.

In the view of Marilyn Strathern, "puberty rituals are about producing gender difference, because pre-pubescent children are of an indeterminate gender."[14]From this viewpoint, the nine double-sided frames highlight the moment that gender difference is shaped within the culture and society of Iran. In fact, veiling makes the difference between gendered bodies visible while making female bodies and hair invisible. Karami marks the moment when the gender difference is supposed to be shaped in Iran, suggesting how the process of gendering an ungendered body through the practice of veiling determines the corporeality of the gendered self.

The Other Side also refers to both the visible and hidden aspects of veiling. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the practice of veiling in public was intended to reconstruct a revolutionary identity for the newly founded Islamic state. The veil was transformed into a powerful political symbol by the revolutionary state during the early years of the revolution, and

[11]Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf, "Coming of Age Rituals: Malaysia," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Family, Body, Sexuality and Health*, vol. 3, eds., Suad Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 68.
[12]The coming-of-age ritual in Iran is not observed by all Iranian families. However, according to the rules, school authorities should celebrate jashn-e taklif for elementary female students when they reach the age of nine.
[13]Azam Torab, *Performing Islam: Gender and Ritual in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 169.
[14]Torab, *Performing Islam*, 184.

it became mandatory by law. Veiled female bodies shouldered the burden of both defending "the revolutionary purity" and standing for "the uniqueness of Shi'i tradition."[15] In the early years of the revolution, the Islamic regime attempted to reach these goals through imposing a unified public appearance upon women. Since the *chador* is a simple long black veil that fully covers the body from head to foot, this type of veiling was brought in as the best form of hijab, which literally means the veil and modesty in Arabic, and soon after it became a symbol of national and religious uniformity.

The politicized observation of veiling as a means to reconstruct Islamic identity leads individuality to be marginalized and the female body to be governed and controlled. In *The Other Side*, the repeated self-portraits allude to this notion that the unifying aspect of veiling creates a repeating, constant and unchanging public image for women. By installing nine frames in a serial order Karami represents a visual continuity to refer to veiling as a unifying practice—a practice that also aims to promote modesty and define a righteous woman as one who observes her behaviour and her gaze when appearing in public. The repeated self-portraits with averted gaze and no direct look allude to the propagation of such modesty.

A spatial-temporal dialogue

As mentioned above, despite indirect references to the practice of veiling, Karami does not display the image of the veil. In this regard, when the work is shown in international art scenes, the work cannot be easily reduced to the attribution of the politicized identity because of the stereotypical readings of the image of the veil. As discussed in the introduction, the image of the veil is referred to as a super-sign defining Iranian-ness in its reductive signification. In other

[15]Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 210.

words, Karami does not represent her veiled hair or body as a sign that can be used to recall stereotypical presumptions. Sonja van Wichelen, in her discussion of how veiling is perceived in Muslim and non-Muslim societies, references two considerations of the body in dominant veiling discourses: reading the body as a *sign* or as a *site*. Viewing the body as a sign concerns "what the veiled body *means*" and what it *signifies*. In this consideration," the veil is a mediated symbol," and "the veiled body becomes ideology or rhetoric" and a tool for "a political construction of meaning."[16]By viewing the female body as a sign, the meanings of a veiled body and its social, political and cultural connotations are put in the spotlight. Thus, the veil, one's public image, is seen as a symbol that can signify different meanings based on the context from which it is viewed. The lack of the image of the veil in Karam's work, though the work is related to veiling, undermines this political construction of the meaning of the veil *as a sign*.

Articulating a phenomenological reference to the practice of veiling and approaching her body, instead, as a *site*, Karami challenges turning her body into a spectacle and viewing it through the Orientalist gaze. What Karami offers to her audiences is her embodied experience of the aging hair under the veil, not a veiled body ready to receive meanings from outside sources. Wichelen describes reading the veiled body as a site where various women's experience of veiling in daily life is examined. She discusses how veiling can contribute to the formation of Muslim female subjectivity, and how it affects the construction of gender in Islamic cultures.[17] What Karami demonstrates in this work is how she perceives herself as a veiled body who witnesses hair changes in private. She does not depict a veiled body to refer to her public identity as an external visible identity, and she does not aim to generalize her experience to all other veiled women.

[16]Sonja van Wichelen, "The Body and the Veil," in *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, ed.Bryan S. Turner (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012),211.
[17] Ibid., 11.

Karami's work challenges the mastery of the Orientalist gaze by redefining hanging conventions and formally providing audiences with an experience of embodied viewership. When the viewer enters the room, what they can see at first glance from the front view is just nine black vertical lines. Then they are encouraged to move around the room and look at the frames from different angles, so the viewer's gaze is held and then released frame by frame. The viewer realizes gradually that those nine lines are perpendicular frames, each displaying both sides of a picture, and that all frames together constitute *The Other Side* as a single installation. In the usual way of hanging the photograph on the wall, the viewer stands in front of the photograph and looks at it. This photograph is taken by a framing apparatus like a camera. A camera makes only one direction of viewing possible, so the rest of the field surrounding the object is omitted and ignored. In *The Other Side,* the perpendicular frames signify that the viewer finds the opportunity to look at the subject matter from another angle of viewing. Moving around the work and spatial interaction with the work bring the audience this opportunity to gain embodied and spatial perception of the work. This interaction constructs "a subject-to-subject recognition," where the artist reveals her embodied subjectivity shaped through the practice of veiling, and the viewer constructs their own by viewing the work.

Since *The Other Side* does not offer a central point of view, it destabilizes the holistic and subject–object paradigms of the Orientalist gaze, unseating the seer from their secure position as a surveyor of all that they can see. In other words, as this work provides the audiences with the experience of embodied viewing, it shapes a spatial-temporal dialogue with the viewer rather than delivering a fixed one-directional monologue. In addition, the hair images on the back become lighter one frame after the other from the right, to follow the propensity of Iranian audiences to read from right to left as they do in reading texts in Farsi. However, the work does

not limit itself to being read from one certain direction. Karami turns the linear sequential structure of the frames into a more spatial sequence in order to let the audiences grasp it as a whole as well. In fact, the viewers can start reading the frames from every side and have access to the frames they have just passed. *The Other Side* imparts order, but it does not impose it, and its spatial sequencing can generate the sensory responses of viewers when they confront the rhythms within the frames.

Apart from the rhythmic feature of the work, the tactile qualities of the photographs produce sensory responses in relation to the sense of touch. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Marks coins the term "haptic visuality" to explain how cinematic and new media works can evoke tactile sensation through the sense of sight. Marks offers this term in contrast to optical visuality. In optical visuality, the act of seeing is regarded as disembodied since there is a distance between the viewers and the object they view, and it is prioritized over other senses "for acquiring knowledge, truth, experience "in "Western ocular centrism." Hence, seeing is considered "the distance sense." [18]

But in haptic visuality, vision is embodied since "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch."[19]Besides "close-to-the-body camera positions" and the representation of the act of touching mentioned in the previous chapter, Marks defines other formal and textual qualities of the filmed scenes such as "grainy, unclear images," "optical printing,""scratching on the emulsion," and "effects and formats such as Pixelvision."[20] According to Marks, "The haptic image is in a sense, 'less complete,' requiring the viewer to contemplate the image as a material

[18]Donato Totaro, "Deleuzian Film Analysis: The Skin of the Film," *Offscreen*, June,2015, accessed February 1, 2022, https://offscreen.com /view/skin_of_film,
[19]Marks, *The Skin of the Film,* 162
[20]Totaro, "Deleuzian Film Analysis: The Skin of the Film,".

presence rather than an easily identifiable representational cog in a narrative wheel."[21] The haptic image recalls "the proximal senses" of touching and feeling in the viewer, and these are valued over the distance senses of hearing and seeing in haptic cinematic and new media works.

Haptic visuality brings the viewer closer to images, lessening the distance between them and the object they view. It makes the eyes move on the surface instead of focusing. In this mode of looking, the eyes are more "inclined to graze than to gaze."[22]Karami applies such a strategy to challenge the Orientalist gaze in terms of arousing visual pleasure and its self-possessive and objectifying properties. For the front images of the frames, she used a malfunctioning camera to take a blurry, grainy, and out-of-focus close-up of herself. In the back, she used hair images that are textured with a brush, and the traces of the brushstrokes are visible on the photographs. When the viewer is facing the front of the work what they can see is a blurred image of a face and black and white images of hair. The work does not give them a clear face as a subject of scrutiny. This face is not complete and easily identifiable. It is textured. The haptic qualities of the hair images and the blurred face invite the audience to come closer and touch the surfaces with their eyes, and to graze their eyes over the images. Karami's inverted gaze also increases the temptation to come closer to the images. The more the audience is drawn closer to the work, the less their eyes can recognize the face. Thus, the work puts the audiences in a complicated situation. On the one hand, they are encouraged to come close and engage their sense of touch, on the other, they are required to step back and look at the self-portrait to discern a face. In this regard, *The Other Side* features a self-portrait that is inviting in terms of facial gesture, but is obscure in terms of the quality of the photograph. By creating this situation, Karami places her audiences in a position where they are not able to cast a potential voyeuristic and self-possessive gaze on her face.

[21] Ibid.
[22]Marks, *The Skin of the Film,* 162

Being There

Being There consists of four photographs printed on large plaster panels, though only one panel has been shown so far. The panels differ in minor details. Some of the differences are discernible and others are inconspicuous. All four panels feature Karami sitting in a room on a chair behind a table with three empty chairs. In two of the four panels, the table and the chairs are flanked by two walls on the right and left. But in the other two, there are no walls on the right and left of the table. In terms of the differences in Karami's face and body, she is wearing a ring on her left ring finger in three panels, and in the other one the ring has been taken off and its mark is left on her finger (figure 21). In one panel, she has a blister on her lip (figure 22). In the other one, she has puffy and red eyes conveying that she might have cried for a while (figure 12), though she appears calm and collected. And in the last panel, there is a stain on her clothes resembling a milk stain that suggests she might have been breastfeeding a baby (figure 23). Among these panels, only the one featuring Karami's red eyes has been shown publicly. In this panel, the setting is in front of a patchy wall with cracked and flaking paint, and the table is not surrounded by two walls on the right and the left sides of the table.

The interior space in all four photographs resembles an abandoned house or a house in the process of wall repair and painting. The photographs are taken in front of very old and stained walls. In two photographs, the empty chairs are so close to the walls that they would be unusable. There are some photographs and pictures tucked under the table cover, which is not a usual place to keep such things. These features show that the photographs have not been taken from a habitable home, and that this set of the dining table and chairs are staged here for the purpose of photography alone.

In her book, *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture*, Gen Doy introduces staged photography as "an important development in art since the later 1970s."[23] This type of photography is sometimes called "the photo-tableau, or the directorial mode," and it shares some features with history painting in terms of form and content. Most staged photographs are printed in large size, small numbers, and are regarded as fine art objects rather than photographs reproducing numerously.[24]Staged photography "connotes fine art, value and 'aura'."[25]Karami's work, like most staged photographs, is large in size. She has brought uniqueness and a sense of aura to her photographs by printing them on plaster panels. The plaster panels add a special quality to the photographs that cannot be conveyed to the audiences through the mechanical reproduction of photography. This quality enhances the tactile and visual features of the photographs. The plaster absorbs the photograph's pigments and creates a unique texture and colour. Not only does this feature give a sense of aura to the work, but also it keeps viewers haptically connected with the work. Like *The Other Side*, this work can stimulate the viewer's sense of touch.

The rendition of the photographs on thin plaster panels causes the work to have a spatial interaction with the room in which it is located. In the shown panel, the plaster panel is 200 cm in height and 120 cm in length, and its thickness is one and a half centimetres. Since the panel is thin, it seems the panel is integrated with the gallery wall, resembling a wall painting. Unlike *The Other Side,* in which each photograph is framed in a black rectangular frame and protrudes from the wall, *Being There* does not have a frame. It tries to dissolve the captured scene representing Karami into the wall, integrating it with the wall as much as possible.

[23] Gen Doy, *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 94.
[24]Ibid., 94–98.
[25] Ibid., 95.

In *Being There,* framelessness connotes openness. Being unframed causes the work to be exposed and naked in a space that is shared among the viewers and the work. While the dark perpendicular frames in *The Other Side* demark clearly the boundaries of what are framed, in *Being There* the absence of the frame relates the work to the wall. In so doing, *Being There* evades the limitations of framing, expanding the space of the work to envelop the viewer. This sense of integrity between interior and exterior spaces of the work is reinforced if the gallery walls have white and light grayish colours echoing the represented walls in the work. Meanwhile, the lack of the frame might imply vulnerability for the work as there are no physical boundaries between the work and the wall.

My second body

The photograph's staged setting portrays the spatial body of the artist located within an interior space. Karami is sitting alone in a domestic place. The sober and silent space of this place is echoed by the placid and still body of Karami, and the covered chairs and table with Karami's white clothes is in harmony with the placid walls. In contrast, the dark colour of Karami's long hair and the vitality of her face and hands render her body conspicuous. By locating her body in the domestic space, Karami reminds us of the deep-rooted cultural associations between the domestic sphere and femininity. Home is stereotypically referred to as a feminized place where women settle into domesticity, playing their traditional roles of being homemakers and mothers. In a patriarchal sense, women's social roles become restricted and limited to staying in domestic spheres, which in turn, brings notions of inferiority and confinement for women.[26]Karami's art is

[26]Iris Marion Young, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme," in *On Female Body Experience:"Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 123–154; Beatriz Colomina, ed. *Sexuality & Space* (New York, NY : Princeton Architectural Press, 1992). Regarding the discussion

critical of this assumption. She does not depict the cliché state of confinement and domestication of the female body being trapped behind the walls of a house. Rather, she introduces the domestic place as a site where her female subjectivity is in construction, and this construction is understood as dynamic, partial, and correlative with space, memory, and maternity.

Karami represents domestic space as a site for experiencing spatiality, which is fundamental to the construction of embodied subjectivity. When it comes to the experience of spatiality, the embodied subject is defined in relation to the space as "[t]he capacity to think of oneself as located in space, and tracing a continuous path through it."[27]In this experience, the concept of the lived body is defined based on a reciprocal relationship between the body and place in a phenomenological understanding of the lived body. Merleau-Ponty refers to this relation when he says, "there would be no space at all for me if I had no body."[28]In this reading, the lived body is a situated body in a material world, and it cannot be separated from space and matter. *Being There* recalls this definition of the lived body. Karami's body is among other objects; she is the only body at home, correlating with the space and the objects. We see her present outer body and the marks and traces on her body that change in each panel such as puffy and red eyes, the blister on her lip, a stain on her chest, and the mark of an absent ring on her finger.

Being There displays the still images that index the experience of different moments of being in a place called home. Across the four panels, the objects in the setting are the same, but

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of domesticity and maternal tasks in Iranian and Islamic cultures, see Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013); Pamela Karimi, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior Revolutions of the Modern Era* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Gail Murphy-Geiss, "Muslim Motherhood: Tradition in Changing Contexts," in *Twenty-first Century Motherhood: Experience, Identity, Policy, Agency*, ed., Andrea O'Reilly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 40–56; *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Family, Law and Politics*, vol. 2, (2005) , s.v. "domesticity."; Ibid., s.v. "household."; Ibid., s.v. "motherhood.".

[27] Crowther, *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts,* 200.

[28]Shaun Gallagher, Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (New York : Routledge, 2012), 161.

Karami's embodied signs are changed. These changes imply she has experienced different situations in the same place. Kirsten Jacobson explains the experience of spatiality in relation to the experience of living in the domestic space of a home. In her view, the home acts as a second body for us because it is "responsive to the body and its needs," and it is "a place of initial stability and a foundation for the self."[29] The body finds its explicit or implicit "here-ness" at home, and the experience of being-at-home and the embodied sense of self are inseparable.[30]Karami represents this experience of being-at-home, embodied subjectivity, and domestic spatial configuration by staging her body within a space that looks like a home. Karami deploys seriality to represent different aspects of this being-at-home in each of the four panels. In *Being There*, like *The Other Side,* each repeated unit with a degree of variation acts as a new version of selfhood. Karami in the former, articulates the construction of her embodied subjectivity in relation to the memory of aging hair, and in the latter, she represents this construction in relation to the experience of spatiality in the home.

Karami displays the personalization of a place called home and her embodied interactions with memories attached to this place and the objects inside it. Iris Marion Young, like Jacobson, refers to home as a second body. She introduces home as "an extension of the person's body," where "the materialization of identity" turns a house into a home. Young explores this materialization in terms of traditional women's domestic duties and the experience of spatiality in home as a gendered place. She explains,

> There are two levels in the process of the materialization of identity in the home: (1) my belongings are arranged in space as an extension of my bodily habits and as

[29]Kirsten Jacobson, "A Developed Nature: A Phenomenological Account of the Experience of Home," *Continental Philosophy Review* 42, no. 3 (2009): 361.
[30] Ibid.

> support for my routines, and (2) many of the things in the home, as well as the space itself, carry sedimented personal meaning as retainers of personal narrative.[31]

The materialization of identity and the process of house making is reflected in *Being There* through the representation of the preservation of meaningful objects. Dustcovers and keeping the photographs under the cover on the table refer to the act of preserving meaningful objects and restoring the memories and histories of the household. In Young's view, meaningful objects in home "must be cleaned, dusted, repaired, [and] restored," and many women continue to these activities today.[32]Women usually inherit meaningful intergenerational objects. They are also in charge of keeping alive the meaningful objects and family stories by preserving them properly and retelling the family stories and histories for the next generation.[33] In *Being There*, the dustcovers suggest proper preservation by preventing the house from being buried in dust and forgetfulness. The furniture is neat and tidy, ready for bringing comfort to the people who live in this house or who are invited over. The histories and memories of this household are kept clean from dirt and dust, and they are preserved properly by being stored on a table that resembles a photo album.

By tucking the photos under the plastic cover, Karami changes the function of the table from being exclusively a place for dining to a place for sustaining memories. The tabletop serves as a photo album that holds the priceless and evocative pictures on a sticky page and covers them with a plastic sheet. This transformation makes the table become a site of memory, and it suggests the traditional role of women in protecting the household history and memories. This is how the dining table becomes a platform for narrating stories and serving tangible and intangible

[31] Young, "House and Home," 139.
[32]Ibid., 142.
[33] Ibid., 140–143.

memories for those gathered around it. Karami creates this setting to commemorate the memories of a household or family attached to the photographs, a letter envelope, and a drawing kept under the cover. She invites the audience to sit around the table and join her in this act of remembrance. In this regard, the dinner table becomes the intersection of the artist's personal memories and public sites of production and reproduction of memories.

Not only are memories preserved under the tablecloth, but also they are preserved in Karami's body. By capturing different embodied marks on her body in the four photographs, Karami implies that being in this place and sitting around this table brings embodied memories to the surface. Karami represents Linda Fisher's term "the meaningful female body." She defines this term based on Merleau-Ponty's thoughts about how the body inhabits space and time and how it is imbued with meanings through the embodied engagement with the world. In her view, this engagement is a process shaped through cognitive and corporeal interactions with space and, as Fisher claims, "the body that understands, that acquires and enacts meaning, is the body that remembers."[34]Karami's body does not merely retell past events and memories. It is actively involved in the process of documentation and remembrance as it has been lived in this place and being among these meaningful and memorable objects. She introduces herself as an active subject whose body is situated there, at the home. She is in-corporated and re-membered within that site of memory.[35]

By staging herself in an abandoned old house, Karami situates her embodied memories in dialogue with other memories and histories that have been imbued to the house by its previous

[34] Linda Fisher, "Gendering Embodied Memory," in *Time in Feminist Phenomenology,* eds. Christina Schües, Dorothea E. Olkowski, and Helen A. Fielding (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 98.
[35]For the notion of the body as the container of memoryanh how the body restores memories, see Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press Mc Graw-Hill, 2003), 80; Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 72.

residents. The walls of this house contain many memories, and they have several stories to tell. But the memories recalled by Karami and the ones buried in the house are devoid of explicitness. The sign of lactation, the puffy and red eyes, the blister on the face, and the ring taken off the finger do not offer explicit meaning for the audiences. Karami refers to the indexicality of these signs, but she does not represent the signifieds. Hence, *Being There* becomes an artwork that consolidates memories that are mute, inarticulate, and unrevealed. This approach provides the audiences with an opportunity to free their imaginations to complete the detached referents, adding significance through their own memories and experiences. In particular, the presence of stored memories and stories in this work is highlighted for Iranian audiences because of the name of the work in Persian. Karami has named the work یکی بود یکی نبود *yeki bood yeki nabood* in Persian. This expression translates to once upon a time in English, and it is a typical phrase usually being said when someone starts telling a story. This name implies that the artist is visually telling a story in her work, and it encourages the audience to discover what her narration is and how it is depicted.

In addition, the rendition of the work metaphorically refers to how the walls of a house store the memories of the households within themselves. The technique of printing the photographs on large plaster panels links the work to the preserving function of in situ wall painting. As the plaster absorbs the pigments during the process of printing the photograph, the walls of the house Karami shows in her photographs have witnessed all the household stories. The loneliness of a woman in a house, the red puffy eyes that might be because of crying, the empty chairs implying someone or some people have gone, the family photograph featuring a man in a military uniform, and a letter and an envelope together suggest the woman in this

photograph might be mourning for the loss of someone related to the photos and the letter tucked under the tablecloth, or she has missed this person, and she is waiting for them to come home.

The contemporary history of Iran contains tragic incidents such as war, revolution, and street agitations in which many women have lost their loved ones. From the viewpoint of Iranian audiences, the memory of loss might be conveyed by this work in terms of referring to those incidents. Specifically, a handwritten letter with a child-like drawing together with the image of a man wearing a military uniform likely recall the memories of the Iran-Iraq war. This is because the military uniform belongs to the Islamic Republic of Iran Army, which was a part of the armed forces of Iran in the war, and during the war, it was common that children wrote letters to their fathers who were in the front line. According to Karami's interview, the couple shown in the family photo is her mother and her father, and the small-sized identity photograph is the image of her grandfather.[36] She asserts that this work responds to her memories of the war, though her father and immediate family members were not directly involved in the war. The mentioned signs are aimed to signify the war losses, but they are not depicted in a way to highlight the war-related connotations and bias the audiences' mind to read *Being There* as a work exclusively *about* the Iran-Iraq war.

In terms of cultural history, the Iran–Iraq war plays a crucial role in Iranian contemporary literature and visual culture. This war is referred to as Sacred Defense (*Defa-e Moghaddas*) and Imposed War (*Jang-e Tahmili*) in the rhetoric of official war discourse in Iran, mainly because Iran had not initiated the war and it was considered a defensive war. In addition, the people who have lost their lives in the war were regarded as martyrs. Since the war started immediately after the revolution, the young Islamic state conceptualized the war values in accordance with the

[36]Katayoun Karami, personal interview with the author, Edmonton, Canada, 29 January 2017.

revolutionary ones to produce meaning for the so called imposed and defensive war. In doing so, the regime built the war and revolutionary discourses upon Shia culture and symbolism, and it promoted the pre-existing culture of martyrdom in Shiism.

That culture with its certain values of martyrdom is still observed and propagated by the Islamic state in Iran, and it is a part of the large cultural and political project that aims to keep the culture of defence alive, commemorating the martyrs who sacrificed their lives not only for the imposed war, but also for the victory of Islamic revolution.[37] Hence, the rhetoric of Sacred Defense was not terminated at the end of war; rather it has been observed since the beginning of war as a way to honour the Islamic revolutionary values, the traditional culture of sacrifice, and the nationalism being defined through Shiaism. In this regard, when it comes to developing a common visual culture, martyrdom turns into the main theme.[38] The Martyrs' Museum in Tehran is the prominent cultural institution that aims to conserve and transfer the ideological values of Sacred Defense and revolution to the next generations, engaging people with the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of martyrdom.[39]

In addition, Sacred Defense has turned into a genre in the mainly state-funded visual art and literary productions such as books, magazines, memoirs, movies, posters, documentaries, murals, TV programmes, and war paintings and photographs.[40] In particular, organizations such

[37] See Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).
[38] For more information on cultural representation of war in both countries of Iran and Iraq see Arta Khakpour, Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami, and Shouleh Vatanabadi eds. *Moments of Silence Authenticity in the Cultural Expressions of the Iran-Iraq War, 1980–1988*(New York: New York University Press, 2016); Pedram Khosronejaded, *Unburied Memories: The Politics of Bodies of Sacred Defense Martyrs in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2013); Peter J. Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).
[39]Christiane Gruber, "The Martyrs Museum in Tehran: Visualizing Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Visual Anthropology* 25, no 1-2 (2012): 68–97.
[40]See Pedram Khosronejad, ed., *Iranian Sacred Defence Cinema: Religion, Martyrdom and National Identity* (Canyon Pyon, UK: Sean Kingston Pub, 2012); Esha Momeni,"Red Death and Black Life: Media, Martyrdom and

as *Hozeh Honari Sazeman-e Tablighat-e Islami* (The Art Institute of The Islamic Propaganda Organization) and the *Ravayat*-e *Fath* (The Narrative of Triumph) Institute, by producing cultural products such movies, TV documentary series, public mural paintings, and posters, have the most influential roles in shaping the visual collective memory of the culture of defence. These cultural organisations support a group of artists and art establishments to produce visual products dedicating to the war propaganda and create the state-controlled legacy of war narration. [41]

Regarding the iconography of war propaganda in the 1980s and the later decades in Iran, the imagery is expressive and evocative to arouse nationalist sentiments and bolster public support of the war through the depiction of martyrdom.[42] Although, the contents of paintings and public murals are mainly masculinized and the subject matter is usually the fallen, women's contributions to the war are not ignored. But women are portrayed based on Shiism and revolutionary values promoting by the regime.[43] Women in illustrations are usually depicted as idealized martyrs' mothers or wives who support their sons' or husbands' revolutionary and Sacred Defense aspirations and goals by standing beside or behind them with intrepid gestures. Women as mothers are also illustrated holding their sons' dead bodies, and most of the time the

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Shame," *Middle East Critique* 28, no. 2 (2019): 177–195; Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art,* 21-91; Alice Bombardier, "Iranian Mural Painting: New Trends," in *Cultural Revolution in Iran: Contemporary Popular Culture in the Islamic Republic,* ed. Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh (London, I.B. Taurus, 2013), 217–229. Alice Bombardier, "Iranian Revolutionary Painting on Canvas: Iconographic Study on the Martyred Body," *Iranian Studies*46, no. 4 (July 2013), 583–600. For Sacred Defence literature and memoir see Mohammad Ghanoonparvar, "Postrevolutionary Trends in Persian Fiction and Film," *Radical History Review* 105 (2009): 156–162; Laetitia Nanquette, "An Iranian Woman's Memoir on the Iran-Iraq War: The Production and Reception of Da," *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 6 (2013): 943–957.

[41]Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art,* 181–232.

[42] Rose Wellman, "Regenerating the Islamic Republic: Commemorating Martyrs in Provincial Iran," *The Muslim World* 105, no. 4 (October 2015): 561–581.

[43] Peter Chelkowski, "Iconography of the Women of Karbala: Tiles, Murals, Stamps, and Posters," in *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, ed., Kamran Scot Aghaie, (Austin: University of Texas, 2005), 119–138; Faegheh Shirazi, "The Daughter of Karbala: Images of Women in Popular Shi'i Culture in Iran," in *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam,* ed., Kamran Scot Aghaie(Austin: University of Texas, 2005), 93–118, Roxanne Varzi, "Iran's pieta: motherhood, sacrifice and film in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war," *Feminist Review* 88 (April 2008): 86–98.

sorrowful tone of these painting are aimed to convey both concepts of glory and sacrifice.[44]These women are usually depicted in chador, a black full-body-length veil, as the best form of hijab that the state prefers women to wear when appear in public. In addition, women are depicted as combatants in some graphic propaganda posters and stamps. However, women did not fight in the battlefields.[45]

Other common public images are of martyrs' mother and wives are veiled women holding their sons' or husbands' pictures. These women usually appear in the state-run demonstrations or meetings, and their images are broadcasted by mass media. This imagery has been used by some artists like Newsha Tavakolian, a Tehran-based photographer who was born in 1981. In one of her famous photo series named *Mother of Martyrs*, she represents these martyrs' mother holding the framed photographs of their sons. [46] Apart from being a supportive mother, wife, or sister of a combatant, the other defined role for women was the new social role of participating in logistic support, which was reflected in war photographs, TV documentaries, and Sacred Defense movies. This new social presence includes participation in activities such as transferring goods and equipment to the war front and delivering services such as treating the wounded behind the war front.[47] During the war, women were encouraged to follow the state war propaganda, acting as mobilized forces who defend Islam. They were supposed to appear in the

[44] See Faegheh Shirazi, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and Women's Images: Masters of Exploitation," in *Muslim Women in War and Crisis: Representation and Reality*, ed. Faegheh Shirazi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 109–138; Shirin Saeidi, "Creating the Islamic Republic of Iran: wives and daughters of martyrs, and acts of citizenship," *Citizenship Studies*14, no. 2 (April 2010): 113–126.

[45]For more information on the representation of women as combatants see. Peter Chelkowski, "The Art of Revolution and War: The Role of the Graphic Arts in Iran," in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*, ed. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002),137.

[46] For more information about Tavakolian and this series see Kristen Gresh, ed., *She who Tells a Story* (Boston: MFA publications, Museum Of Fine Arts, 2013), 69–70; Rose Issa, "Newsha Takalolian," in *Iranian Photography Now*, 206–211.

[47] For more information about the social role of women during the Iraq-Iran War see Elaheh Koolaee, "The Impact of Iraq-Iran War on Social Roles of Iranian Women," *Middle East Critique* 23, no. 3 (2014): 277–291.

society as "typical symbols of devotion, self-sacrifice and love of God and Islam."[48] This notion was publicized through war imagery.

Since the eight-year war is a crucial event in contemporary history of Iran, many Iranian artists have dealt with the war and its consequent issues in their art. Some of these artists belong to a group of artists who won state favour through the representation of the ideological narration of war and usually promoted by the state-sponsored organizations supporting the Sacred Defense canon. The other group of artists are the ones who preserve their own personal memories and narrations of war and they do not follow the state war propaganda.[49]

Though it commemorates war loss and the grief martyrs' wives have suffered, the visual codes of *Being There* stand in contrast with the Sacred Defense canon that has demarcated the image of ideal womanhood in the visual culture of war. Karami's approach towards narrating her war memories through a lack of explicit war references make her work different from the other artists who preserve their own personal memories and narrations of war in their art. For example, Gohar Dashti and Shadi Ghadirian are two contemporary photographers who have used explicit war references in their works. Dashti and Ghadirian have reflected the social and cultural consequences of war in everyday life of Iranians, and their artworks have been shown in many international art venues as well as the local ones. One of the recent international venues in which they have shown their works with war themes was the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the United States, in 2014. The exhibition was named *She Who Tells a Story* and it featured twelve women photographers from Iran and the Arab world. Newsha Tavakolian and Shirin Neshat

[48]Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*, 214. For more detail on the status of women in Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, see Ibid., 199–220.

[49]For more information about the artists who produced revolutionary and war art and the ones who has created their own personal war memories see Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art: Developments and Challenges," in *Different Sames: New perspectives in contemporary Iranian Art,* ed., Hossein Amirsadeghi (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), 27–30; Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art,* 37–38 and 150–153.

were two other artists with Iranian backgrounds who participated in that exhibition.[50]Dashti in *Today's Life* and *War* (2008) photo series and Ghadirian in a photo series named *Nil Nil*(2008-9) deal with the Iran-Iraq war, looking at the war from the viewpoint of a woman who has experienced the consequences of war in her private life.[51] Although both of these artists are, like Karami, concerned about the lingering consequences of war in women's personal lives and in the private spaces hidden from the public, their artworks have conspicuous visual references associated with war. Dashti in *Today's Life* and *War* series juxtaposes every day activities of a couple such as sleeping, reading a newspaper, and eating against the backdrop of the Iran-Iraq war scenes, implying how the war and its consequences have overshadowed the young generation in Iran. In *Nil Nil*, Ghadirian's series with war theme, war-related objects such as military boots and uniforms, and bullets are explicitly located among feminine objects such as high heels, dresses, and lip stick. Ghadirian stated that she made this work to talk about a woman waiting for a man to come from the war.[52]

In *Being There*, Karami reflects the everyday memories of war, but in a different way than Dashti and Ghadirian. In order to create this work, Karami had casual conversations with almost forty women who had lost their husbands in the war, and she listened to their memories and stories of the war. The common element shared among these women is that they had lived with their husbands for a short time, and some of them were just engaged, and did not yet live with their would-be husbands. These women did not get married after the death of their husbands, and they lived alone by themselves or with their parental families. Apart from having more or less similar traumatic memories of war, these women shared a deep yearning for having

[50]For more information about this exhibition see Gresh, *She who Tells a Story*.
[51]For more information about Dashti and Ghadirian see Silvia Cirelli, *Gohar Dashti,* (Albissola Marina: Vanillaedizioni, 2013); Rose Issa, *Shadi Ghadirian: Iranian Photographer*, (London: Saqi, 2008).
[52]Gresh, *She who Tells a Story*, 86.

a child from their martyred husbands. These women have kept this aspiration since the death of their husbands, and have mourned for their departed husbands and imagined children in their private spaces. Karami did not have such experience of loss, but like many Iranians, her life has been affected by the war, and she has her own war-related memories. By representing herself as a lonely woman in a house with empty chairs, Karami puts those women's narrations at the intersection with her own experiences. She reiterates how the construction of the self is relational when those women and Karami share their memories of war and retell their war stories. She invokes the collective memory of those wives of martyrs who long for having a child, and who mourn their loss in private spaces. These memories are collective and plural as much as they are individual and personalized.

According to literary scholar Marianne Hirsch's discussion of the relationships among family photos, traumatic memory, and mourning across generations, what Karami represents in her work is the articulation of "postmemory." Hirsch calls postmemory a form of memory that is shaped among a generation as they grow up remembering the past memories of the previous generation. This act of remembrance is achieved by means of preserving family photos and retelling familial stories. Hirsch argues that postmemory "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection."[53] She describes the way a generation reshapes and re-embodies the past memories of the family members who lived before them.

Hirsch claims that photographic images, in contrast to written or oral narratives, "are very particular instruments of remembrance, since they are perched at the edge between memory and

[53] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22

postmemory," and they function as "ghostly revenants."[54] In *Being There,* as discussed earlier, Karami represents herself sitting behind a dinner table that resembles a photo album. The combination of the photographs she has chosen can recall a generational relation between the persons in the photographs and herself, since the photographs are the images of her mother, father, grandfather, and a childish handwritten letter implying the presence of the younger generation. In addition, the name of the work in Persian suggests that she is telling a story. On the other hand, she plays the role of a martyr's wife by representing herself in the situations that can recall the state of waiting and mourning. In other words, Karami represents herself negotiating between her memories of war and those of the martyrs' wives with whom she talked. She represents the postmemory of war as a kind of collective memory reflecting the after-effects of the multigenerational landscape of the Iran-Iraq war.

Being There honours the women whose feelings are obliterated from the dominant visual discourse of war, and whose sorrows are hidden from the public eye thanks to the masculinist gaze of the female body that disregards the women's traumatic experience in the official narrative of war. In the official discourse of war, the imagery of women is only comprised of public roles such as delivering services and looking after the wounded behind the front and mothers and wives who appear in public to support their sons or husband. But Karami depicts the private lives of these women, focusing on the domestic spaces that are eclipsed by the public scene. She represents a recalled martyr wife in a domestic space, not in a public space. This woman is alone. Her waiting for her husband to come is solidified. She lingers in her sorrows; she is the only one left there sinking in her memories of loss. These memories are carved on her eyes, breasts, finger, and lip. In recalling these memories, they flow on her body; they appear. In

[54] Ibid.

Karami's work, a martyr's wife is not recognized and identified under the name of her husband. Rather she is recognized through her melancholy over the loss of the husband and a child she could have had. Through this representation, Karami gives a new agency for these women, which is different from the one the state defines for them.

Intercorporeal relation

As discussed in the introduction, war in the Middle East is one of the motifs that is expected to be easily decodable in the artworks of Middle Eastern artists in the globalized art world. As *Being There* does not clearly depict visual references to the Iran-Iraq war, it reduces the probability of receiving overt and reductive interpretations regarding the war-related content of the work. In the staged setting, the walls are empty of pictures and windows onto the outside, the chairs and table are covered by white linens, Karami is wearing simple clothes, and the dishes are empty. The house is empty of any features indicating a location and representing the materialization of cultural elements in the home. It does not represent a stereotypical female body as a spectacle to be consumed voyeuristically, satisfying the Orientalist gaze.

Being There unseats the viewer from their secure position, challenging the self-possessive feature of the Orientalist gaze by gazing at the viewer. However, this attempt does not appear at first glance. When the viewer enters the room, they find themselves in front of the image of a woman who is sitting in a staged setting. This setting has unified its space with the architectural space of the gallery, because of the interior space of the represented house. Karami's photographed body draws attention by making eye contact with the camera/viewer. She returns the gaze of the viewer. In other words, Karami represents herself as seeing subject not objectified body. By gazing at the viewer, Karami acknowledges the presence of the viewer and invites

them to guess what the relations are between this woman, the objects, and the space depicted in the photograph. Instead of merely viewing the represented body, the viewers are invited to think about the relations hidden in the staged scene.

The interaction of Karami's photographed body and her viewers through the reciprocal gaze can create embodied viewership for the viewers, and it shapes a "subject-to-subject recognition" between them and the artist. Through this mode of viewership, she undercuts the logic of subject-object viewership in the Orientalist gaze. Spatial confrontation with the work is highlighted in both of Karami's works, though in two different ways. In *The Other Side*, the linear sequential structure of the frames causes the audiences to be mobile, move around, and look at both sides of the frames. Therefore, temporality plays a key role in the formation of the audience's perception of the work while they have access to all frames and can perceive it as a spatial sequence. Like Hedayat's work, the wallpaper, the perception of *Being There* is more strongly related to spatiality than temporality. This work reveals its expressive totality at first glance.

Although the work encourages the audience to find a vantage point in order to fully grasp the scene and demarcate their presence, the texture of the work and the low-resolution quality of the picture invite viewers to come closer to the work to find the details. In this regard, as with *The Other Side,* audiences find themselves in a constant tension between coming closer and taking distance. These formal qualities undermine the disembodied feature of the Orientalist gaze.

Conclusion

Inconspicuous visual references to the lived experience of veiling and the articulation of embodied memories of war are the main features in Katayoun Karami's two works discussed here. As Keramati deals with past memories through embodiment and the representation of an agentic body in the second chapter, Karami adopts such an approach as well. And while Keramati shows her hair is blowing in the breeze, Karami talks about her melancholic feelings of how her hair is deprived of such tactile sensations caused by the wind and sun. *The Other Side* displays the process of becoming a woman through the lived experience of veiling, and *Being There* depicts the present-ness of a female body when it comes to reminding the memories of loss. Like Hedayat and Keramati, Karami's works reflect critical approaches toward the stereotypical representation of Iranian-ness when they are viewed within the globalized context.

Iranian-ness, in Karami's works, does not emerge as an easily recognizable image of a Middle Eastern woman with obvious racial embodied markers surrounded by war scenes, or the image of a veiled woman that connotes the suppression of women through the practice of veiling. Rather Iranian-ness is echoed in Karami's personal experience, and it shows a located perspective from which she has created her works. She does not aim to generalize her experience to all women practicing veiling, and she does not offer her body as a symbolic body that signifies stereotypical meanings. For example, in *The Other Side*, the artist's introverted and inward-looking gesture and her facial expression are rendered in a way that they can connote such feelings as calmness, desolation, meditation, submission, sorrow, vulnerability, modesty and humility. Since this work is related to veiling, such feelings can be read in relation to the artist's own bodily perception of veiling, and they might differ from other women's experiences of veiling. What brings Karami sadness might be found agreeable by another woman. What leaves

Karami pondering sorrowfully on the fact that her hair is turning grey in concealment might provide another woman comfort by protecting her from the objectifying male gaze. What causes Karami to lapse into silence might give a voice to another woman. What makes Karami inert might motivate another woman to be more active, and what is seen as the experience of hair captivity might be regarded as protecting modesty and virtue. These expressions and perceptions are the results of different lived experiences of veiling and various individuals' perception of it, and they could be influenced by cultural, social and political understandings of the practice of veiling.

Yet Karami's work has a formal feature that can bring a sense of collectivity to her works, which allows them to reflect the experiences of other women. In *The Other Side*, various images of hair without a face can suggest a sense of collectivity or commonality among women. The work can recall a collective body of women in which every woman can replicate her own embodied experience of aging and relegating hair to *the other side*. Karami, in *Being There*, returns to this sense of collectivity by referring to the memories of a group of women in her work. She puts her war-related memories at the intersection of those women's memories. Instead of depicting a woman in heroic gestures or representing disturbing images of war, Karami has captured the solitude of a woman who is in mourning for wartime loss. But she does not make a clear statement about the war. She invites her audience to join her, have a seat around the table, and share their memories in an old house its walls have been witnessing many memories over the years.

Karami's works do not introduce her body as a spectacle that is ready to be gazed at. Rather she captures her body, face, and hair to articulate her embodied experience. In this regard, her works reduce the chance that her body will be viewed through the voyeuristic and

objectifying gaze of the Orientalist gaze when it comes to the reception of the works in the global art scene.

Overall Conclusion

In spite of forty years of critical discussion on the rhetoric of identity in the global contemporary art mainstream, this rhetoric still exists in one way or another. The question, then, is not if the representation of cultural identity and racialized bodies still matters but rather *how* so-called marginalized and neglected artists negotiate these issues and engage them in a critical fashion. The artworks discussed in this dissertation reveal a new voice for this kind of consideration in the contemporary art of Iran.

These works were selected after I conducted semi-structured interviews from Edmonton with the artists, who were in Toronto and Tehran, over the phone in 2016 and 2017. The artists generously shared a lot of background information about their works and where they were exhibited that I could not have found elsewhere. Particularly, the works that do not have published statements or the works like *Being There* and Hedayat's wallpaper whose launching points have not been stated publicly by the artists. I was born and grew up in Iran and did my master's degree in Art Research in Tehran. My familiarity with well-known artists and curators who are involved in art production in Iran and the active art galleries provided me with unique resources for this research. I was able to contact many people to learn more about the artists participating in both local and international art venues. Such access greatly helped me to find the selected artists and collect more information about them. In particular, Ghazaleh Hedayat and Katayoun Karami whose artworks could not easily be found on the websites or in published books when I started to work on the contemporary art of Iran in 2013 in Canada. At that time, there was scarce published information in English about artists working in Iran.

The contemporary art of Iran has received international recognition and acclaim within the last two decades, but very little scholarly literature has been devoted to the artists from Iran

whose works challenge the stereotypical meaning of Iranian-ness. That is why I decided to work on this less known group of artists from Iran. By exploring the critical articulation of identity in the artworks of the selected artists, my objective is to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of how artists from Iran define Iranian-ness based on their own personal experiences. Ghazaleh Hedayat, Simin Keramati, and Katayoun Karami take on and consider the challenges of negotiating visual regimes that dictate the representation of Iranian women in the globalized art context. They critically analyze the role that stereotypical images, such as images of veiled female bodies, play in obscuring the lived experiences of women living in Iran. They also reject the ways in which global art institutions define Iranian-ness. In short, the works I have selected contribute to broader efforts to shape a new understanding of female subjectivity in Iran, and to the definition of the embodied self itself.

The selected artists discussed in this dissertation apply the camera-based practices of video and photography to challenge the master narratives of the representation of racialized female bodies and Iranian-ness on the global stage. But they do not offer a mere reactionary resistance to such master narratives by completely eradicating cultural references and embodied features. They deal with gender-related and regional issues such as veiling and war in their works while avoiding self-othering and self-exoticizing.

When it comes to the reception of the contemporary art of Iran in the globalized art world, the articulation of personal lived experiences paves the way for the presence of a new generation of artists who do not turn their bodies and culture into a spectacle. Hedayat, Keramati, and Karami perform how their bodies experience the practice of veiling and recollecting the memories of war and revolution. In doing so, they do not offer their bodies as the objects of the Orientalizing gaze; nor do they represent their bodies as symbolic signs. Instead, they consider

their bodies as sites from which to manifest their experiences. When an audience encounters these works, they do not find themselves in front of racialized bodies that are ready to be consumed voyeuristically. Rather, they are invited to accompany the artist in her exploration of her experiences. Karami indexes her lived experience, re-presenting it in her work. Hedayat and Keramati offer lived experiences performed for camera and presented in front of the viewers' eyes. This is how these artists prioritize the articulation of embodiment and the lived experience over the mere representation of racialized bodies that can limit the interpretations of their works. Within the articulation of these lived experiences, these artists provide the audiences with viewing various forms of Iranian-ness, and therefore, the stereotypical and reductive representation of Iranian-ness as a homogenized identity is undermined.

By performing the particularities of their own experiences, these artists reclaim their agencies and, in Belting's view, introduce themselves as artists who come *from* Iran, not as *Iranian* artists. In searching for their agency, and articulating this formally in the work, they undermine the Orientalist gaze that might be projected upon them when their works are exhibited in globalized art venues. These artists apply formal strategies to reject such a gaze and represent themselves as agentic embodied subjects, not objectified bodies. As discussed in the previous chapters, one of these strategies is returning the viewer's gaze. In doing so, Hedayat turns the ordinary act of seeing into an act of endurance, Keramati accompanies her returned gaze with blood flowing from her nose, and Karami establishes a reciprocal look with the viewer, inviting them to discover the relations between different objects and the represented body in her work.

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, the selected artists challenge displaying an easily recognizable marginalized body for the viewers to exoticize. Karami represents a blurred image of herself. Hedayat disturbs the viewers' looks in her wallpaper or distracts their

gazes by her flowing tears, as Keramati does with her blood. In addition to strategies that displace or disturb the audience's gaze, these artists engage audiences haptically and affectively with the works. The haptic qualities of Karami's works and the affective responses generated by Keramati's and Hedayat's videos have this possibility to return the viewers to their own bodies, causing them to feel their own feelings. This can happen through the formal features of the works, which engage the audience's sense of sight as well as other senses including hearing and touch. Affective responses generated by seeing flowing blood and tears, hearing the screeching sound of the train and the siren, and tactile sensations simulated by seeing blurred and textured surfaces can cause audiences witness their own feelings and feel something inside their own bodies. Thus, the viewers are placed in relationship to the artwork, and consequently, the artists, rather than being kept at a conceptual, objectifying distance. Not only does this form of engagement undercut the disembodied stereotyping of the Orientalist gaze, it also shapes an intersubjective dialogue between the viewers and the artists in which both occupy the position of *being subject.* In this way, each of the works analyzed in this dissertation acknowledges a construction of subjectivity that is relational and embodied.

Figures

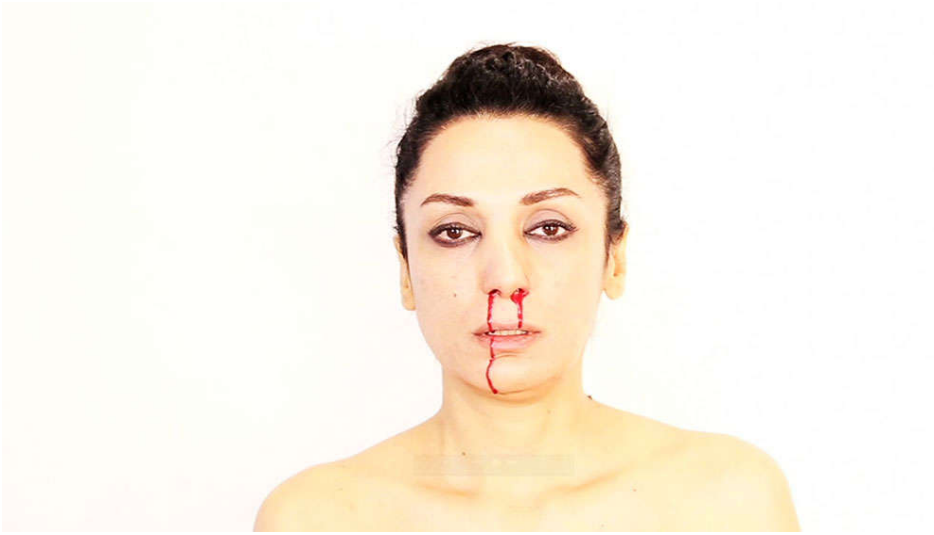

Figure 1: Simin Keramati, *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist*, 2014. Single channel colour video, 15′:57″. Still from video.
Courtesy of the artist.

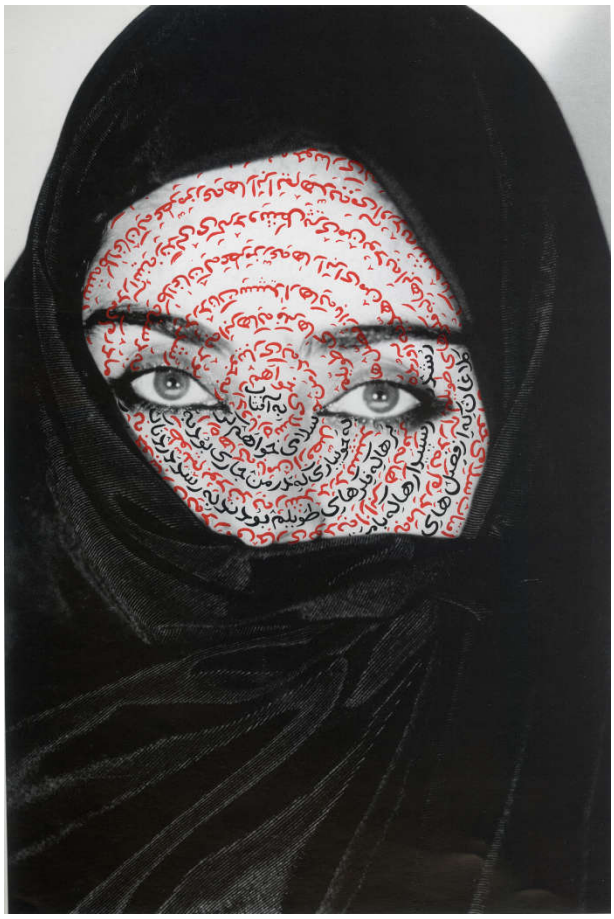

Figure 2: Shirin Neshat, *I Am Its Secret*, 1993.
From series *Women of Allah*.
Photograph. RC print & ink,
(photo taken by Plauto).
125.7 × 85.7 cm.
© Shirin Neshat.
Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

Figure 3: Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence*
1994. From series *Women of Allah*.
Photograph. RC print & ink, (photo taken by
Cynthia Preston).
118.4 × 111.1 cm.
© Shirin Neshat.
Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

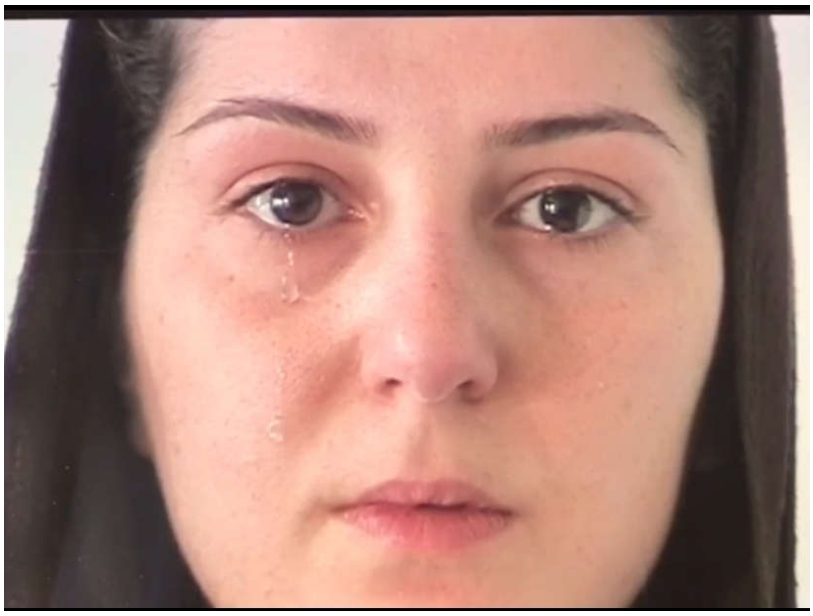

Figure 4: Ghazaleh Hedayat, *Untitled*, 2005. Single channel colour video. 6′:37″. No sound. Still from video. Courtesy of the artist.

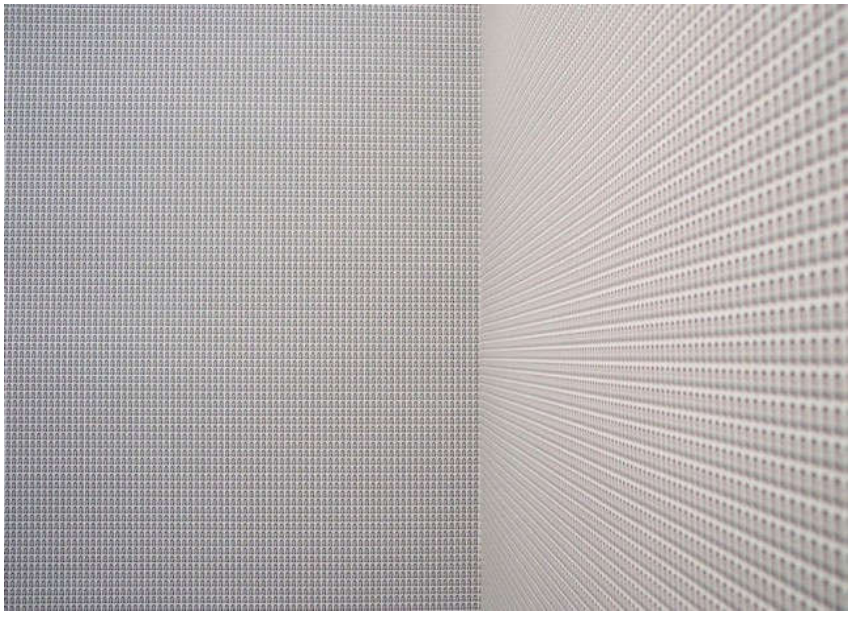

Figure 5: Ghazaleh Hedayat, *Untitled*, 2004. Wallpaper. Laminated digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 6: Ghazaleh Hedayat, *Untitled*, 2002. From series *My Isfahan*. Analogue photograph. Printed on photo paper, 30 × 90 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

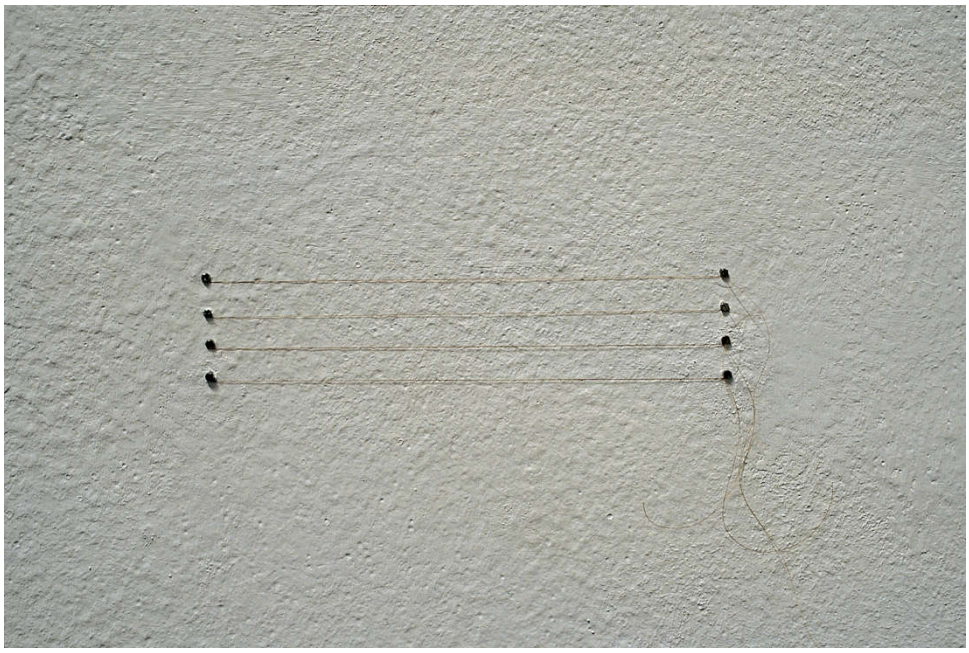

Figure 7: Ghazaleh Hedayat, *The Sound of My Hair,* 2008. From series *The Strand and the Skin.* Four strands of hair, nails. Courtesy of the artist.

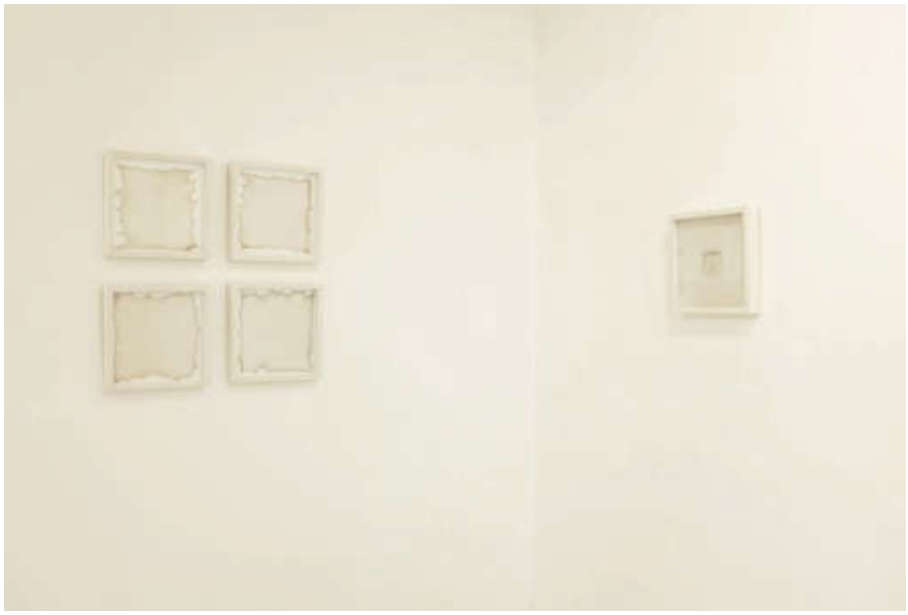

Figure 8: Ghazaleh Hedayat. Installation view from series *Crust*, 2013. Nylon stocking fabrics, nails. 30 × 30 × 5 cm frames. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 9: Ghazaleh Hedayat, *Untitled*, 2014. From series *Bygones*. Analogue photograph. Inkjet print on Epson Enhanced Matte photo paper. 38 × 50 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 10: Simin Keramati, *The Painless Method*, 2014. Single channel colour video. 8′:13″. Still from video. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 11: Katayoun Karami, *The Other Side*, 2007. Installation view. Photograph. Analogue print. 9 double-sided frames, each frame 44 × 32 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 12: Katayoun Karami, *Being There*, 2013. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 13: Simin Keramati, *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist*, 2014. Single channel colour video. 15′:57″. Still from video.
Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 14: Simin Keramati, *The Painless Method*, 2014. Single channel colour video. 8′:13″. Still from video. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 15:, Simin Keramati, *The Painless Method*, 2014, Single channel colour video. 8′:13″. Still from video. (The original image: Caravaggio, *David with the Head of Goliath*, 1609-1610, Oil on canvas, 125 × 101 cm, Galleria Borghese, Rome.), Courtesy of the artist.

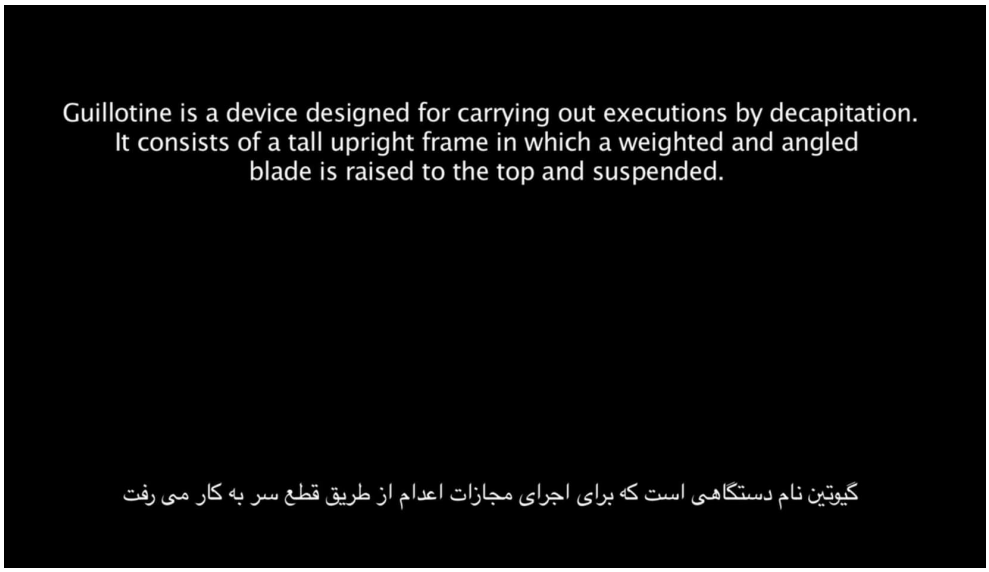

Figure 16: Simin Keramati, *The Painless Method*, 2014. Single channel colour video. 8′:13″. Still from video. Courtesy of the artist.

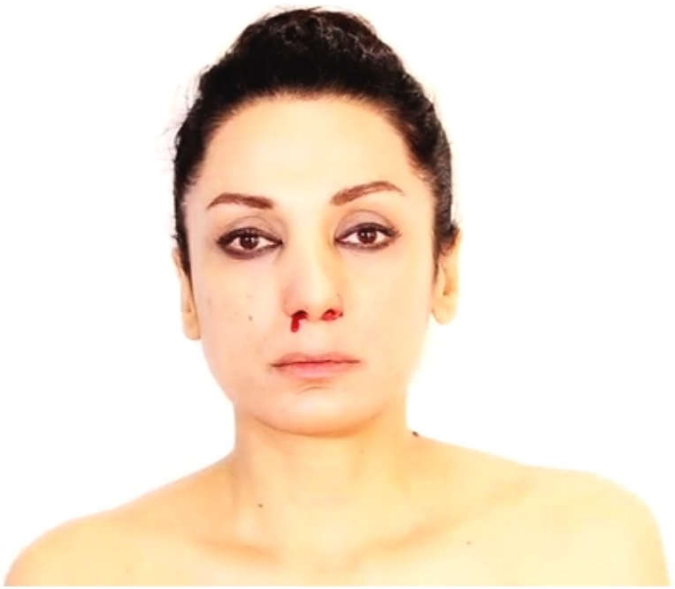

Figure 17: Simin Keramati, *I am not a female artist from the Middle East in exile; I am an artist*, 2014. Single channel colour video. 15′:57″. Still from video.
Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 18: Simin Keramati, *The Painless Method*, 2014. Single channel colour video. 8′:13″. Still from video. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 19: Katayoun Karami, *The Other Side*, 2007. Installation view. Photograph. Analogue print. 9 double-sided frames, each frame 44 × 32 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

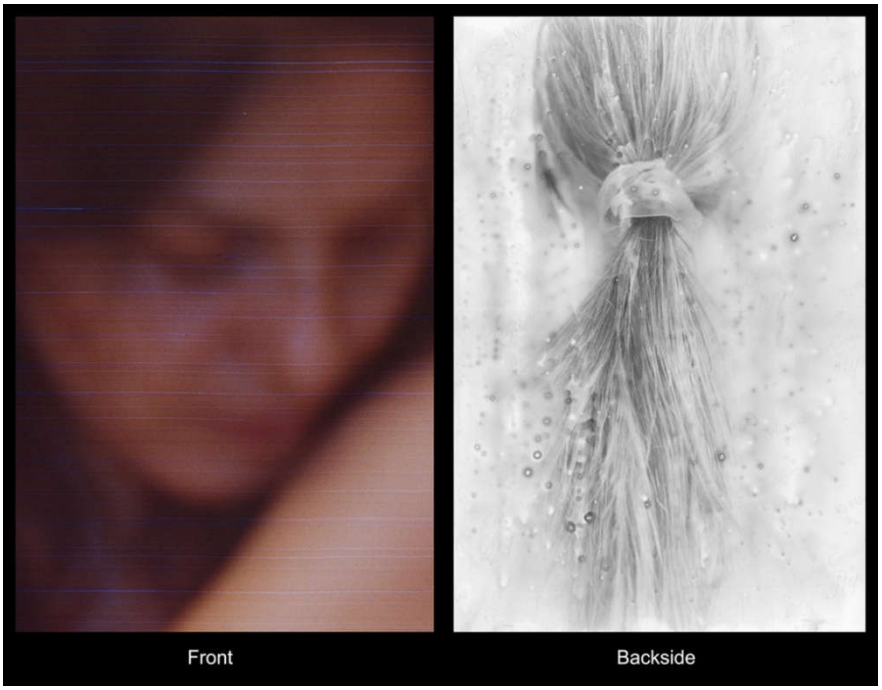

Figure 20: Katayoun Karami, *The Other Side*, 2007, detail, front and backside of one frame, Courtesy of the artist.

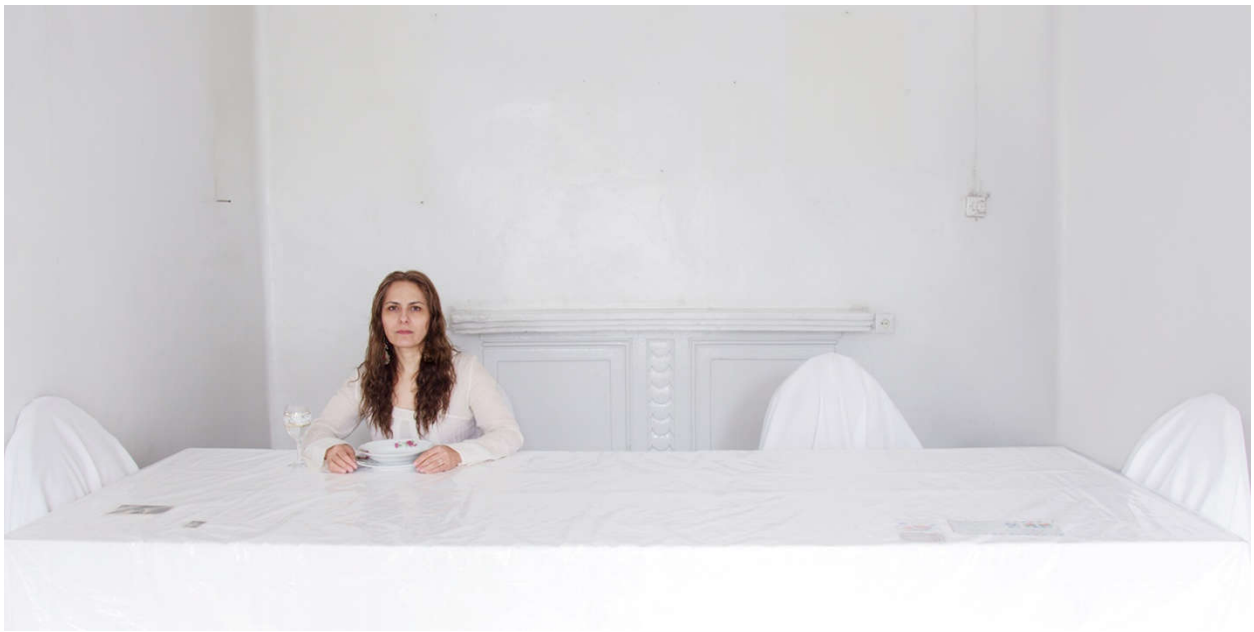

Figure 21: Katayoun Karami, *Being There*, 2013. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 22: Katayoun Karami, *Being There*, 2013. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 23: Katayoun Karami, *Being There*, 2013. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

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Appendix A

Notification of Approval

Date:	October 14, 2016
Study ID:	Pro00065653
Principal Investigator:	Somayeh Noori Shirazi
Study Supervisor:	Lianne McTavish
Study Title:	Negotiating identities in the artworks of three contemporary Iranian women artists
Approval Expiry Date:	Friday, October 13, 2017
Approved Consent Form:	Approval Date: 10/14/2016 Approved Document: information letter and consent Somayeh Noori Shirazi.pdf

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Anne Malena, PhD
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

Appendix B

Interview questions:

1: Could you please talk more about your education?

2: Where did you study and what was your major?

3: If you studied abroad, how has it affected your works?

4: Could you please explain about your works and your statements for these works?

5: Is there any common idea shared among your works? If yes, what is that and why have you reflected this idea?

6: Why do you resist the reflection of Iranian-Islamic identity in some of your recent works? what are the reasons behind this turn in your work?

7: Could you please elaborate on your visual strategies to resist the depiction of cultural identity in some of your works?

8: How many international art venues have shown your works?

9: Do you have any experience with local or international art venues regarding the depiction of cultural identity in your work? Does any of these art venues or galleries emphasize that you should reflect cultural identity if you want your works to be exhibited in this venue?

10: Have you ever been inspired by any non-Iranian artists who are critical of the depiction of cultural identity?