Another Emerging: Locating the Islamo-Orientalised Female Other Navigating Anotherness in Contemporary Western Visual Culture

By
Maria Moloud Kheirkhah

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
University of the Arts London
Chelsea College of Arts
2021

Blank page (verso cover sheet)

Abstract

Few women artists from the Muslim world(s) who live and work in the diaspora can talk about the way they represent themselves and their artistic self-image without confronting the pre-existing ideas of their predominantly Western audiences. Neither are these women able to escape the historical and political narratives that surround them. My artistic practice is no exception to this – it is assumed, received, perceived and measured within a contemporary Western visual context.

This thesis investigates the historical and political contexts of women artists of the Muslim diaspora and argues that Orientalism, Colonialism and Islamophobia negatively impact our image, self-representation and artistic voice within contemporary arts and culture. The events following 9/11 both hindered and problematised this self-representation, pushing some women to self-Orientalise and self-Other, whereas others were pushed into silence. Highlighting this transition – from being imagined through the Orientalist and colonialist canon to using self-narration – as significant for women artists of the Muslim diaspora, this thesis focuses on the potential to self-represent by claiming our own voice and image.

The nature and formation of this problem are examined in this thesis through analyses of key texts by historians and critics, exhibition histories, artists' works, individual interviews and my own experience of 30 years as an artist, curator and educator in creative and cultural settings. This investigation locates and defines this phenomenon (a problematic palimpsest) as the 'Islamo-Orientalised Female Other' (IOFO) by creating a critical framework that captures the complexity of this issue. Thus, the following central questions arise: Can the IOFO artist speak? If so, how? This thesis then discusses the possibilities of voice through artistic practice by proposing 'Anotherness' as a strategy, through my own practice, to move forward.

Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. This thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree and does not incorporate any material submitted for a degree.

Signed: Maria M. Kheirkhah

Date: September 2021

Personal statement of involvement

It is sometimes difficult to be definitive as to why you feel uncomfortable using certain images or particular terms as an artist if you do not share the nuances of the culture within which you are practising. All the subtleties you have learned between language and gestures in your native tongue may not be available. For example, when sharing a joke, there is unlikely to be a common sociocultural consciousness to fall back on. Somehow, your thoughts get stuck between words; they fall in between and through the gaps.

Having been traumatised by the sound of guns and the aftermath of a revolution in 1979, I buried my beloved books, said goodbye to friends and family, kissed my parents goodbye, and was sent off to the United Kingdom (UK) to take some time out.[1] The idea was to use this time to learn the English language a little better, possibly for six months to a year, hoping to go back after all was settled in Iran. Perhaps then I could return to my studies. At least, that was the plan.

When I first arrived in the UK on a sunny April day in 1979, my brother, who had lived here for several years, advised me to try and socialise much more with English people, rather than spending time with my Iranian friends, to learn the language better, as opposed to only speaking in Farsi. That would also help me understand the customs better to help me settle in a different country. Perhaps he already had an inkling that I may not be able to return for some time after the revolution. The more my brother stopped me from engaging with anything to do with home, for instance, listening to Persian songs, the more homesick I became, and I often wrote to my parents asking to go back. I found the grey skies in the UK depressing and the people were distant and unfriendly. I was 17 then.

Soon, all this changed. I started going to college and began my art education. I developed skills in drawing and painting, and my art teacher, Mr. Klaus Meyer, encouraged me to pursue an art career.[2] I loved the idea despite my family's high hopes for me to pursue a medical career. After all, I had enjoyed and achieved a science diploma. I was a bookworm, and this gave me an ability to write eloquently in

[1] Due to university closures, regime change and the uncertainties amongst many others from the Iranian diaspora, as well as the Islamic revolution, the theocratic changes, which emerged as a result, and the Iran-Iraq war between 1980-1988, there was a steady stream of Iranians who migrated to various countries. The largest numbers of Iranians have migrated to the United States and Europe (mainly the UK, Germany and France).

[2] Klaus Meyer (1918-2002) was born in Berlin. A German Jew who came to England in 1938, he studied printmaking at Slade School of Art. I studied drawing and painting under his guidance and supervision at Kilburn Polytechnic (1979-81) and without his encouragement I would have never chosen art as a career.

Farsi, which had seemed wasted when I came to England, but at least I could pursue my other love: art. If I could not join my words coherently or elegantly enough in English, I could always draw and join lines elegantly to make sense.

Over four decades since my arrival, I have finally made my peace with language because my lines are no longer enough to answer and speak my image, and because my image has already been spoken of, for, against, interrupted, skewed, interpreted and elaborated on. Authored and described by many people past and present, I must finally have the courage to look at my image and artistic challenge in the face. I want to understand why my Iranian-ness or Persian-ness or Muslim-ness can say so much to my "Western" audience before I even speak. Can I speak for myself and be the author of my own image? Therefore, I realised that research had become necessary.

Acknowledgements

I express my deepest gratitude to my sisters, Ozra Kheirkhah and Mahshid Kheirkhah, for their love, encouragement and unshakeable support throughout this journey.

I would like to thank my Director of Studies, Dr Michael Asbury, and my superviser, Dr. Wiebke Leister, for their contribution and academic guidance. I am grateful to Professor Malcolm Quinn for his enriching conversations, his guidance and his persistent support throughout my research. I also want to thank my examiners, Professor Gen Doy and Dr. Anjalie Dalal-Clayton, for their insightful suggestions for the afterlife of this thesis.

A very special thanks goes to my family here in the UK, my former partner Andrew Smith for his unflinching support and his enduring friendship, and my son, Benjamin Smith, for his love and quiet strength during some challenging times in the initial years of my research, as well as for managing the opening event of my solo exhibition at the Triangle Gallery, Chelsea College of Art.

I am grateful and indebted to my dear friend Dr. Ines R. Amado for her generosity of spirit, wisdom and encouragement in the later period of my research.

My thanks go to my long-time friend Nahid Majid for standing beside me during challenging times in the initial period of my research. I should like also to extend my thanks to Keith Piper for his support and friendship at the inception of this research.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Fatemeh Nematinejad (in memoriam), who encouraged curiosity, empathy and independence of thought**,** which not only inspired me, but also enriched the many lives she encountered; and to my father, Mehdi Kheirkhah (in memoriam), for his love and encouragement to pursue my dreams. The warmth of their words, thoughts and deeds is the source of my strength and shines so brightly upon my life path.

Table of Contents

List of figures

Introduction

My artistic practice is confronted by expectations and assumptions in the way that it is received, perceived and measured within a Western context.[3] Following my departure from Iran and arrival in London in 1979, and particularly since the events of 11 September 2001, the realities of being Iranian and Muslim have given me what may be called a 'cultural skin', locating me as 'Other' within a Western context.[4] As a subject of the political and the Muslim diaspora – among many others from my own and previous generations with similar backgrounds – my presentation and representation as a British-Iranian Muslim female artist is a contested place and a site of investigation.[5]

Before 2000, women artists like Shirazeh Houshiary, Mitra Tabrizian, Mona Hatoum, Zineb Sedira, Jananne Al-Ani and myself engaged with subjects such as spirituality, sexuality, war, exile and the Palestinian problem. However, it was not until 2000, the year of Shirin Neshat's popular exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in London, that we were confronted with issues concerning self-narration and self-representation. Neshat's exhibition made bold claims about the image of the Muslim woman from the Middle East (in Neshat's case, Iran) and owes its significance not only to its exhibition place, a major art gallery in the UK, but also to its theme; it was entirely dedicated to the subject of Islam, the veil, the woman and her lack of voice from this other place, Iran.[6] The success of Neshat's solo exhibition at the Serpentine had a dual effect on the female artists of the Muslim diaspora. First, it established a sense of empowerment and facilitated the possibility of being present within the

[3] Western: throughout this thesis I use the terms "West" and "Western" to refer to the UK, the US, Western Europe and North America, but also 'the discursive construction of the Orient and Europe's Other as traced', as defined by Said (1978; see also, *Muslim Women, Transnational feminism and the Ethics of Pedagogy* [Taylor and Zine, Routledge 2016:19]).

[4] 'The 'Other' is anyone who is separate from one's self. The existence of others is crucial in defining what is 'normal' and in locating one's own place in the world. The colonised subject is characterised as 'other' through discourse such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the coloniser and colonised and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonising culture and world view … This Other is important in defining the identity of the subject … it can refer to the colonised others who are marginalised by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre.' Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (2013: 187).

[5] Alongside the most historically significant and religious diasporas, such as the Jewish Diaspora, there has been a newer generation of diasporic population visible from the Middle East due to the instability and wars. Amongst them are the Lebanese, Iranian, Palestinian and Syrian diasporas that have become most visible (Brah 1996; Dufoix 2008).

[6] Middle East: A term most commonly used since the early part of the 20th century, designating a geographical region containing major access points to Asia, such as the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf, or as a blanket term rooted in Eurocentric readings of West Asia and Muslim-majority countries. The term indicates regions from West Asia to North Africa.

landscape of contemporary art by occupying a visible platform and making new approaches possible. Second, it encouraged some women artists of the Muslim worlds and Muslim diaspora to create a self-presentation that was self-Othering and self-Orientalising: a self-presentation, which my research investigates and considers as problematic.[7]

A year after Neshat's exhibition, we witnessed the events of 9/11. The impact of such events and subsequent Islamophobia in the context of women artists of the Muslim diaspora presented some women artists (including myself) from the Middle East, Asia and parts of Africa with what may be termed a confusion or dilemma. This dilemma was whether to stay away from the subject and image of women, Islam and the veil due to Orientalist aesthetics and associations with preconceived ideas (considered backward, exotic or passive; in short, Orientalised [Kabbani 1986, 2008]), or to use this as an opportunity to investigate further such preconceptions and open up a dialogue in this area of work. I decided on the latter. My research examines the possibility of using the subject and image of the woman of the Muslim diaspora but carefully considers the associated ethics and aesthetics, particularly in the context of rising Islamophobia since 9/11.

I was no stranger to identity politics. I was aware and anxious of falling into categories of identity predetermined by curators and exhibition-makers. The desire to place or pigeonhole artists was significant to me in my early encounters in the UK and became progressively more problematic in the contexts of social encounters and my artworks or exhibitions. For example, I noticed that in most social circles, including the arts and art exhibition contexts, my identity was of great importance in the reception or promotion of my artwork. I was often categorised and described as an 'Iranian woman', an idea often raised in conversations associated with the Iranian 1978–79 revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, the veil in post-1979 Islamic Iran and the oppressive regime in the 'axis of evil'.[8] At other times, I was perceived as a 'Persian woman', often uttered softly, somehow associated with a faraway land of the East,

[7] Muslim Worlds, Islamic: In this thesis, I use the terms 'Muslim world' and 'Islamic' to refer to peoples or countries that have Islam as their main or state religion, or are countries largely populated commonly by Muslims. However, the term 'Islamic' can emphasise and refer to general culture, architecture, laws, art, etc., and 'Muslim worlds' emphasises people or cultures.

[8] The expression was first used by former US President George W. Bush on 29 January 2002 to describe governments that his administration accused of sponsoring terrorism and seeking weapons of mass destruction, including Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

with Orientalist narratives of Scheherazade, Arabian Nights, exotic Hollywood depictions of belly dancers, and with perceptions of Iran under the Shah before 1979.

In locating the challenges confronted through my practice and the reception of my work, often within my own exhibition context or even in social situations, there was a tacit insistence/attempt to associate me with a specific culture or country. This perception raised the question of how this subject/sign of identity had developed within my own contemporary art world since my arrival in 1979 and particularly after the events of 9/11. Subsequently, this problem became an activating force for making works that analysed the changed function of artists from the Muslim diaspora as they began to shift the emphasis from Oriental to Islamo-Oriental, or from Persian to Iranian.

This issue is discussed throughout this thesis as a means of identifying and analysing how the problem of identity occurs in art practices, and, in turn, how these practices can acquire an agency that holds an independent space from Orientalist visual approaches interconnected with current political and social moments. It is within this context of assumptions and expectations about a fixed Muslim and Orientalist identity (which could result in narrowing the meaning of the work) that I draw upon my own experience within the arts and cultural production for a visual and cultural study, which, as I demonstrate, defines the perception that precedes others and me.

Research questions

This research addresses voice, or lack of voice, through my practice of installation, performance and film, by suggesting ‘Another’ or ‘Anotherness’ in contrast to a pre-existing Other. By using several methods, such as fictitious exploration, reappropriation, performance and interventions of archives and image-text constellations, this approach offers the possibility of rethinking Orientalist and Othering aesthetics through theory and practice. This aim is achieved by reworking, altering, inserting, disrupting, foregrounding, juxtaposing, omitting, rewriting and reinventing these historical absences to reclaim our erased, ignored and omitted voices, including my own, without assuming a final fixed position. I engage with these issues, practices and methods through the following key research questions:

1. How is the woman artist of the Muslim diaspora perceived and received within Western contemporary visual arts and culture?

2. Can the woman artist of the Muslim diaspora speak? If so, how and what are the possibilities of that voice through her practice?

Aims

This research has two main aims:

1. To develop possible visual strategies for disengaging the imagined Muslim female Othered from a historically mute position through practice and dialogue.
2. To reflect upon possibilities for (an) independent voice(s) in the way we write about our own experiences, our own art works in different contexts, through creating visual, performative and time-based work.

Objectives

To achieve the aims, I investigate and develop alternative readings/narratives through text and practice, focusing on the female Oriental (Asian/Middle Eastern diasporic) voice/body/autobiography within a visual arts discipline. Moreover, I propose artworks to address, challenge and question representation, visual signifiers, exoticism and the Oriental female voice in contrast to an 'Othering' Western voice.

Methods and methodologies

There is little scholarship or historical writing on the work of women artists from the Muslim worlds, their artistic contributions or critiques of their work within art history, and certainly little on women writing about other women or their own work.[9] In contrast, male artists have enjoyed centuries of recognition and appreciation accompanied by the writings of art historians and critics who contextualise and interpret their artistic productions, which, in turn, illuminated their story and added currency to its value. I take it upon myself to add my own voice through methods developed in practice, and in so doing, to contribute to a history regarding women artists of the Muslim diaspora. Therefore, I use historiography but adapt it to include diverse sources from within the arts and media to reflect on the relevant boundary conditions, to tease out a history not yet written coherently enough to explore our

[9] See *Shirazeh Houshiary* (Lisson Gallery 2008, 2017); *Mona Hatoum* (Phaidon 1997, 2016), *Shirin Neshat* (Rizzoli, 1998, 2010); *Muslim Women, Transnational feminism and the Ethics of Pedagogy* (Taylor and Zine, Routledge 2016); essays and articles produced and published as exhibition catalogues which I will be introducing in exhibition histories in chapter 3.

current contemporary artistic moment of practices, representations and self-representations of women artists from the Muslim worlds in the visual arts within a Western context; that is, the UK, Europe and the United States of America (US).

Regarding approaching complex issues, Richard Vann suggests that, '[d]ifferent strategies are required for investigating the history of peoples who adopted writing only recently' (Vann 2019). Vann explains that a scientific explanation would consider 'enumerating relevant boundary conditions and then adducing the appropriate "covering" laws'.[10] For Vann, a historiographical approach goes further by investigating not only what, but also how, on what occasions and from whose perspective. This investigative and interpretive approach is useful for this thesis to locate the IOFO and to develop visual strategies for claiming Anotherness. This historiography, as I demonstrate, defines a perception, which, in effect, *precedes* many others and myself alike, and which affects our production as creative agents because of the expectations placed upon us and upon the reception of our work within a contemporary Western art world.

Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into two main parts. Part 1 comprises Chapters 1, 2 and 3 and deals with historical and contemporary explorations of the Othering of the Oriental and Muslim woman. Through this analysis, Part 1 concludes with the transformation and accumulation of what this thesis locates as problematic through artistic platforms: the IOFO. Responding to this problematic, Part 2 initially explores how women artists use concepts and aesthetics in their artistic practices within contemporary socio-political contexts (Chapter 4), whereas Chapter 5 focuses on my own artistic practice as a way of developing strategies and content in response to the IOFO.

Following this introduction, Chapter 1 explores the historical representations of the woman of the East within the context of Orientalist visual history. The chapter looks at illustrations depicted in the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights.* Using these, I begin to make sense of what my Persian-ness or my Iranian-ness might evoke

[10] In his explanation of historiography, Vann offers the example of a broken radiator and how a historian might approach this differently to a scientist in order to make sense of the past and understand the present. For example, a scientist would draw a certain conclusion, that the radiator was made of iron and filled with water without anti-freeze, and the car was left outside when the temperature fell below freezing and then adducing the appropriate "covering" laws—in this case, that water expands as it freezes and the tensile strength of iron makes it too brittle to expand as much as the water does. As a whole, then, it appears that historians may interpret why the radiator became broken rather than explain it definitively. See link: https://www.britannica.com/topic/historiography/From-explanation-to-interpretation accessed on 23 January 2019.

in my audience. This understanding might help me obtain an insight into how the image of the Oriental woman developed throughout history and whether Orientalist visual depictions bear any relationship to my artistic voice and my socio-political environment.

Chapter 2 examines the contemporary social and political contexts and the rhetoric around the Muslim woman and her image, both literal and conceptual, against the backdrop of the following events: the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the Iranian hostage crisis in 1981 and 9/11. As greater public interest and media representations began to develop regarding the Middle East in recent decades, the veil became an obsessive symbol of the Muslim woman, Islam and the Muslim world. This symbol became a widely disseminated media representation, having a great impact on the socio-political context of women artists.

Chapter 3 explores how the artistic community and my artistic environment observed such projections and the available platforms for women artists of the Muslim diaspora. This chapter surveys three key exhibitions, including Shirin Neshat's solo show at the Serpentine Gallery (2000), and the perspectives of key curators, artists and thinkers to gauge the space of the Muslim female diaspora artists and the ways in which visual producers might approach this newly formed phenomenon.

Chapter 3 concludes Part 1 of this thesis and locates the problematic position of women artists (both subjectively and artistically) from the Muslim diaspora, claiming the IOFO as a way of identifying and mapping out the formation of a new phenomenon that occurs in women artists' work and reception since 2000 and that was further affected after 9/11**.**

Part 2 of this thesis consists of Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 presents a study of artists' responses and approaches to aesthetics and subjects in relation to an analytical framework already in place, as concluded in Part 1 of this thesis. The chapter discusses several Iranian artists and how they represent the image of the Oriental and Muslim woman.

Chapter 5 centres on my own response to the problematic issue of the IOFO, suggesting Anotherness as an artistic strategy. The practice section of this research takes advantage of the findings in Part 1 by revisiting specific representations, using fiction and explorations of image, text and montage, as well as performance and installation. These key methods are employed to deconstruct and remake, to

reconstruct and reclaim Another, in which practice becomes a complementary component in a strategy of rethinking, reworking, altering, foregrounding, juxtaposing, omitting and reinventing this specific positioning.

Chapter 1: The image of the Oriental woman painted, photographed and onscreen

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part A explores the historical and visual representation of the Oriental woman as constructed for a Western world. It does so by primarily offering a brief review of Frantz Fanon's *Algeria Unveiled (*1965), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* (1987) to consider Orientalism through Orientalist paintings, colonialism, colonialist photography and the historical 'Otherness' of the Oriental female subject.[11] In the absence of the female voice across these genres, Part B explores the Orientalist paintings from the exhibition *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* at Tate Britain (2008), and includes the responses from two contemporary female critics, Emily Weeks and Rana Kabbani. Part B further investigates the appropriation of Orientalist aesthetics, the proximity of the critic to the subject of the Oriental woman, the privilege and audience perception of the Orientalist woman. Importantly, this chapter sheds light on possible strategies that can be used through practice to de-Orientalise and decolonise the historical accounts and archives.

Part A

1.2 Historical review

Recent controversies concerning the Middle East and the veil as a significant sign and symbol of women from this region are not new. In 2014, for example, the European Court upheld the full veil ban in France (BBC 2014), while in 2017 OFSTED school inspectors were 'authorized to question Muslim girls in primary schools who practice Hijab' (Hussain 2017: n.p.). A key critic who had already criticised such attitudes is Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist and philosopher who explored colonial attitudes manifested through the veil and how these re-entered the Western public imagination through contemporaneous creative productions.[12] According to Fanon,

[11] Fanon's *L'An Cinq de la Revolution Algerienne* was first published during the Algerian war of independence in 1959 and translated into English as *Algeria Unveiled* in 1965.

[12] Frantz Fanon was influential in the field of post-colonial studies and was perhaps the pre-eminent thinker of the 20th century on the issue of decolonisation and the psychopathology of colonisation. His works have inspired anti-colonial liberation movements for more than four decades.

> Behind the visible, manifest patriarchy, the more significant existence of a basic matriarchy was affirmed. This enabled the colonial administration to define a precise political doctrine: if we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in houses where the men keep them out of sight.
>
> (Fanon 1965: 74–85)

Fanon examines colonial power relationships through the significance of the veiling and unveiling of Algerian women.[13] The significance of the veil is examined both in relation to the native Algerians and the French colonialists, particularly regarding the role of Algerian women during the struggle in Algerian society. Fanon argues that this dynamic, which developed concerning the unveiling of women by French colonial agents, represented an act of humiliation and an assault on the psyche of the Algerians. What emerges for Fanon is the hypocrisy of the French colonial project: that the unveiling of women under the guise of liberation was merely a false narrative hiding an ulterior motive. This professed altruism justified the occupation of Algeria in the name of enlightenment and a supposedly genuine concern for women's emancipation. In truth, the colonists focused their political doctrine on assaulting the woman and her veil, not only through rape, but also on a psychological level to destroy the main structures of Algerian society. This approach projected an idea of Algeria as a backward society, a primitive, insular and stagnant culture in which the veil was the significant marker of that culture. As a result, the French colonising project could claim itself as superior and liberal (McMichael 2011).

Two decades later, Edward Said published his seminal book, *Orientalism*, in which he discusses the nature of the East-West relationship, the concepts of Othering and power in the context of how the West defines itself in relation to that which it is not. This Other is expressed through, for example, literature, art and imagery. Acknowledging the importance of the Orient to Europe, Said writes,

> The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations and languages, its cultural constant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other…the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.
>
> (Said 1978: 1–2)

[13] Launched by French colonialists in the early 1930's and subverted by Algerian women during the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962).

Said argues that 'the West' and 'the East' constitute an invented binary, produced and popularised by European intellectual and literary traditions that distort and exaggerate differences. Thus, the West is portrayed as enlightened, logical, disciplined, progressive, modern and male, whereas the East is depicted as backward, sensualist, lazy, passive, dangerous, irrational and female. Said divides the Orient into a literary product and a region, claiming that as a literary product, 'the Orient was almost a European invention,' yet, as a region, it 'is an integral part of European material civilization and culture' (1978: 1–2). There is not one without the other. These constructed ideologies of exceptionalism cast the West as relatively superior. Orientalist discourse, for Said, is more valuable as a sign of the power exerted by the West over the Orient than a true discourse about the Orient.

While Said and Fanon articulate Orientalism and colonisation critically by examining their inherent and dynamic power relations, Malek Alloula's book *The Colonial Harem* (1987) documents how semi-nude images of Algerian women were used as postcards that circulated in France between 1900 and 1930. Alloula suggests the function of these images undermined the value structure and dignity of 'backward' Algerian culture and Algerian women, creating an 'Othered' female stereotype by French photographers during the French occupation of Algeria. By presenting a thorough historical archive of the photographic images and their intrinsic power dynamic, Alloula further considers how French colonialists first began to claim the bodies of Algerian women and to humiliate the culture by asserting their desire to possess and colonise. Alloula denounces the distortion of these images of women and their way of life through the voyeuristic lens of the coloniser. Frozen in time through a posed photograph and framed by the convention of the postcard, the Algerian women and their bodies are laid bare, positioned within an Oriental *mise-en-scene* for all to see and gaze at; voiceless, nameless, bought and sold as postcards to be sent back home to France, presenting the women as exotic, primitive and strange.

The works of Fanon, Said and Alloula illustrate the multifaceted nature of Orientalism, including the important role of women, the politicisation of their bodies and the codifying of their attire. Through examples in literature, Said demonstrates how Orientalist discourse is constructed. Yet, within that dynamic, the subject of the woman remains marginal, as already highlighted by many critics who accuse Said of gender blindness (Lewis 1996; Mortimer 2005; Yegenoglu 1998). In contrast, Alloula's documentation of postcard images focuses almost entirely on women and

the display of their half-naked bodies within intimate spaces. He demonstrates visually and in an archival, documentary manner how the image can be a powerful tool in constructing the Oriental woman through ethnographic and stereotypical lenses. Alloula's organisation of images, in line with Fanon's analytical writing on psychological power dynamics, demonstrates the power of the image in psychologically defeating, disrupting and undermining the Algerian woman, and in so doing, disrupting a culture; a culture that, at its very heart, valued a strong sense of its gender roles. At the same time, Fanon and Alloula's differing approaches, reveal that colonial violence and attitudes towards Algerian women depict them as nameless, voiceless and subjected to the politics of the coloniser.

1.3 Oriental, Orientalism

According to the Collins English Dictionary, the term 'Oriental' means 'coming from, of, or relating to, Asia, the Orient could mean people of the East, of Near, Far or Middle East'. To foreground this section's concerns, I return to Said's *Orientalism*, in which he encourages the reader to re-examine Western perceptions and misconceptions of the Muslim worlds. In his words,

> Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poet, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate…. accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. . . . the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient ... despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient.
>
> (Said 1978: 2–5)

Said illustrates the way in which the representation of Europe's 'Others' has been institutionalised as a feature of its cultural dominance. Orientalism describes the different disciplines, institutions and types of thought by which Europeans came to know the Orient, essentially establishing the link between power and knowledge, for it fabricates and dominates Orientals in the process of knowing them. However, by exploring and defining the Imperial dynamics between East and West, Mildred Mortimer exposes Said's positioning of Orientalism 'as an exclusively male

phenomenon and the Oriental woman as a projection of European male fantasy' (2005: 53). Said only marginally discusses the subject of the 'woman' and the tableau of art or Orientalist paintings. Aware of this lack in his book, Said writes,

> [I]n the works of Delacroix and literally dozens of other French and British painters, the Oriental genre tableau carried representation into visual expression and a life of its own (which this book, unfortunately, must scant). Sensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, intense energy: the Orient as a figure in the pre-Romantic, pre technical Orientalist imagination of late-eighteenth-century Europe was really a chameleon-like quality called (adjectivally) 'Oriental'.
>
> (Said 1978: 118–19)

Perhaps Said's main focus on the question of Palestine and the political power dynamics between the West and East explains the absence of the woman in his book, but since its publication, there have been several studies by women scholars who aimed to address, examine and develop what Said sidestepped in his book. For example, Reina Lewis (1996) draws on the Orientalist female painter Henriette Browne to highlight her contribution to this genre and her different approach to painting Oriental women and the harem scenes. Lewis highlights that the figures in Browne's paintings are often dressed, and more attention is paid to the architecture and women portrayed within it, rather than emphasising the luxury excess associated with Orientalist aesthetics practised by her male contemporaries. Browne's paintings *Une Visite* and *Une Joueuse de Flute* challenge the masculinised context of its time and the extent of women's involvement in the popular field of the visual realm of Orientalism. In a similar vein, Mayda Yegenoglu (1998) focuses on a persistent Western fascination with the veiled women of the Orient as a site of both fantasy and nationalist ideologies. As Yegenoglu describes,

> In the nineteenth-century European travellers' obsession with the veil, the "precise political doctrine" dissolves into a textual inscription which is witness to an underlying enunciative … As is well known, in Lacan's approach the gaze is not seen, but imagined by the subject in the field of the Other. Orientalist writing is the European imagination at work in the field of the Other. The veil attracts the eye, and forces one to think, to speculate about what is behind it….it is through the inscription of the veil as a mask that the Oriental woman is turned into an enigma.
>
> (Yegenoglu 1998: 44)

While both writers offer feminist perspectives on the historical and colonial discourse on the subjects of women, politics and paintings depicting Oriental women, they

nevertheless leave a gap in our knowledge about the Oriental female artist herself and her position in addressing this particular genre. Based on this shortfall and Said's encouragement to examine 'strategic formation' as a way of exploring 'the relationship between texts and how groups of texts … acquire mass density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large' (1978: 20), it is appropriate for me as an Oriental female artist to address such a position, or rather the lack of it, by offering examples of such history to evoke the past and present in the social, artistic and cultural Oriental context.

Figure 1: Jean-Leon Gerome, *Dance of the Almeh* (1863)

The persistent presence of popular depictions in the context of Orientalism are born out of harem paintings and pre-existing archetypal images of male and female subjects of the Muslim worlds, such as Jean-Leon Gerome's painting *Dance of the Almeh* (Fig. 1). Living with the effects of these histories and portrayals from an artistic and personal point of view, it is important to examine such paintings and historical moments to illustrate how women artists can engage with the stereotypical views of Orientalists and Orientalist paintings, which are ingrained in the perception of viewers. This chapter does not endeavour to re-examine the literature produced about this highly specialised area of history or theory. Instead, it seeks to examine and identify the visual legacies these periods have left behind and to discuss them in today's context to develop their relationship and the subsequent impact on women artists' ability to self-represent their political realities as diasporic women artists from

the Orient.

Following the legacies of Orientalist paintings, inseparable from the politics of their own time as they reflect onto my own world, I ask myself as an individual Middle Eastern woman artist within the politics and context of my visual art continuum: How are we as 'Oriental' and as 'women artists' to consider or look at an image that depicts and represents our bodies and our worlds within these projections? Such stereotypical images continue to appear within our artistic institutions, our society and museums today, for example, in paintings by Delacroix or Picasso. It is at this moment that the personal becomes political in confronting such images. As a way of identifying and locating the complex challenges confronted in my work and navigating my voice and image, Part 2 of this chapter engages with some of the issues through specific examples of Orientalist paintings and colonial photography and their critics to reveal a history that continues to impact us as women visual artists within our contemporary art world.

Figure 2: Léon Carré, *Le Livre des Les Mille et Une Nuits* (1926–32), illustration in the 12th volume

Part B

1.4 Orientalism and Orientalist paintings

Before the advent of photography and film, there already existed a firmly established representation of the Oriental woman within Western visual culture, coupled with the received ideas of a Western audience, who understood that the Oriental woman was often represented as an erotic and exotic subject in this Other place. These portrayals were conveyed in paintings of the 18th and 19th centuries, which emphasised women's sexuality, exoticism and passivity. Representations of the Oriental woman were also produced in scholarly and scientific texts since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, which set out an Imperial ideology in a 23-volume publication known as *La Description de l'Egypte,* which claims to describe and contain knowledge about every facet of Middle Eastern life and its people. Other forms of texts describing the Oriental woman are found in letters, reports and exploratory travelogues by scholars who explored those areas, including Gustave Flaubert, George William Curtis, William Makepeace Thackery and Richard Francis Burton. Furthermore, images and paintings of women within the specific architecture of forbidden places, such as odalisques within harems, were often painted and depicted.[14] Illustrations such as Léon Carré's *Le Livre des Les Mille et Une Nuits* (Fig. 2) accompany the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights* as told by the storyteller Scheherazade, which creates an imaginary and exotic scene for the Western reader.[15] These stories are set against a backdrop of exotic decorative and architectural elements for a Western audience who relied heavily on such descriptive stories and illustrations to capture and represent this 'other world' (Riding 2008). Fantasised and transformed, pictured and imagined, the Orient was performed and masqueraded for the Western public. At times, the Orient was presented as a symbol of class, status, culture and as a sign of the West's progress in relation to its significant Other, the East, as eloquently defined and explored by Said (Riding 2008).

While such fantasies created a place to dream, excite and imagine spectacular scenes, the Orient simultaneously pulled together fact and fiction. It conjured up

[14] An *odalisk* (Turkish) is a chambermaid and servant who would never have exposed her body. By the eighteenth century the term odalisque referred to the eroticised artistic genre in which a nominally Eastern woman lies on her side on display for the spectator; a common fantasy in Western artistic movements.

[15] A collection of traditional Persian and Arabic tales by Alf Layla wa-Layla, translated by Antoine Galland as *Les Mille et un Jours, Contes Arabes* and known in Britain as the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*. The most familiar voice of the Oriental storyteller during the eighteenth century was that of Scheherazade, the newly married vizier's daughter who tells stories to her husband the Sultan Shahriar to save not only her own life but that of her sister Dunyazad, and to prevent the possible death of many more women to marry the Sultan.

stories and paintings, inspiring music and theatrical set designs, illustrating an Oriental world rich in patterns, colours and spectacular architectural spaces. This served an audience who relied heavily on descriptive travelogues and detailed visuals, which, in turn, allowed the artist-creator to appropriate and emphasise an aesthetic that already existed within the Oriental world, such as geometric patterns and a distinctive architecture, tiles, textiles and woodwork. This aesthetic transformed the Oriental woman into an exotic subject marked by the very aesthetics that surround the image of her body. She is identified through the aesthetics, patterns and a set of visual signifiers that lock her into the space of the Oriental.

1.5 Critical responses to Orientalist paintings

In 2008, Tate Britain opened a major exhibition entitled *The Lure of the East, British Orientalist Painting*, which brought together 120 paintings and drawings focused on the genre and themes of British Orientalist art. This exhibition was also documented in an accompanying catalogue, which presented the various categories of Orientalist paintings not only through the study of 'the native', but also through the self-representations of ambassadors, artists and travellers performing 'the native' in the paintings (2008: 15–16).[16] The catalogue offered a general historical account of British Orientalist paintings, contextualising the political and technological advances of the West and the marked period when modernisation became unmistakably identified with Westernisation.

[16] In the introduction to *British Orientalist Paintings* Tromans explains: 'The image of the conqueror "going native" as he developed his empire into the East is long standing within European culture. Alexandra the great, conqueror of Persia, and Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor who moved his capital from Rome to Byzantium (Constantinople), both adopted Oriental costume in the hope of facilitating their rule. In later times, such cross-cultural dressing was adopted by lesser men and women for a range of different reasons. Robert Shirly, roving European ambassador in the employ of Shah Abbas of Persia in a period well before Middle Eastern powers had permanent representatives at European courts, signalled his credentials by his clothing … and of his wife, a Circassian (Caucasian) whom he met in Persia' (2008: 15-16).

Figure 3: John Frederick Lewis, *A Lady Receiving Visitors* (*The Reception)* (1873), oil on wood, 63.5 x 76.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon collection

Several writers have focused on paintings and artists of this genre to shed light on this period, especially Emily Weeks[17] and Rana Kabbani,[18] who discuss the paintings, their value to artistic institutions and the artists of this period. In their role as critics, they are positioned as different individual women in relation to Orientalist paintings. Weeks considers the context of the artist John Frederick Lewis and presents the reader with a thorough historical account of Lewis and his painting. As Weeks writes,

> The terms of Lewis's popularity were not lost upon this most market savvy of artists. Lewis's own reputation, which had so declined during his years abroad that its restoration seemed unlikely, soared to new heights in the wake of Thackery's account. Lewis, now the darling of the Victorian art world, was elected President of the Society of Painters in Water Colours in 1855 and, once he had decided to paint exclusively in oils, a Royal Academician in 1865 (he had been elected an associate in RA in 1859). To further capitalise on the intriguing persona that Thackeray had created, and despite such professional accolades, Lewis abandoned his old habits of social visibility and retreated with his new wife to an elusive and, in the words of one visitor, Arabian Night-like existence outside London's metropolitan centre, in Walton-on

[17] Emily Weeks is an independent art historian and consultant for private collectors, museums, art dealers, and auction houses in America, Britain, Europe, and the Middle East. Her areas of expertise include Orientalism (images of the Middle East created by European artists) and nineteenth-century British visual culture.
[18] Rana Kabbani is a British Syrian cultural historian, writer and broadcaster who lives in London. Most famous for her works *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of the Orient* and *Letter to Christendom*, she has also edited and translated works in Arabic and English.

> Thames in, Surrey. There Lewis focused exclusively on his highly wrought pictures of the Middle East, keeping in mind both the public's desire for new and reliable information about this increasingly, well-known region, and the singular vantage-point that he was now believed to possess. His decision to concentrate on scenes of the harem proved an especially shrewd one, as this subject continued to captivate even the most informed and oversaturated members of his viewing public.
>
> (Weeks 2008: 26)

This account reveals not only the privileged position of the Orientalist painter and the popularity and reception of Orientalist paintings, but also the important role and appraisal of the historian and critic in creating value for the privileged painter and his paintings championed at a national and expert level. In contrast, Kabbani's view of this genre is interrupted and disturbed by her personal and political situated-ness in relation to the East-West relationship. She makes the point that the production of such a genre cannot be separated from the paintings themselves as distinct entities (*i.e.* the relationships between the artist, their work and the subjects they paint and their political environment and position). Kabbani approaches the subject quite differently in her essay *Regarding Orientalist Painting Today* (2008), as she includes her personal political position when confronted with Orientalist paintings. She writes,

> I wrote about Orientalist painting more than two decades ago, seeking as an "Oriental" to analyse its meanings, to try to understand *how it depicts my world*. On being invited by the Tate Britain to reconsider this genre of painting for the purpose of this exhibition, I was struck at how little my strong feelings had been diluted over time. If anything, the interventions by Britain and America in the Middle East that we are presently witnessing have made it increasingly difficult for me to look at these pictures with anything like an indulgent eye. The past and the present have bled into each other.
>
> (Kabbani 2008: 40)

Weeks's uninterrupted appraisal of Lewis's work, which allows her to view and write about this genre with apparent ease, in contrast to Kabbani's discomfort in viewing this genre, reveals positions of privilege that set the tone for the following analysis of their text and positionality as historians.

1.6 A review of Weeks's text: a study of Imperial painting and writing

In her essay *Cultures Crossed: John Frederick Lewis and the Art of Orientalist Painting* (2008), Weeks begins with her frustration about Said's articulation of

Orientalism and the negative association that developed between the word Orientalism, as articulated by Said, and Orientalism as portrayed in Orientalist paintings. For Weeks, Orientalism was not simply an Imperialist exercise; there was a sense of productivity occurring in this period, a rich and real cross-cultural exchange that took place. Drawing on Lewis's painting *The Reception* (Fig. 3), originally titled *A Lady Receiving Visitors: The Apartment is the Mandarah, the Lower Floor of the House, Cairo* (1873), Weeks discusses the complexity of Lewis's life and paintings in relation to the subject of the Oriental and Orientalism. She describes him not simply as an Imperialist painter, but as an articulator of the positive exchange that produced such paintings, his work deserving a more in-depth and renewed enquiry concerning the artist and the period in which he was painting. In justifying this claim, Weeks highlights Lewis's creative and playful exchange of the *qu'a* and the *mandarah*. Although the former is usually placed on the first floor of a building where women would gather, and the latter is a ground-floor apartment within a house where male visitors would be received, Lewis positioned a female harem on the ground floor instead. According to Weeks, this intervention is based on his authentic knowledge gained from his experience of living in Egypt, which appears to contribute to a genuine cross-cultural exchange and a challenge to a male-dominated Victorian art establishment. Compared with his male painting competitors, Lewis confronts the Western view of a woman's position, in contrast to painters such as Edward William Lane, who took a dry Victorian approach to categorising and defining what he depicted as the Orient.

Weeks's reading and contextualisation of Lewis's painting presents a contemporary retrospective, one that reintroduces and renders the artist and the artwork as complex, which has the potential to suggest new knowledge regarding the artist, his relationship and intentions towards the Oriental women he painted. Weeks's essay reveals much about this genre and perhaps inadvertently indicates the privileged Imperial relations that mobilised this genre to be what it was and still is today. This is not only in relation to the artist and the empire clearly visible in Lewis's privileged lifestyle of a 'lazy hazy' pasha in Egypt;[19] Orientalist painting would have less significance without the masquerade and dissemination authorised by its privileged network of writers and legitimised and respected by the nation through the academy

[19] Lewis's privilege afforded him to hire many female staff, including 'a talented cook', which Thackery turns into a public joke when he writes about Lewis in making him the darling of Victorian art world.

(Weeks 2008).[20] The network of a privileged social elite offered a clear indication of a collaborative relational process that combined artists, critics, writers and audience reception together, all of whom participated in creating Orientalism.

Perhaps the most revealing of this relational process in Lewis's works is the subject of the harem and the impressive power of visual signifiers, which enabled him to replicate Oriental scenes to remarkable effect (Tromans 2008).[21] The Oriental woman was no longer needed to express an Orientalist narrative, and signifiers such as carpets, *mashrabiyya* or textiles were enough to entice his audience and awaken the Imperial feeling of possessing an Oriental scene and body.[22] This, in turn, reveals his audience's primed perception in participating in this already Othered Oriental woman that even the slightest sign-posting of a word, a dress and objects would allow a visual narrative to be constructed or performed and then consolidated into an impression of history (Alloula 1987). According to Weeks, Lewis's detailed depictions were particularly effective in telling a story. As she writes about *The Reception:*

> The room in *The Reception* is depicted as having three recessed bays, high ceilings and an open expanse of floor that occupies the entire bottom half of the panel. Sunlight floods this interior space, streaming in through *mashrabiyya* window screens and dissolving much of its contents into dazzling geometric patterns. In the centre of the room is a sunken reflecting pool, its marble borders inlaid with coloured stones. It contained a small but elaborately carved conical fountain. A wooden ceiling, brightly painted, and plain wooden structural beams complete the setting architecturally. The lady of the house is placed just right of the centre, in the middle recess of the room. She is draped languorously across a brilliant blue couch or divan, an attendant before her. This female servant gazes distractedly beyond.
>
> (Weeks 2008: 25, original italics)

While Weeks attests to Lewis's fascinating approach to recalling every detail in his picture, it is Weeks's expressive and detailed descriptive approach that enables her to engage her reader and tell a story. She contextualises Lewis's painting within Orientalism and Orientalist artworks, which not only

[20] Lewis's popularity in relation to his Orientalist paintings and a body of texts by the established critics ensured and endorsed his authentic authority over the subject. As Lewis mentions, 'The artist's remarkable intimacy with this region had been established years earlier with the publication of *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill Grand Cairo* (1846) by William Makepeace Thackery (Weeks 2008: 25-26).

[21] After settling back home in his Surrey home, Lewis continued to paint the Hareem, often used and implied in the title and indicated as Hhareem to further impress his intimate knowledge of language.

[22] Most of the time, the female model in Lewis's paintings was his wife.

introduces the reader to the visual elements, but also to the description of each one. This approach provides a strong sense of the painting, engages the reader in significant detail and asserts the writer's insight and knowledge of the visual work. The observational and descriptive method of knowing used by Weeks complements Lewis's technique of visually describing through his brushwork the objects that belong and relate to a particular culture as realistically as possible. It is a well-practised method in both writing and paintings about the Orient and Orientals, signified by a high level of detailed description. It is as if every brush stroke is there to convince the viewer, asserting an intimate knowledge of the painted subjects and objects.

Orientalism and Orientalist paintings transmit a sense of knowing by inviting the viewer into an intimate architectural space through the art of placing objects, expressions, individuals and the geometry of the surface in the painting, further adding texture, colour and ornaments. The mise-en-scène surrounds the figures and elements associated with the subject, using elaborate colours, patterns and objects indigenous to the Orient and deployed as signifiers within the work. The paintings also convey a sense of knowing through detailed descriptive writing, which asserts knowledge and authority about what is used, worn and how it functions in this Other world. This is part of what might be termed the pre-existing detailed 'visual literature' of the genre, which imparts both familiarity and power to the subject matter, further consolidated by the large body of literature already existent on the subject matter.[23] Weeks's detailed and descriptive method of writing is, therefore, appropriate for the Orientalist paintings she analyses and discusses. This approach also relates to what Weeks refers to as a 'visual text' regarding Lewis's paintings, in that she brings this visual text into the contemporary moment, which is celebrated as an exhibition and archived and disseminated once more through the catalogue.

[23] For example, Weeks writes that 'the artist's [Lewis] remarkable intimacy with this region had been established years earlier with the publication of *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (1846) by his friend William Makepeace Thackeray. Makepeace Thackeray was a well-known author who writes in his accounts of his travels and of being reunited with Lewis when he visited him in Cairo, and that Lewis had adopted a native and privileged Turkish Bey's lifestyle, implying that he had achieved an authentic life experience of what was like to be, and live, like a native' (Weeks 2008: 26).

Figure 4: John Frederick Lewis, *An Intercepted Correspondence, Cairo*, (1869), oil on panel, 74.3 x 87.3 cm, private collection

1.7 A review of Kabbani's text: regarding Orientalist painting today

As mentioned above, Rana Kabbani is a critic whose essay for the exhibition catalogue exposes a different approach to Orientalism. Returning to the site of the exhibition, Kabbani describes how there was significant interest in the stereotypical depiction of the Oriental woman, coupled with a sense of voyeurism still present within our contemporary society. As Kabbani describes,

> Centuries of stereotyping had so insisted on the lascivious sensuality of the East that, by the nineteenth century, 'Oriental' women had become the coveted prototype of what was sexually permissible in an inhibited and repressive age. A common technique of Orientalist painting was to reveal a woman's half-clothed or naked body, which, in contrast to a well-dressed interior, made that body, appear more alluring and arousing. One cannot escape the feeling that voyeurism is an important component of these paintings. There seems to me [that] long centuries of fortifications can all be kicked open by the painter – as by a colonial jackboot – to let the Western voyeur in.
>
> (Kabbani 2008: 42)

What makes Kabbani's review interesting is her contemporary view of this genre. She argues that Oriental paintings continue to have the power to capture the public's imagination, which is evident in the popularity of the genre, partly based on the nude Oriental woman often depicted in these paintings. Kabbani refers to the crowds drawn to Orientalist paintings at the Louvre in 2006, when it presented paintings of the erotic

fantasies of 'Turkish' bathing beauties by the ageing Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, an artist who created these paintings between 1852 and 1859, modified them in 1862, but had never set foot in Turkey.

Kabbani makes general observations about the Orientalist period but simultaneously reveals her own subjective and political perspectives in her writings, which stand in contrast to Weeks's specific and detailed approach. As a female Middle Eastern writer and historian, Kabbani's situatedness comes across profoundly and clearly, as if she were herself depicted in the paintings she describes. She reflects on the following question: But what does it feel like to be looked at in this manner? 'This question remains problematic when posed by a non-Westerner in mainstream Western culture, which now allows less space for dissent than ever before in matters of cultural representation' (Kabbani 2008: 42).

Kabbani's questions and comments from the position of an Oriental female resonate with me on several levels, but on two in particular. First, at times, I too feel subjected and reduced to a stereotype and Othered, to use Said's formulation of Orientalism, revealing a voyeurism inherent in the privileged look of a Western (Imperial) gaze. Second, there is the potential to deny me the visual and aesthetic means of expression in my diasporic position within a Western context; an aesthetic means and authority over my own image that connects me to the very subject I wish to speak about and comment on as part of my practice, context and subjective space. For example, the style of writing, the elaborate descriptive qualities, the voyeuristic painting of patterns, colours and architecture becomes a visual language through which the Orient is described in detail through paintings.

The images of the Oriental female and the gendered female body have already been appropriated and laid bare in the literal and conceptual articulation and as a means to entice, possess and humiliate, especially as described by Fanon and Alloula in Part 1 of this chapter. This appropriation has also continued to stifle an ability to have a voice as a means of expression and self-representation in our contemporary moment and in my ability to relate to a Western audience. As Kabbani explains,

> Orientalism has always rested on the peculiar premise that the West knows more about the Orient than the Orient knows about itself. This premise, most starkly obvious in political discourse – and disastrously so in today's White House – also underlies the 'softer' area of painting too. This made for an Orientalist canvas that posited itself not just as a mere picture, but as an important repository of knowledge. The super-realism of most of these

> paintings made them resemble archival or documentary photographs, conveying a deliberate impression that they had 'caught' the Orient exactly as it was. But this realism was ultimately deceitful. It masked but articulated particular sexual, religious, psychological or racial prejudices, rather than the internal logic and energy of an actual place.
>
> (Kabbani 2008: 43)

Kabbani reveals her discomfort at witnessing an Imperial past reflected in the paintings (in the way that the paintings claim an authority due to their ethnographic quality). At the same time, she reminds us of the military-economic mastery and violent power dynamic depicted in such paintings.[24]

Kabbani's approach to being personally implicated within Orientalist painting, and Weeks's position in seemingly producing tightly evidenced written materials through access to a well-documented history (a history that uses a privileged and Imperial male language) reveal the absence of the voice of a people, including female Oriental voices. Kabbani finds these 'voices' difficult to access because there are hardly any of these 'voices' valued, documented or acknowledged, especially not within a Western framework of Imperial history. She points to the attacks made on Said's (1978) seminal work across different disciplines, including art history, and highlights the reluctance by an increasingly conservative sector within Western scholarship to tolerate his conclusion. She refers to this criticism of 'Said's voice' when she says, '[b]ut not everyone can be compelled to celebrate Western writing or artworks on the Orient in the inflexible modes imposed by Western critical convention' (Kabbani 2008: 42).

1.8 Critical responses

When contrasting the approaches of the two writers, a stark difference in their responses is evident. Weeks draws upon detailed archival and other recorded and registered accounts from this period, going back to an Imperial moment and rereading a historical genre, much in the same way Orientalist writers do about Lewis's paintings.[25] In comparison, Kabbani's voice and position as the Oriental female have been excluded from this historical discourse of Oriental knowledge and dialogue, precisely because it was gathered and recorded within the narrow spectrum of an

[24] Examples are the invasion of Iraq (2003), the invasion and deployment of troops in Afghanistan (2001) and the repeated sanctions in Iran since 1981.

[25] For example, William Makepeace Thackeray's account of his visit to Cairo and his writing on Lewis's domestic lifestyle. Weeks' mention of 'a female talented Egyptian cook' in Lewis's household tells us as much about his privilege as a British man as does Thackeray presumed knowledge of the woman (Weeks 2008: 26).

Imperialist historical narrative. It is clear that Weeks could access original archives and documents and present a knowledge-based account of the subject matter because the male Eurocentric Orientalist voice was recorded and written as history, whereas Kabbani can only look back to see a void. Hence, she can only offer a more personal, subjective viewpoint. Kabbani's own emotional and cultural connection to Orientalism is undermined simply because she cannot recognise her own world in such depictions (Kabbani 2008). Nevertheless, she seeks to advance the genre by analysing what it retrospectively means in our current political moment, calling out the stereotypical nature of the elements used and their savvy intentions exercised within this genre. In this way, it can be argued that the difference between the privileged voice and the non-privileged voice is passed down and perpetuated, even in the context of a Tate exhibition and catalogue produced in the early twenty-first century.

Before expanding on my own critical reaction to this genre, I offer an analytical review of Alloula's response to colonial photography, expanding upon ongoing Orientalist visual strategies in relation to politics.

1.9 Colonialism and photography

> It matters little if Orientalistic painting begins to run out of wind or falls into mediocrity. Photography sets in to take up the slacks and reactivates the phantasm at its lowest level.
>
> (Alloula 1987: 4)

As suggested by Alloula in the above quote, this type of photography affirmed a cultural violation that afforded the colonialist the space to take a greater and much more expansive approach to depicting the Oriental female to a predominantly Western audience invested in the political and cultural 'Otherness' of women from such spaces and effectively conflated their Oriental past with their Muslim identity.

Figure 5: *Moorish Woman*, postcard. *The Colonial Harem* (Alloula 1987)

The harem, to the Orientalist, evoked an image of a place where women and wives were kept, mingling with no other purpose but to be the objects of sexual pleasure, where the Orientalist painter's imagination could offer and exhibit the vision of this Other, a symbol of what could be owned and conquered (Fig. 5). In contrast, the harem had a different meaning for the Algerian woman and marked a physical area or sanctum of privacy, one that defined and allowed her body a sanctuary to protect her from the male gaze as she goes about her daily business.[26]

The privacy of the female, whether manifested in the space of the harem or the covering of the veil, visibly defies the photographer's gaze to see behind her veil and, in the words of Alloula, 'brings to the photographer confirmation of a triple rejection: the rejection of his desire, of the practice of his "art" and of his place in a milieu that is not his own ... a symbolic white speck on the eye of the photographer and his viewfinder' (Alloula 1987: 7). Humiliated and powerless by this denial, the photographer (the coloniser) asserted his power through violence. His visual impotence propelled him to respond to the harem of the veil, to this boundary drawn by the cloth, with a vengeful assault. He revealed his aggression in his insistence to penetrate this harem through the lens. The photographer established his studio and, like the painter before him, used special props such as 'robes and veils of silk, satin, fustian, damask, velvet and brocade; excessive jewels, cushions, carpets' to frame the Oriental woman (Kabbani 2008: 41). For Alloula, therefore, the coloniser and the

[26] Harem means protected, private or forbidden quarters.

camera became a force of violence and aggression. With the help of the camera, the presence of the coloniser was established and displayed, and the technology allowed him to fabricate a *realistic* picture of the Oriental woman. As Fanon explains,

> Behind the visible, manifest patriarchy, the more significant existence of a basic matriarchy was affirmed. This enabled the colonial administration to define a precise political doctrine: if we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in houses where the men keep them out of sight.
>
> (Fanon 1965: 74)

Alloula goes further and distinguishes between 'the colonial postcard and the exotic postcard … [with] the first [being] the extension of the second through violence. Colonialism is exoticism plus violence' (Alloula 1987: 129). The transformation through technology shifted the Imperial gaze from an expression through Orientalist painting to the exotic photographic image and the postcard. To destroy the Algerian spirit and incapacitate their resistance, the postcards served to conquer the image of the women behind the veil. The photographs of semi-nude women were a testament of the colonisers' victory and power: an expression of possession. The half-naked women depicted by the Orientalist painter are now even more *real* (Fig. 5). The harem and its women are now portrayed in flesh; the Oriental woman is now visible through the lens.[27] A photograph of this type needs no caption or text; the Imperial history is embedded in it. The woman behind the veil is violated through her nudity. She is evidently undressed, captured and frozen in time forever to be looked at. Turned into a postcard, this fantasy-like photographic depiction can now be widely shared and consumed, just as Alloula suggests, 'topped off with a smiling or dreamy face [and] this Moorish bosom, which expresses an obvious invitation' (Alloula 1987: 105). The postcard may depict smiling faces, but these are pushed towards 'a generality that is enhanced by their anonymity' (Alloula 1987: 103). Without an individual identity, the Oriental women become exemplifications of the place where they were displayed and circulated into the hands of many.

While Orientalist paintings remained mainly exclusive to the elite, the availability of the postcard due to its size and price made it easier to be disseminated

[27] The photographer will come up with more complacent counterpart to these inaccessible Algerian women. These counterparts will be paid models that he will recruit almost exclusively on the margins of a society in which loss of social position, in the wake of the conquest and the subsequent overturning of traditional structures, affects men as well as women (invariably propelling the latter towards prostitution).

to a larger public. To possess the postcard was to possess her image, an image now left at the mercy of a mass of consumers who added words as they pleased on the reverse.[28]

This transformation from an Imperial exotic and exclusive image as depicted in Orientalist paintings to mass-market postcards began to shift the dynamic of the image from the dreamy exclusive Oriental harem to acquire a different value that was politically motivated and violent. A souvenir of the coloniser procuring the Algerian body through the image of the woman, the postcards celebrated and evidenced the conquering of the most culturally valued and hidden part of the colonised (Fanon 1965). The Algerian woman was visible in postcards and available to all citizens back home, serving as a popularisation of apparently accurate and typical images from a colony. Yet, if such photographic imagery represented this other world and these Other women in such a general and simplistic way, then how was it possible to speak in the absence of a voice and to challenge the violent representations of the subjects?

[28] Alloula describes the postcard's journey as follows: 'All along the trajectory, from sender to addressee, it will be offered to view, without any envelope to ensure the intimacy of a private correspondence. [T]he use of this type of postcard cannot be entirely foreseen: it goes from jocular smuttiness between correspondents ("The lucky bastard! He sure doesn't get bored over there!") to lover's stratagem (the soldier who wants his girlfriend to believe that temptations are numerous) and includes the constitution of comparative 'knowledge" … "I send you these few lines in order to bring you up on what has been happening to me"' (s1987: 105-106).

Figure 6: Maria Kheirkhah *Untitled* (1990), brush drawing in a traditional style used in miniature painting, 24 x 34 cm

As an Iranian who has travelled across Iran, I recognise a world of courtyards and fountains, patterns and the intense light, the heat of the sun and know the comfort of the shade. As an artist who trained in miniature painting and Tazhib (Fig. 6), and who understands the satisfaction of creating compositions that can tell fascinating stories of my motherland, I hear the silence but do not recognise the women (the odalisque) who replace this silence. Despite the familiar elements such as *mashrabiyya* depicted by the Orientalist painters, I still do not hear their stories.[29] What I see are paintings on the walls of galleries and museums that render the colours of the cloth that 'she' wore without even fully covering her body. Immortalised through the image of a painting are voluptuous women who are supposed to represent the Oriental women, but who were these women?

[29] Mashrabiyya are the geometric designs or askale hendesah often expressed through the differing elements of the architecture and are derived from the secret art with each number and design having a precise meaning as expressions of the divine. *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest* by Laleh Bakhtiar (1976 and reprinted 1979) is a valuable resource that gives insights into the expression of hidden archetypes in concrete symbols and the relationship between nature, poetry, mathematics, architecture, music, colour and geometry.

As a woman artist who understands the processes involved in composition, colour preparation, designing the arabesque and the complexity of geometry, I cannot be a silent, idle witness in front of paintings depicting half-naked silent women fixed to the patterns and objects that claim her as Oriental. I find it difficult to admire the appropriated aesthetics that Lewis, Delacroix, Dicksee, Matisse and many others have so skilfully claimed as their own without acknowledgement of the artistry they encountered and observed. Exhibitions such as *Lure of the East* (2008) and *John Frederick Lewis: Facing Fame* (Watts Gallery 2019) carefully distanced themselves from the odalisque, but the fact remains that the odalisque and the harem have already claimed the Oriental woman. The colours, patterns and objects and her half-naked body define her image. The above begs the question: How can we, women artists of the Muslim diaspora, who are subjected to representations of the imagined Oriental female, address these blanks or bear witness to the experience of the violated object of such imagery?

Figure 7: Walter Wangers, *Arabian Nights* (1942), screenshot

1.10 Orientalist depiction and the moving image

The tradition of fixing the image of the Orient and the Oriental in Orientalist paintings, exemplified by key painters of the nineteenth century, such as Eugène Delacroix, Frederic Leighton and Frank Dicksee, was continued by influential and popular modernist artists, including Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso during the

twentieth century.[30]

With the invention of the moving image, the influence of Orientalist imagery persisted on the cinematic screen, a popular medium that notably engaged with the Oriental Other in Hollywood movies between the 1920s and 1940s. These movies included Arthur Lubin's *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1944), Walter Wangers' *Arabian Nights* (1942; Fig. 7), Raoul Walsh's *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924) and Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934). Contemporary cinema continues to develop and rework Orientalist themes, as exemplified in Stephen Sommers' *The Mummy* (1999) and Zack Snyder's *300* (2007). Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar undertook a significant discussion on the subject of Orientalism in cinema and film. In their book *Visions of The East: Orientalism in Film* (1997), the writers analyse cinema and films on Orientalism, such as William Wyler's 1940 film *The Letter*, David Lean's 1962 production of *Laurence of Arabia,* and the 1992 Disney animation *Aladdin*.

Bernstein and Studlar critique the un-evolving Orientalist perception of the East in American cinema and cite the opening scene in Disney's *Aladdin*. A brown-turbaned man sings 'Oh I come from a far-away place, where the caravan camels roam, where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face, it's barbaric, but hey, it's home'. When Disney was challenged by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee of the United States, Disney replaced the lyrics with 'where it's flat and immense and the heat is intense, it's barbaric, but hey, it's home', which kept the barbarism as an adjective alluding to the East (Bernstein and Studlar 1997: 17). *Aladdin* uses well-established stereotypes, such as the harem, excess, barbarity and dancing girls, composed in a sophisticated, masterful film, not straying very far away from the adventurous fantasy world evoked through the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights*. The importance of this projection lies within the production and narratives that may be relevant to Muslim diaspora female artists today. In his book *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear*, Tim Jon Semmerling (2006) contextualises the political-cinematic doctrine in place after the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) refused to cap the price of the oil in 1979, which impacted Iran's relationship with the US. As Semmerling explains:

> Then, the American hostage crisis in Tehran of November 1979 came as a new low in the American self-image in relation to the Middle

[30] For example, Matisse created *Odalisque à la Culotte Rouge* (1921) and Picasso created *The Women of Algiers* (1955).

> East. Although Iran is not an Arab country, the hostage crisis created another, albeit erroneous, global imaginary for Americans. This map, according to McAlister, trumpeted oil wealth as a symbol and lumped Arabs and Iranians into a total realm of terrorism, wherein Islam became the new signifier of the region, and an inimical "Islamic World" seemed to be the new categorical label of the Middle East that even threatened the Middle East itself. Facing this new Islamic world, America, "the mightiest power on earth" found itself engaged in a test of will with an unruly gang of Iranian students and an ailing zealot of 79 [Khomeini].
>
> (Semmerling 2006: 20)

Semmerling foregrounds his argument based on political motives on the part of America, such as the humiliating April 1980 rescue attempt known as Operation Eagle Claw, which took place during the Iranian hostage crisis. The American President 'was forced to live out his term against a televised backdrop of unending captivity and humiliation that seemed to highlight American Impotence' (Engelhardt, cited in Semmerling 2006: 21). This impotence was felt by Americans and, faced with international humiliation, contributed to a negative and vengeful attitude towards the Middle East (McAlister 2006), adding another layer to 'the evil Arab' image that had become convincing to the American public through their discourse on foreign policies (Semmerling, 2006: 21). Based on this backdrop, Semmerling offers a detailed analysis of scenes and dialogue in films, such as David O. Russell's *Three Kings* (1999) and John Frankenheimer's *Black Sunday* (1977), to highlight how Muslim Arabs are often demonised in American popular films. I argue that based on such political motives and continuing Orientalist attitudes, recent films and television productions, such as the award-winning television series *Homeland* (2014), continue to be produced and remain present and popular in the contemporary imagination. However, while films like those listed above are clearly related to my current research, I do not propose to examine them, since they are not central to the aims of this thesis. Instead, I expand on a new generation of female artists and filmmakers who challenge such dynamics by directing their own films that include the Oriental female from a different perspective. Key examples of recent films are Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2008) and Ann Lili Amirpoor's *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night* (2014), which I discuss in Chapter 4.

1.11 Conclusion of Chapter 1

This chapter was divided into two parts. Part A outlined Fanon's productivity in highlighting the central role of women and how their veils played an important part in the Algerian struggle, stressing the shifting significance of the veil to both the colonised Algerians and the French colonialists. These power relations were further demonstrated through the production of postcards documented by Alloula and Said's conceptualisation of the historical 'Otherness' of the Oriental female subject. All three writers not only reveal the key role of women, but also their portrayal across the Western world. Nevertheless, Part A also exposed the absence of the female voice in the writers' texts. I use this absence as a starting point to add and lend my voice as an artist to acknowledge this lack and fill this void in order to reveal a history that has created a misconception of the female artist of the Muslim diaspora.

Part B explored Orientalist paintings, colonial photography and Hollywood cinema through a critical lens to develop strategies to gain a voice that enables me to rethink and negotiate perceptual or literal images of the silent Oriental woman. The development of Orientalism revealed the concept's role and relationship within our contemporary arts and cultural spaces. A discussion of this genre through the contemporary female critics Weeks and Kabbani enabled this thesis to explore the appropriation and influence of Orientalist aesthetics, the proximity of the critic to the subject of the Oriental woman and its audience perception.

The following chapter discusses how the image of the Muslim woman is treated today and how this representation impacts my socio-political context as a female artist of the Muslim diaspora.

Chapter 2: Absence and media representation

2.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter investigated the representation of Oriental women in Orientalist paintings, colonialist photography and, to a lesser extent, mid-twentieth-century Hollywood cinema, this chapter focuses on the image of the Oriental and Muslim woman in contemporary socio-political and cultural contexts. By focusing on the impact of two major events, namely the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, I investigate the photographic portrayals of the Oriental and Muslim female across the media. More specifically, I analyse and discuss two case studies: first, a Metropolitan Police poster from 2007, and second, Lieutenant Colonel Malalai Kakar (2014). Developed from the Orientalist imagery already examined above, it is clear that the images are charged with Islamophobic overtones.

Depictions of an 'Othered' Muslim woman have taken a significantly more negative slant in the media since the terrorist attacks in New York, London and Paris, becoming the subject of numerous biased news reports and speeches by political leaders.[31] An analysis of photographic images through news media offers the opportunity to identify the contemporary Muslim subject and its problematic formation. This approach opens an investigation of current controversies and representations encountered by female artists from the Muslim worlds, especially in relation to the veil and the world of Islam within a Western context.

Central to this chapter are questions concerning how and why this traditional garment has become a stereotypical symbol. The veil, obsessively identified as particular to women from the Middle East, Asia, and certain parts of Africa, has influenced the visual production and reception of artists' work within a Western context. This thesis critically explores the development and impact of the representations of the Othered Muslim woman in relation to worldwide events as reflected within contemporary visual arts and cultural productions.

[31] On 11 September 2001, a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda targeted the US. On 7 July 2005, a series of coordinated terrorist suicide attacks on public transportation in London killed more than 50 people and injured more than 700. On 13 November 2015 in Paris, coordinated terrorist attacks by gunmen and suicide bombers claimed the lives of 130 people. The attackers hit a concert hall, a major stadium, restaurants and bars, almost simultaneously.

2.2 Said on the media representations of the Iranian Revolution and 9/11

In *Covering Islam,* Said (2002) considers the media's relationship between East and West by looking at political agendas, the depiction of Islam and the stereotyping of the Muslim world. Although first published in 1981, covering the importance of the Iranian Revolution in the region and the representation of the Muslim world in the West, Said added a new chapter to his revised edition from 2002 to consider how this East-West relationship changed after the events of 9/11.

Said's work has three main chapters. Chapter 1, *Islam in the News*, examines the historical ambitions of the West and its power position relative to the Muslim worlds through an Orientalist legacy in media representations. In this context, Oriental-*ism* can be defined as a distorted and exotic view of a diverse and complex world of Islamic countries. Such imagery is further legitimised by art institutions in European countries. In Chapter 2, *Iran Story*, Said examines narratives constructed around the media coverage of the Iran hostage crisis. He argues that this coverage became significant in reinforcing pre-existing Orientalist ideas, forming the opinions of a new Western generation, especially of Americans, whose historical perceptions were not necessarily those of the original European colonial powers. The final chapter, *Knowledge and Power*, explores the relationship between academic research and the writing that helps shape institutional policies and the discourse around Islam. Said sees the reporting and media coverage as a continuation and development of Orientalist devices to maintain power positions over the Eastern, Middle Eastern and Arab States, manipulating and shaping public opinion.

The media coverage that Said highlights in his book is further investigated and expanded upon by Hamid Dabashi. In *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Times of Terror* (2009), Dabashi begins by analysing an editorial cartoon printed on the 4th September 2007 issue of the *Columbus Post-Dispatch*. The cartoon depicts Iranians as cockroaches 'spewing out of a sewer' (as Dabashi claims) and comments that 'Muslim and Iranian communities around the United States are exceedingly angry' with this type of negative portrayal (Dabashi: xv, xvi). Although Said and Dabashi discuss the negative media coverage of Muslim worlds, the Iranian hostage crisis and revolution, and the portrayals of Iranian communities in the United States, they do not discuss how continued Orientalist and Islamophobic images disseminated through the media implicate women's bodies, their livelihood and subjectivity, Addressing this issue and adding to both Said and Dabashi in this chapter, I pay

particular attention to the prevalent, populist images of the Muslim woman of the East and their implications within the creative field.

2.3 Media representations of women and the case of the Iranian Revolution

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 engendered a renewed gaze upon the Muslim woman. With this came a politicisation of the veil, significant in different ways to the West and to an Islamic East. The popular movement that overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty ended 2500 years of monarchy in Persia/Iran and gave rise to an Islamic republic under Ayatollah Khomeini. The subsequent Iran hostage crisis should be understood within this context of these events.[32] The depiction of Iran was one of ideological inflexibility (seen in contrast to surrounding Islamic neighbours and Gulf States), a rendering that resembled a comment by US President Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in 1979. In response to rising oil prices and the political position of the OPEC, Brzezinski 'announced a new cognitive map for America: "The Crescent of Crises"' (Semmerling 2006: 18–19).[33]

To understand the continuity and complexities involved in visual representations of the veil, it is important to know its significance both to Iranian women and as inseparable from Iran's relationship with the West (especially the UK and the US). This is especially important for women, as their representation was marked by two revolutions: first, the 1905–11 constitutional revolution and, second, the 1978–79 Islamic revolution.

The first revolution involved Reza Shah's banning of the traditional chador (head and full-body covering but without including the face), which was often violently enforced upon women as part of the implementation of a Westernisation programme intended to modernise Iran. This programme included the dictation of a Westernised dress code for men, a process already implemented in Ottoman territories during the 1820s (Naficy 2011a). Egypt and the neighbouring countries underwent a programme with similar modernising intentions, which were coupled with a push towards technological advances and a new dress reform that took place in the 1820s,

[32] The Iran hostage crisis was a diplomatic stand-off between Iran and the USA. Fifty-two American diplomats and citizens were held hostage for 444 days between 4th November 1979 and 20th January 1981, after a group of Iranian students supporting the Iranian revolution took over the US Embassy in Tehran.

[33] 'This Crescent of Crisis' was envisaged as those states that stretched along the shores of the Indian Ocean - from Turkey all the way to India - and, more frighteningly, were either close to or shared borders with the USSR. It was an area in which Moscow could make headway against Washington, and in which the Soviets had designs for the oil they would need in the future. Iran, the citadel of US military and economic strength in the Middle East, was centred at the borderline of the spheres of the two world powers' (Semmerling 2006: 18-19).

which had replaced the turban with the fez (Tromans 2008a). In Iran, Reza Shah's programme of women's reform was the so-called *Awakening of Women,* which took place from 1936 to 1941, following the dissolution of the national Women's Associations, the last one being dissolved in 1933, when the chador was officially banned.

Figure 8: David Burnett, Iran (1979)

Stories of the chador being forcibly removed from women in public are common, and I recall my mother recounting numerous tales of this public humiliation. This forced removal built-up resentment among some women towards an enforced Westernisation and the removal of a culturally resonant item of clothing. Its reinstatement at the time of the Islamic revolution was, in practice, both a more nuanced and complex story than is often portrayed in the Western media. The later revolutionary period (1978–79) saw the reinstatement of the chador and the establishment of a republican theocratic state. My personal experience before the 1978–79 revolution was that I and many girls like me went to public spaces with no head covering, unless we entered religious spaces such as mosques or attended religious ceremonies. However, to a lesser extent, it was a common sight to see some women wear the chador or hijab. This was due to the former Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi lifting such restrictions as part of his 'white revolution' reforms after his succession in 1941, following the abdication of his father Reza Shah that year. Growing up, I can recollect that whenever we had large gatherings at home, the issue of who wore the chador or who dressed modestly simply was not central to our lives

or relationships. We laughed, argued, criticised, agreed, disagreed and discussed life and social issues, books, films and relationships. We simply accepted that some women in our extended family were more traditional or religious than others. This situation was to change soon after the 1979 revolution. At first, we were confronted by having our unveiled photos in any official document stamped with a cross. Then, the hijab was gradually implemented. First, it was made mandatory for women in government and public offices in 1980, and then it was fully exercised for all women in 1983. This led to significant marches and demonstrations (Milani 1992).

Soon after the revolution, it dawned upon many women that this revolution could have significant consequences. Shirin Ebadi explores this notion in her book *Iran Awakening,* in which she writes, '[t]he headscarf "invitation" was the first warning that this revolution might "eat its sisters"' (Ebadi 2006: 39). It was a revolution in which many women participated and for which they had high hopes and high demands, such as fewer political prisoners and freedom of political speech. Describing the feelings many women had, Ebadi writes:

> That day, a feeling of pride washed over me that in hindsight makes me laugh, I felt that I too had won, alongside this victorious revolution. It took scarcely a month for me to realize that, in fact, I had willingly and enthusiastically participated in my own demise. I was a woman, and this revolution's victory demanded my defeat.
>
> (Ebadi 2006: 38)

The revolution had deeper roots, as indicated by the initial changes, which at first looked almost superficial, such as changing street names from Western names to Shi'ite Imams and the changes to dress codes, which came as a clear indication of a resistance to the Shah's obsession towards modernity and Westernisation (Ebadi 2006).[34] Although women often protested against compulsory veiling, they gradually adopted it for complex reasons – not only fearing prosecution, but also because, for some women, this issue raised a historical resentment left over from Reza Shah's banning of the veil, carried out by his son and successor Reza Pahlavi. Thus, not only was this a revolt against the Shah, but also a clear signal to the West – a visible expression of Iran's unhappiness with what was seen as a history of Western cultural and economic interference that lasted for decades.

[34] For example street names like Eisenhower, Roosevelt and Queen Elizabeth were renamed after martyred defender of the new republic and Shiat imams. The use of perfume or anything to do with a Western dress code began to change. Men abandoned their suits and ties and adopted informal plain clothes (Ebadi 2006).

2.4 A troubled relationship

Ebadi writes of Iran's history in her living memory and of its troubled relationship to two major Western countries, the UK and particularly the US, and the role they played in toppling a much-loved political figure, the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1951.[35]

Mossadegh's popular policies not only upset Western interests in the oil-rich Middle East, but increasingly threatened these interests with his popularity within Iran, following the strong, sometimes despotic leadership of Reza Shah Pahlavi.[36] The view of Mossadegh as a figure opposing UK interests finally led to a coup d'état that ousted him as prime minister in 1953. The event strengthened the powerbase of the then constitutional monarch Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and was orchestrated and backed by the US and the UK. This knowledge of outside interference was never quite forgotten or forgiven by the many Iranians who had watched their beloved elected Prime Minster Mossadegh being ousted and imprisoned, seemingly at the behest of an American President and his CIA agents.

Despite these political tensions, the revolution, the Islamic republic and the reinstatement of the veil had a surprisingly positive effect that many Iranians could not foresee, in that women began to mobilise and use their initiative vehemently and creatively, a comparison that could be drawn with Algerian women regarding subverting the veil and their unexpected efficiency and creativity in resisting the coloniser, as discussed by Fanon (1965). In Iran, the veil gave some women new motivation and confidence, as well as the freedom to participate in universities and workplaces. It not only covered the body of a woman, but also her wealth and social status.[37] It became a uniform dress code for all women. The reinstatement of the veil meant that women from more traditional and regional places could now demand more freedom without having to challenge the patriarchal structure already in place, or without challenging their own traditional values believed to protect them from being

[35] Mossadegh earned the love of his nation in his bold move to nationalise Iranian oil which was effectively until then controlled by Western oil consortiums that allotted Iran only a slim share of the profit. Mossadegh's popularity was also due to his zeal for diplomacy and his open demands for freedom of the press (Ebadi 2006.

[36] As Ebadi notes: 'Financially supported by Kermit Roosevelt with nearly a million dollars at Shah's disposal who paid crowds in the poor south of Tehran to march in protests and bribed newspaper editors to run spurious headlines of swelling anti-Mossadegh discontent. This led to Mossadegh's military trial and imprisonment and restored Shah's position to power. The Shah famously thanked Roosevelt, by saying 'I owe my thorn to god, my people, my army, and to you' (2006: 5).

[37] Women when veiled or with scarves were often seen as backward, poor, uneducated and regional, and there was a clear difference between women of Tehran and other regions, which was often recognised in their attire.

subjected to the male gaze. Perhaps this viewpoint can be better understood through Fanon's observation of the Algerian woman:

> The body of the young Algerian woman, in traditional society, is revealed to her by its coming to maturity and by the veil. The veil covers the body and disciplines it, tempers it, at the very time when it experiences its phase of greatest effervescence. The veil protects, reassures, isolates….one must have heard the confessions of Algerian women … unveiled women to appreciate the importance of the veil for the body of the woman. Without the veil she has an impression of her body being cut up into bits, put adrift; the limbs seem to lengthen indefinitely. When the Algerian woman has to cross a street, for a long time she commits errors of judgment. The unveiled body seems to escape, to dissolve. She has an impression of being improperly dressed, even of being naked. She experiences a sense of incompleteness with great intensity. She has the anxious feeling that something is unfinished.
>
> (Fanon 1965: 80)

Denying Iranian women what, to them, felt natural, familiar and protective (as it did to Algerian women) contextualises the psychological impact and resentment when they were forced to unveil. Reza Shah's 'unveiling' of women, sometimes by using physical force and violence, and his son's Westernising direction, were particularly criticised by traditional Iranian men and women, who considered the unveiling a rejection of tradition with negative side-effects that saw women objectified. In reintroducing the chador after the Islamic revolution, women, especially those who came from a more traditional background, felt protected and able to enter the public realm. This change was evident in the increased number of women travelling to enrol in different universities around the country. This unexpected new freedom allowed women to pursue and finally achieve a new professional status, which, in turn, allowed them financial independence and freedom. As Ebadi highlights in her book,

> Standing at a crowded intersection of the capital or listening to the sermon at Friday prayers, you would not immediately know that 65 percent of Iran's university students and 43 percent of its salaried workers are women. I wanted to write a book that would help correct Western stereotypes of Islam, especially the image of Muslim women as docile, forlorn creatures.
>
> (Ebadi 2006: 210)

While witnessing these major changes on my return to Iran between 1989 and 1991 to work at two universities in Tehran, I felt a new energy emerge from my female students and colleagues. During my two-year stay in Iran, I spent many evenings joining all-women dinner gatherings, at which we would have numerous

discussions around artistic productions, poetry, music and films. It was during this time that I met Tahmineh Milani, a prominent Iranian film director and screenwriter who was in the process of making *Half Hidden*, a film about women and their presence in Iranian society. It was Milani who, I believe, paved the way for many women and future generations to use their voice, confidence and independence to discuss any issues and to express their intelligence with or without the chador. In this sense, cinema became a powerful platform for women to observe other women engaged in a discursive and intelligent debate about their own social conditions.

My experience of being in Iran alongside many intelligent, proactive women had a lasting effect on my attitude and approach towards women, the veil and the female artistic voice. When I returned to the UK for a second time in 1991, the Persian tales of Sheherazade were no longer a point of reference when interacting socially in my new UK context. Instead, those tales were replaced by many questions about Iran and women's repression as signified through images of the veil. After some time, I learned that if I did not want to become involved in a political conversation when asked where I was from, I would answer Persia. That seemed to soften the conversation and I could escape the barrage of political questions for which I was supposed to have answers.

This experience intensified for Muslim women after the events of 9/11, not only in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq, but also around the world because international news media reported the so-called War on Terror. I knew it was not only broadcast on my television set, but also on my neighbours' and everyone else's TV set in my social and professional circles. That was the ever-present context, intensified by the famous 'Axis of Evil' speech by US President George W. Bush in 2002, that directly implicated Iran. Like the experience of Algerian women discussed in the previous chapter, the Western media revived an obsession with the veil, religion, terrorism and the supposedly backward life of people from the countries linked to the 9/11 attacks. The media lumped everything together, as if histories, time, cultures, countries and people were collapsed into one monolithic entity and Muslim women and their veils became the sign of this 'other world' that must be overcome in order to be freed of oppression.

The media, a significant source of influence and armed with political purpose, were in part responsible for such a portrayal. It can be argued that the media were not winning the hearts and minds of invaded countries such as Iraq or Afghanistan but, in

fact, the hearts and minds of their own immediate domestic audience, seeking to validate external political action (an example of this activity is the notorious 45-minute campaign in the media, which sought to convince the general public that the UK was within range of Iraqi missiles; this was done to generate support for an invasion of Iraq). Such politically motivated language was not giving voice and freedom to women but forcing upon them another form of will by destabilising through violent action, convincing their own people with a familiar colonial argument that these women have no sense of themselves or self-agency. Alison Donnell notes this dynamic concerning Afghan women by paying attention to Adeena Niazi's voice.

Donnell's essay *Visibility, Violence and Voice? Attitudes to Veiling Post-11 September* (2003) approaches this subject from the perspective of Afghan women. Their misrepresentation, which further distorted their voice, image and agency, aided in reviving established Western stereotypes and representations. Donnell illustrates this position by discussing an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* broadcast on 5th October 2001. According to Donnell, Winfrey initially invited the agency Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) and other women's groups to discuss their work in relation to Afghan women and Islam. However, much of their concerns went unheard as the focus quickly shifted into a discussion of the hijab as a highly charged symbol of difference that paralyses productive cross-cultural debate. In defence of the RAWA and the (unrequested) Western attention on the subject of the veil, Donnell draws on Adeena Niazi's view, who sought to argue against the determined concentration on veiling, which did not guarantee freedom, safety and security for Afghan women.[38] An interesting example of such a situation is Lieutenant Colonel Malalai Kakar, the first Afghan policewoman, whose veiling afforded her safety and security within the context of Afghanistan and empowered her to act on behalf of others to deal with the crimes of the Taliban in her capacity as a colonel. I further discuss the image of the Muslim woman within our current media context in the next section and address this through my practice in Chapter 5.

Following the 9/11 attacks, the veil became a problem for Muslim women. At the same time, high-profile Western women such as Cherie Blair and Laura Bush

[38] Adeena Niazi was one of two hundred women delegates to attend the 1600-strong congregation of the Loya Jirga in Kabul in June 2002 to elect a transitional administration and consider a solution to the problem of government after the ousting of the Taliban.

played a key role in claiming their power position in relation to Muslim Afghan women, who were depicted as victims without agency, while these high-profile women perpetuated the Western narrative without recognising the role of Western women as agents of colonialism (Lewis 1996).[39] Donnell addresses the lack of voice of Afghan women and their portrayals in the media, which overemphasise the veil and the West's stereotypical representation and projection of Afghan women, as opposed to a more genuine representation of their voice. As Donnell argues:

> [W]hile the veil marked women … as targets of both direct and subtle forms of abuse, Western media representation emblematised both the alterity and the repression of women in Afghanistan through their veiling… although the physical restrictions and social limitations that being forced to wear the burka imposed on women should not be underestimated, it does appear that the visual privileging of veiling has narrowed the focus on women's rights. Indeed, the veil is so easily translated into a visual vocabulary of oppression that it is difficult to divert attention on to the more pressing issues for women in many Muslim countries, such as their legal status in issues relating to custody, inheritance and testimony. The veiled figure also serves to fix Afghan women as hidden and passive and therefore enacts an ideological barrier, conditioning expectations of victimhood rather than of voice. Even those pieces of journalism and personal narratives which do speak out about other issues usually deploy veiled figures as their 'illustration' and make reference to the veil in their title, albeit unwittingly. They are thereby confirming the centrality of the veil to any fuller discussion.
>
> (Donnell 2003: 124)

Donnell, in her critique, argues that the veil has become an obsessive media representation of the Muslim woman, Islam and the Muslim world more widely. She condemns the way the media and key political leaders repeat simplistic assumptions, stereotypical representations and political justifications for continued Western military interventions. This argument suggests that because of this Western preoccupation, a deliberate concentration on veiling, and in the middle of a geopolitical trauma following the events of 9/11, the veil, both in its textual form (as a book/book title), and in its visual form (images of veiled Afghan women), provides a platform for the creative and literary industries. This situation serves to hamper even further the progress and discourse around women's issues in Afghanistan and to

[39] 'The debate in the West over Muslim women continues to focus on questions of veiling and oppression. On the one hand, there are self-appointed "authentic" voices and "native informants" who deem the veil oppressive and call for its disappearance. On the other hand, there are new versions of Orientalist and colonialist discourses revived, paradoxically, by liberal feminist critiques of domination of Other women. A genealogy of Western feminists congregates around the veil, from Simone de Beauvoir in the 1950's and Kate Millet in the 1970's to Geraldine Brooks and Martha Nussbaum in the 1990s' (Taylor and Zine 2014).

silence their voice in an international context. Donnell's analysis of the veil – represented as images in various forms within the media and reports of the Muslim world – reveals three readings of these women: first, that of oppression; second, that of a historically naturalised Orientalist gaze; and finally, that of fear and despised difference (Islamification) that sees the exotic object of fantasy now replaced by xenophobia and Islamophobia.

2.5 The image of the Muslim woman within a contemporary Western context

Figure 9: Gathering after the Christchurch incident, New Zealand (2019), photograph Hannah Peters/Getty Images, screenshot from the Guardian, accessed 24th March 2019

> "Islam" as it is used today seems to mean one simple thing but in fact is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam. In no really significant way is there a direct correspondence between "Islam" in common Western usage and the enormously varied life that goes on within the world of Islam, with its more than 800,000,000 people, its millions of square miles of territory principally in Africa and Asia, its dozens of societies, states, histories, geographies, cultures. On the other hand, "Islam" is peculiarly traumatic news today in the West… During the past few years, especially since events in Iran caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently, they have made it "known."
> It has given consumers of news that they have understood Islam without at the same time intimating to them that a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances "Islam" has licensed not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility.
>
> (Said 1997: I–Ii)

As I quote this text from Said's book on how Islam and Muslims are portrayed and covered in the media, the 2019 terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, comes, regrettably, as no surprise to me. However, the political and social implications of these acts are addressed differently in this research, especially in terms of how women are portrayed within these ongoing political narratives. If postcard images of Algerian women were used as a political score, as illustrated and discussed by Alloula in the previous chapter, and their veil, as argued by Fanon, as a colonial ploy to undermine a culture, then the current media portrayal of Muslim women through images and text may be viewed from similar standpoints. What this thesis engages with (due to the controversy around the Muslim body and image since the 9/11 attacks, as well as the subsequent rise of 'Islamophobia')[40] is the position of women artists from the Muslim diaspora and the impact of such narratives on their ability to self-represent through the visual arts. Of particular interest are the significant numbers of images published around/about the Muslim woman in the media today, portraying her as a simplistic and somewhat undifferentiated object and subject alike. There are clear, contemporary examples in the media regarding how they typically depict 'Other' women, as shown in Fig. 10.

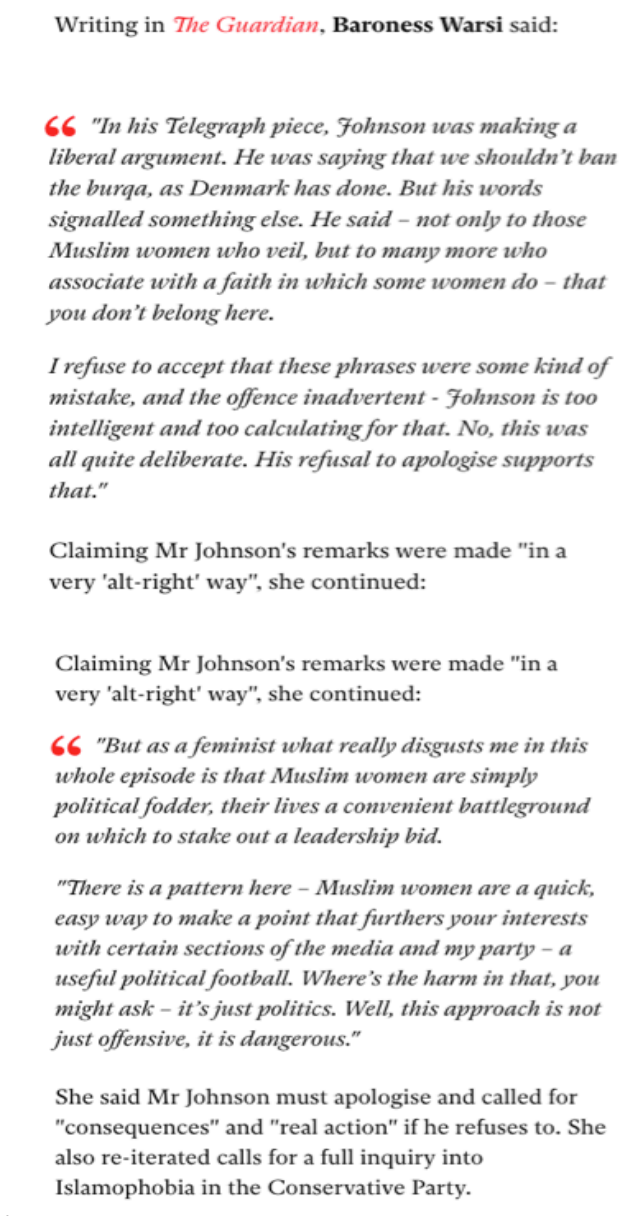
Figure 10: Collage of various newspaper cuttings, screenshot

[40] The banning of the burqa (a full-length garment that may or may not cover the face worn by women in some Islamic traditions to cover their bodies when in public), the right-wing attacks on mosques in Europe and most recently in Christchurch in New Zealand (2019), full body covering in France in 2010 and subsequent terror alerts with images of women wearing the veil.

The overwhelming stereotypical representation of the Muslim woman produced by a deluge of media images impacts on and reduces us, both as artists and as individuals (Fig. 10). Such representation creates questions and difficulties about the way we produce images of ourselves and how we narrate our own subjective spaces. Prevalent myths about the Muslim/Oriental woman feed into this and, if the space of the Muslim female artist depends, to a significant extent, upon what the audience brings to it, then the history that relates to such ideas is also a crucial point to consider in these studies.

Recent examples of such rhetoric are to be seen in Boris Johnson's comments in the *Daily Telegraph* published in August 2018. In the article, Johnson describes Muslim women in burkhas as resembling 'letterboxes' and 'bank robbers' (Johnson 2018: n.p.). This description resulted in widespread controversy and outrage and ensued serious consequences. Iman Atta, Director of *Tell MAMA*, reported a significant spike in Islamophobic incidents in the week after Johnson's remark. There was a near four-fold increase in anti-Muslim incidents compared with the previous week, involving 38 anti-Muslim incidents, 22 of which involved women.[41]

[41] See *Tell MAMA* Annual Report 2018, *Normalising Hatred*, available at https://www.tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Tell%20MAMA%20Annual%20Report%202018%20_%20Normalising%20Hate.pdf accessed on 11th December 2020.



Writing in *The Guardian*, **Baroness Warsi** said:

> *"In his Telegraph piece, Johnson was making a liberal argument. He was saying that we shouldn't ban the burqa, as Denmark has done. But his words signalled something else. He said – not only to those Muslim women who veil, but to many more who associate with a faith in which some women do – that you don't belong here.*
>
> *I refuse to accept that these phrases were some kind of mistake, and the offence inadvertent - Johnson is too intelligent and too calculating for that. No, this was all quite deliberate. His refusal to apologise supports that."*

Claiming Mr Johnson's remarks were made "in a very 'alt-right' way", she continued:

Claiming Mr Johnson's remarks were made "in a very 'alt-right' way", she continued:

> *"But as a feminist what really disgusts me in this whole episode is that Muslim women are simply political fodder, their lives a convenient battleground on which to stake out a leadership bid.*
>
> *"There is a pattern here – Muslim women are a quick, easy way to make a point that furthers your interests with certain sections of the media and my party – a useful political football. Where's the harm in that, you might ask – it's just politics. Well, this approach is not just offensive, it is dangerous."*

She said Mr Johnson must apologise and called for "consequences" and "real action" if he refuses to. She also re-iterated calls for a full inquiry into Islamophobia in the Conservative Party.

Figure 11: *The Guardian*, August 2018, screenshot

Johnson's comment is contested in the above article by Baroness Warsi (Fig. 11). Of importance is that she, too, realises the significance of his comments, which signal and implicate not only Muslim women who *do* veil but also 'many more who associate with a faith in which some women do – that you don't belong here' (Warsi 2018). The language typified by Johnson's now infamous terms 'bank robbers' and 'letterboxes' (Johnson 2018) appears to be built upon pre-existing historical accounts and depictions of an inaccurate or bizarre nature. This is clearly the case, since, prior to the advent of photography and film, there already existed within the Western visual culture a well-formed and established idea/image of the Muslim woman, as already

discussed in Chapter 1: sexually available, mute and exotic, depicted within the work of many Orientalist painters and depicted on colonial postcards.[42] Considering such contexts while living with the effects of these histories, one is aware of such popular mythologies and the portrayal of a mute, often veiled, female construct as the archetypal image of the exotic female of the Muslim (Middle Eastern) world (Fig. 12).

Figure 12: Illustration of head coverings, BBC News Online, 2018, screenshot

2.6 The concept of image in relation to representations of Muslim women

> How does meaning get into image? Where does it end? And if it ends, what is there beyond? Such are the questions I wish to raise by submitting the image to a spectral analysis of the messages it may contain.
> (Roland Barthes in Evans and Hall 1999: 33–40)

The questions raised by Roland Barthes examine the role of the image compared with text (linguistic messages), most easily understood in relation to consumers and advertisements. The advertisement he analyses serves as a way of looking at intentional codes and constructions embedded in images and text, via the linguistic message that anchors the image. I propose to apply this approach to two images that have been significant to me, both on a personal level and in relation to this research.

[42] For example, Bakst Leon, Costume Design for an Odalisque in the Ballet Scheherazade (1910); Gerome Jean-Leon, *For Sale: Slaves at Cairo* (1871); Lewis John Frederick, *The Harem* (1850).

The images in question are a Metropolitan Police poster from 2007 (Fig. 13) and the image of Lieutenant Colonel Malalai Kakar from 2014 (Fig. 18).

In researching the literature and visual imagery relating to the two images, it became clear that an image is rarely entirely independent of a variety of constructs, such as history or culture, nor is it neutral in the mind of its reader or audience. In the case of the Muslim female and Oriental, the imagined is the amalgamation or montaging of different elements that have accrued throughout time to create an idea, a perception – what I refer to, overall, as an image. To rethink the space of this Muslim female Oriental, one must decipher the construction of the histories that lie in the mind of its audience and identify the connecting threads leading to the present moment – one might refer to this as reading through layers in time (a palimpsest).

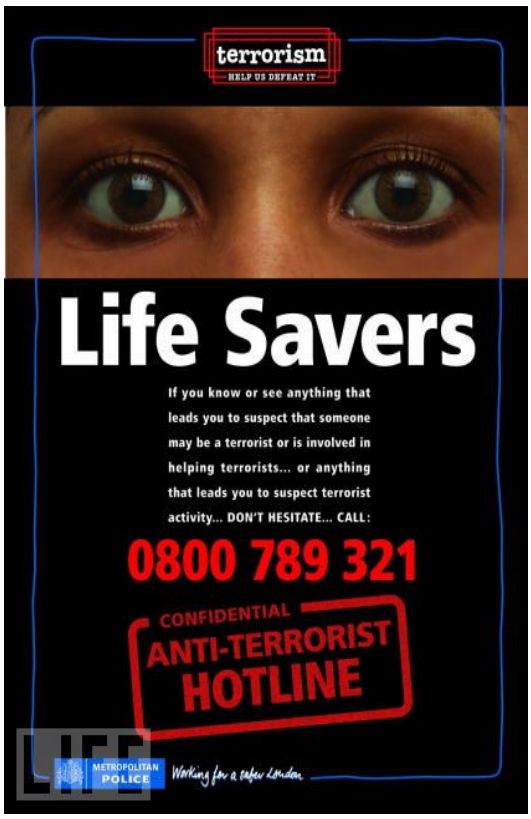


Figure 13: *Life Savers*, Metropolitan Police poster (2007)

2.7 The case of the Metropolitan Police poster

Applying Barthes's approach, and in the context of widely recognisable images of the Muslim woman, I consider the overall structure of the *Life Savers* poster from 2007 (Fig. 13) and then compare it with my own graphic handout, printed for a lecture almost a decade earlier in 1997–98 (Fig. 15).

I first encountered the *Life Savers* Metropolitan Police poster at my local train ticket office in West Dulwich, London (a predominantly white, middle-class area – at least when I lived there). This was during a time when feelings were running high in the UK, as it was after the London terrorist attacks in 2005. Disturbed about the news and my own family's safety, I wondered whether friends, colleagues at work and neighbours would quiz me to understand what was going on. To some degree, there was a sense of guilt imposed upon one (me) as someone from the Muslim world (particularly so in the case of Iranian origin, which brings with it the memory of an Islamic republic, the hostage crisis, Iranian Embassy siege and so on). This guilt was coupled with a sense of resentment on my side for having to be answerable for such acts. I have also personally experienced that, if it was too embarrassing for people to use derogatory language against me about Muslims, perhaps to vent understandable emotions against terrorists who commit such appalling crimes, then there would be an undercurrent of aggression in their tone, often conversationally lumping all the Muslim worlds together (knowing that I am a Muslim, practising or not). I was deeply perturbed by these projections and felt a huge sense of injustice at these very questionable assumptions. Was I supposed to prove myself not a terrorist as an Iranian-born woman artist?

I have already elaborated to some extent on how these presumptions and prejudices might exist due to a colonial history of the Oriental woman, exacerbated following the 9/11 attacks. However, of importance here is the contextual time of the image, the analysis of the Muslim woman in our current political moment and its impact on my practice as an artist and curator.

The initial and lasting impression I had when I saw the poster at eye level attached to the wall on the side of the ticket service counter at West Dulwich train station was the veil-like graphic: a black woman depicted with her eyes visible, while the upper and lower parts of her face are covered with the alarming text of terrorism printed in red, as a warning. The relationship between the text (the graphics) and the image is very striking. The word *terrorism* is placed over the forehead and *boxed in red* in the centre-right between the eyes at top of the page – as we read left to right, top to bottom – almost like the title to the page as we encounter the text. The concealment of the upper part of the face in relation to the concealment of the greater lower part of the poster conveys the veil and creates the connection between the veil and the text *terrorist*. The eyes staring right at the viewer convey ambivalence – is she

warning us or is she taking up the identity of terrorism? Overall, what must be understood is that the cultural context is white, and the time is that of terrorist attacks; thus, the veiled black woman is clearly the 'other', the threat.

It is the quality of the combination or assemblage (contextualised within its specific moment in time/place, within the frame of the artwork, author, artist and history) that gives the poster meaning and informs our understanding. The viewer simultaneously receives the factors of the perceptual message – one relating to the coded veil (cultural and specifically Muslim), race (black woman) and the issue of terrorism (fear). This reception contributes to the problem recognised in this research; a problem that provokes and awakens a certain perception and that includes visuals and text to specific ends.

Figure 14. Text from Metropolitan Police warning

Turning to the text of the poster (Fig. 14), the words are clear in their meaning. They are set in the context of potential danger and provide details about how the

reader (i.e. the general public) should be alert and how they can contact the police. The text in the poster conveys a clear message. It does not need the image to say what it needs to say. Barthes argues that, 'language needs special conditions in order to become myth… that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message' (Barthes 1972: 107). As such, the combination of image and text in the poster clearly presents the myth of the Muslim woman seen and disseminated far and wide within a UK context with a colonial history. Here, the correlation of the signifier of terror, in the form of text and the signified veiled Muslim woman, becomes a sign within a UK context and audience. A contemporary myth is constructed.

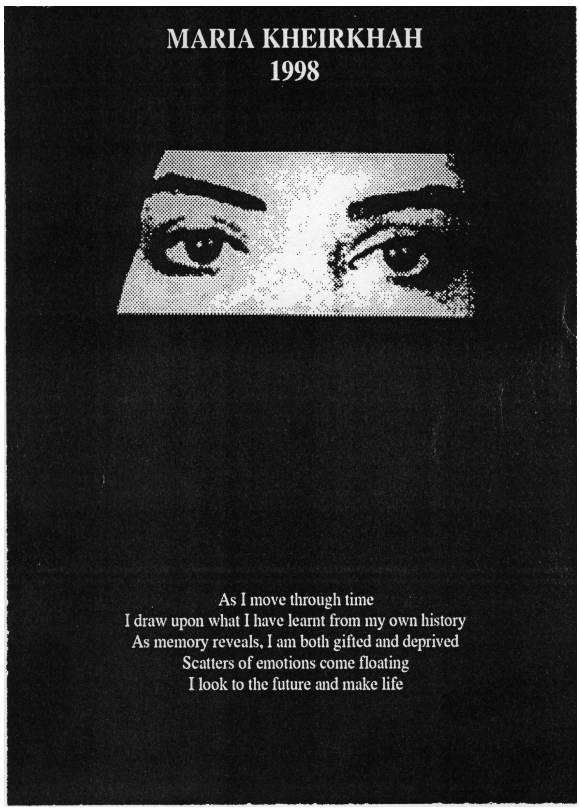


Figure 15: Maria Kheirkhah, handout (1997–98)

Reflecting on my own handout (Fig.15), distributed to audience members almost a decade prior to the *Life Savers* poster, my words impart a completely different meaning to a similar image. The handout was meant to offer an introduction to my practice and a personal account of where I saw myself emotionally at the time. It is a position that speaks of migration, of a sense of loss and longing, a self-representation in which I begin to explore my relationship to the veil but, most important, in the way

I seek to add my own voice as a diasporic woman. If we juxtapose both texts, we see how different they are:

> As I move through time, I draw upon what I have learnt from my own history, As memory reveals, I am both gifted and deprived, Scatters of emotions come floating, I look to the future and make life.
>
> (Maria Kheirkhah, poem, 1997)

> If you know or see anything that leads you to suspect that someone may be a terrorist or is involved in helping terrorists……. Or anything that leads you to suspect terrorist activity…DON'T HESITATE…CALL.
>
> (Metropolitan Police poster, 2007)

Figures 16 and 17: Maria Kheirkhah, *A comparative study*

One realises that, however similar the graphics, the police poster and my handout show a quite distinct difference in the way the text implicates the image and in how the images are disseminated. My handout was a poetic and personalised reflection of myself, and was only distributed to an audience of artists and academics of perhaps 30 or 40 people, whereas the police poster was displayed right next to the train ticket office and, thus, was seen by a far greater number of people. The poster presents a dilemma for me as an artist, not only raising issues concerning the use of the veil as an image in my artworks (the importance of filling the image with my own words to speak my own truth), but also creating an anxiety in not being able to reach

out to tell a different story to counter negative representations and speak back to the same number of people.

2.8 The case of Lieutenant Colonel Malalai Kakar

Images in combination with specific text and of a particular historical moment may easily be described as loaded – images that perhaps give high-profile politicians the confidence (and, some might argue, the populist support) to describe veiled Muslim women as having the appearance of 'letterboxes' and 'bank robbers' (Johnson 2018: n.p.).[43] The case of the photograph of Lieutenant Colonel Malalai Kakar, a former Afghan police officer, is particularly central here (Fig. 18). The image was used as part of a propaganda campaign to ban the burkha, framed and presented as a 'terror alarm' image by Britain First (a right-wing fringe political group active in the UK) and is an example of a loaded image. The caption accompanying the image reads, 'Terror attack level: Severe – an attack is highly likely. For security reasons, it's now time to ban the burqa' (Saul 2014: n.p.).[44]

The photograph of Kakar without the caption may have raised various questions but, given the combination of caption and image, it casts her in a particular light, possibly posing a threat. There is also the question of translation and interpretation. Had this photograph been published in Afghanistan, even in the neighbouring countries, the image may have been interpreted in an entirely different way, as was my interpretation as an Iranian woman who recognises the common use of the burkha but not the gun – an object of force predominantly associated with men. This image, in the context of Afghanistan, would symbolically empower her in relation to her male counterparts or in relation to the perceived threat of the Taliban. Perhaps it could be seen, for example, as a positive image: that of a woman wearing culturally specific clothing, capable of reinforcing the law, which was what Kakar was employed to do. Colonel Kakar was assassinated by the Taliban in 2008, who saw her as a threat, yet her photo, in a different cultural context, was used to animate extremism and as a terror suspect identified as a Muslim woman in a burkha with a gun.

---

[43] In an article from August 2018, Boris Johnson said that he felt "fully entitled" to expect women to remove face coverings when talking to him at his MP's surgery. He said schools and universities should be able to take the same approach if a student "turns up ... looking like a bank robber".

[44] Heather Saul writes for *The Independent* on 20 September 2014: Britain First picture: Photographer 'horrified' after first Afghan policewoman killed by Taliban used for 'ban the burka' campaign. Photograph by Lana Slezic, who claimed that her photograph was used and shared by Britain First.

Figure 18: Photograph by Lana Slezic misappropriated by a right-wing group in the UK

Kakar's image is not an isolated case. There is a significant number of images, in print and various media, including social media, that portray and build a negative myth around the Muslim woman. Another example is the published news report and the accompanying images of the three missing girls who ran away from the UK in 2015 to join Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria.[45] What could be read and assumed depends partly on the 'cultural time' of the report – our memory/knowledge of Muslim-ness and Muslim girls, news coverage of related events in our recent history and the important rhetoric hovering around these events.

In her article *Muslim Women's Bodies – the Hottest Property in 2014* from 29th December 2014, Shelina Janmohamed wrote in *The Telegraph*,

> When it comes to Muslim women, it's still all about what we wear – and the last 12 months only serve to confirm this sad state of affairs. What we say, our achievements, opinions and self-determination continue to be brushed aside. Even as women's movements around the world continue to gather momentum, Muslim women's looks, clothing and bodies continue ever forcefully to be policed. We continue to be reduced to one-dimensional voiceless images.
>
> (Janmohamed 2014)

What Janmohamed picks up on above indicates not only a wilful undermining of the agency and achievements of women from the Muslim worlds, but also a renewed, concentrated colonial obsession centred upon the veil. Such attitudes persist, focused upon a sense of difference and superiority, and perpetuate a sense of 'us versus the Other'.

[45] The three British girls also known as 'jihadi brides' were Shamima Begum, 15, Kadiza Sultana, 16, and Amira Abase, 15, who ran away from home in February 2015 to join Islamic State in Syria.

As I closely examine the significance of the veil for women throughout this chapter, considering rich historical accounts and more recent perceptions by a Western audience, it is clear that the events of 9/11 are crucial in the development of diasporic artists of Muslim worlds and to their participation in the public and artistic domains of the Western world. This relationship is reinforced by the research discussed in this chapter, which affirms the urgency of examining the spectacular to understand the space of the female artist of the Muslim diaspora.

If today's artistic productivity of women from Muslim worlds is greeted, encouraged and desired through a narrow spectrum of identity by its predominantly Western audience, then the illustration of such imagining becomes paramount: both in the work of artists subjected as Other, and in the mind of its audience while that audience enjoys a revived gaze upon its own colonial past, leading to a centrality resurrected in the space of the contemporary Muslim female Othering.

This chapter introduces the thesis by affirming the urgency and necessity of examining images of the Muslim woman disseminated within our current cultural context to understand the spectacle and space of the female artists of the Muslim diaspora. It is worth noting the ideas of Guy Debord here. In his work *The Society of Spectacle* (originally published in 1967), Debord defines the spectacle through two primary forms, the *concentrated* (such as 'Stalinist' regimes, implemented through the cult of personality and the use of force) and the *diffuse* (which relies on a rich abundance of commodities, typified by wealthy democracies) and, later (in 1988), he introduced a third form: the *integrated* (a combination of *diffuse* and the *concentrated)*. He concludes that the integrated spectacle now permeates all reality. For Debord, the integrated society defends itself with misinformation and misdirection. It does this primarily through the spectre of terrorism:

> Such a perfect democracy constructs its own inconceivable foe, terrorism. Its wish is to be judged by its enemies rather than by its results. The story of terrorism is written by the state and it is therefore highly instructive. The spectating populations must certainly never know everything about terrorism, but they must always know enough to convince them that, compared with terrorism, everything else seems rather acceptable, or in any case more rational and democratic.
>
> (Debord 1988: n.p.)

If one applies the logic of Debord to the above posters (Figs. 13 and 18) and to the historically spectacular image of the Othered Muslim woman, we read in their

creation a familiar process of blame and a focus upon a particular threat posed by an outsider. The sight of the veil and the Muslim woman from the Orient has long been a sensation in the eyes of its Western audience, whether as odalisque, passive or exotic or now as terrorist, represented as images in the media and reports of the Muslim world. What is interesting, and sobering, to consider is that Debord's thinking places the Islamic female Other as a *necessary and inevitable construct* of a society seeking self-affirmation through the Other, the demonised, the spectacular, the fantastic. Clearly, how we relate to the veil and the idea of Muslim and female in part depends upon cultural context and previous narratives that an audience may have encountered, and upon memories, which are evoked as we are surrounded by ideas expressed in the media. The proximity of this memory of the imagined and the presence and perception of the audience becomes a decisive consideration for visual artists as we create our own narratives. It is the Muslim woman, as a perceived single entity, and these voiceless images that are referred to as the Muslim female Other. After every extremist attack, there seems to be a flood of imagery in the media reporting the supposed Muslim woman, who subsequently enters the common consciousness in which religion and gender seem directly tied to a violent and repressive culture expressed through a particular code of dress.

2.9 Conclusion of Chapter 2

What can be deduced from the above study is that texts in visible form (*i.e.* the use of words as script) have the power to fix the image, pin it down and tie meaning to the message; a deliberate intention is fixed, and the message is ready for effect. The combination of text and image can represent either an act of terrorism or a presentation of passiveness. This dualistic 'type-casting' denies the more manifold and multi-layered reality of many women from different parts of the Muslim worlds. This factor is discussed in Donnell's essay. Her analysis and examples of artists, activists and writers critique the obscuring of Afghan women's concerns and demands in the way that the Western media creates an overemphasis on the veil. This view denies the diversity that arises from many different cultures and practices; it further impedes independence of mind and action of the many people coming from these different places. As recognised in a transnational feminist approach, the locality and history of such complex issues are important factors in women's positions in relation to veiling; for example, when veiling in such situations is the most direct action in

terms of safety. However, what is often neglected, including in Donnell's essay, is a discussion of Afghan women before the Russian occupation and its subsequent role in the emergence of the Taliban's aggressive policing of women through the veil, which is an area that deserves a much deeper analysis beyond the scope of this thesis.

I, therefore, find it necessary to examine the 'monolithic image of the Muslim woman' addressed in the media, as claimed and described by many, to reflect upon and explore the possibility of being defined and articulated through her voice, claiming ownership of her image, and to rethink a new position, searching for another to emerge.

My practice, as discussed in Chapter 5, takes advantage of this strategy not only to fix (locate) my own contextual time, but also to anchor my voice to my image. This approach is necessary to subvert negative projections as a way of exploring my subjective position as an artist in a number of ways, through the personal (which draws on my own experience of being a woman of the Muslim world and subjected to these readings within a Western context), through my artistic work in speaking back (by bringing into crisis the perception of an Othered Oriental Muslim woman) and through my curatorial work (which creates dialogue through organised seminars relevant to practice – see appendices).

Chapter 3: Locating the Islamo-Orientalised Female Other

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews key texts and current examples from the visual arts to investigate and identify the challenges that contemporary visual artists and producers of the Muslim diaspora face when they create work in relation to representation and self-representation. The exhibitions and artists discussed are primarily women artists and producers of the Muslim diaspora, who work within a Western context – mainly in the UK – with a focus on the artistic environment, such as exhibition platforms. I engage with the conceptual implications of key texts, such as *A New Beginning, Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics* (2002) by Rasheed Aareen, and *What Fills Emptiness? Reflections on Iranian American Women Artists Since 1979* (2008) by Shiva Balaghi. The exhibition histories reviewed are analysed from different vantage points, and the conceptual implications of the above key texts are used to investigate artistic positions and available platforms (e.g. exhibitions, biennales, art fairs, art magazines and organised discussions).

I argue that artistic platforms and their visibility are influenced by what I refer to as 'Orientalisation versus self-Orientalisation' on the part of the artist and audience, as well as the influence of organising bodies (as mentioned above) and key political events (as discussed in previous chapters). The reflections arising from selected exhibitions, curators, artists and thinkers conclude Part 1 of this thesis by locating the *Islamo-Orientalised Female Other* (IOFO) as a problematic projection within the visual arts and asks: Can the IOFO artist speak and, if so, how?

3.2 Identity politics and artistic challenges

Rasheed Araeen is a Karachi-born, London-based conceptual artist, curator and founder of the ground-breaking journal *Third Text: Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture,* which deals with issues of post-colonialism, ethnicity and third worlds.[46] Originally trained as an engineer, he became an important figure in creating a platform for Black British (British African, Caribbean and Asian) artists,

[46] His earlier work often dealt with issues of identity, representation and racial violence. A piece which articulates best his earlier concerns is his performance *Paki Bastard, Portrait of The Artist as a black Person* (1977).

and curated the highly important and influential exhibition *The Other Story* in 1989.[47] Many of the artists included went on to become well-known and influential in their own right.

Of interest to the discussion in this chapter is Araeen's Epilogue to the *Third Text Reader* (2002), in which he first discusses why and how the journal *Third Text* was established to create 'a historical shift away from the centre of the dominant culture to its periphery in order to consider the centre critically' (2002: 333). Araeen describes two contradictory developmental discourses during the 1980s. The first questioned the institutional policies and attitude towards non-White artists. The second discourse dealt with the emergence of multiculturalism supported and promoted by the mainstream (dominant) Eurocentric establishment (Araeen 2002).

Araeen discusses the journal's intention to represent a more equal and international art scene and to include the Third World and its artistic and cultural achievements. His explanation constitutes a critique of the concept of political Otherness that artists during the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s' had adopted. These years saw a particular popularity and positive reception to 'Otherness' in the visual arts. He first explains, '[I] want to show that postcolonial cultural theory, which supposedly challenges dominant assumptions, has, in fact, reinforced these assumptions' (2002: 336). He then discusses how, in effect, identity politics and the interest of left-leaning liberals is merely an empty gesture of recognition and celebration of non-White artists, which cannot possibly secure a real voice in modern art. Araeen further claims,

> Celebration of the exotic Other today is not new. What is new is that the Other is no longer just the culturally exotic Other. Now, we also have a politically exotic Other, who is supposed to be either exiled from, or is critical about, his or her country of origin. …What is common to all of them is either the predicament of being outside where they long to be or a concern about the countries of their origins. In the name of political or critical engagement, a Palestinian artist can now articulate his or her experiences of exile; an Iranian artist living in New York can now represent the condition of Iranian women in Iran today in a highly exotic fashion; Chinese artists can now be celebrated institutionally in the West.
>
> (Araeen 2002: 341)

[47] The exhibition featured artists, such as Frank Bowling, Sonia Boyce, Eddie Chambers, Uzo Egonu, Mona Hatoum, Lubaina Himid, Gavin Jantjes, Donald Locke, David Medalla, Ronald Moody, Ahmed Parvez, Ivan Peries, Keith Piper, F.N. Souza and Aubrey Williams, and included Araeen's own work, too.

In the above comment, although Araeen does not specify gender or specific artists, it may be argued that his observations could apply to artists such as Shirin Neshat or perhaps Mona Hatoum, seeing that both work outside their country of origin but identify or are identified with this state of 'politically exotic Other'. Araeen recognises the interest in and support towards these artists, further revealing an Imperial dynamic that distinguishes them as the Other, much in the same way as the East/Imperial–West dynamic denies a more complex picture of artists and artwork. However, it is the agenda around the promotion of the work that seems to interest Araeen. He writes,

> The predicament of others has always attracted the powerful, particularly its liberal section, because it is the way for the powerful to show their sympathy and charity towards those who are deprived and are suffering. The victim is important for the liberal gaze, it is the way the powerful prove their humanism, and thus deflect the critical gaze of the deprived from its source of power.
>
> (Araeen 2002: 342)

While Araeen questions the nature of patronage towards artists dealing with Otherness, he does not spare artists and representatives of Otherness from criticism, since he sees a symbiotic relationship in the structure of patronage, which became known as 'identity politics'. The Tate describes this term as follows:

> Identity politics is the term used to describe an anti-authoritarian political and cultural movement that gained prominence in the USA and Europe in the mid-1980s, asking questions about identity, repression, inequality and injustice and often focusing on the experience of marginalised groups. Identity politics emerged out of the 1960s Black Civil Rights Movement, second-wave feminism and gay and lesbian liberation. It was confrontational and asked questions about the kind of art that should be made and for whom in a post-colonial world where the history of art was being re-written to encompass a broader, less Western[sic]-dominated perspective.
>
> (Tate: n.p.)

Araeen's concerns in his epilogue offer an opportunity to address the absence of women in his argument, as well as the merits, dilemmas and limits that identity politics present to women artists of the Muslim diaspora who seek new strategies and effective discourse in producing and pursuing recognition of their art.

3.3 Women and artistic platforms

Despite seeing an increasing number of women artists from Europe and the US becoming more visible and recognised for their art over the past five decades, something previously largely experienced by their male counterparts (Parker and Pollock 1981; Pollock 1988), this visibility has not improved equally. There is little scholarly literature or historical writing on the work of women artists from the Muslim world, their artistic contribution, or criticism of their work within art history. There is also very little on women writing about other women or about their own work concerning the same subject matter (Chicago and Lucie-Smith 1999; Grosenick 2001). Creative platforms largely emerged from women's political movements, as well as the appearance of feminist books and magazines, including *Spare Rib*, a feminist magazine seeking to challenge the stereotyping and exploitation of women, which was in print between 1972 and 1993.[48] Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (*1975) was influential in initiating the ongoing discussion of the gaze and female representation in film, as well as in positioning the audience (and therefore the gaze) as largely white male.[49] Within such movements, the recognition of women artists, such as Georgia O'Keefe, Barbara Hepworth, Camille Claudel, Judy Chicago, Elisabeth Frink, Frida Kahlo, Eva Hesse and Shirazeh Houshiary developed. These women became an inspiration for me and for my generation of women artists.

Following the comparatively recent recognition of American and European women artists in general, the past 20 years have begun to see some recognition of a handful of women artists from the Muslim diaspora or from women artists of colour (see Appendix 1 for diasporic movement). Shirin Nashat and Mona Hatoum are two examples. Despite the increased recognition within a patriarchal art world, an unequal and lesser value is still placed upon women artists in general, but more so for women artists of colour. Many of my artistic and curatorial projects since the millennium (especially since 2012) addressed this inequality, initiating a programme to create a platform for women artists of colour in my curatorial capacity at the 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning.[50]

Before 2000, as I recall from my degree in fine arts in the early 1980s, there were very few female Middle Eastern artists across the fine arts and art literature. The

[48] I became involved with this magazine during my early years of moving to the UK in 1981-82.
[49] In her essay, Mulvey positions the male audience as deriving visual pleasure from a dominant and controlling male gaze, boosting his ego. This essay was first published in *Screen* 16 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.
[50] Please see Appendix 5 for a list of curatorial works.

one example my tutors would suggest was Shirazeh Houshiary, who had just graduated from Chelsea College of Arts along with Anish Kapoor and begun to be represented by the Lisson Gallery. Later, I became aware of artists such as Mitra Tabrizian, who was active as a photographer, in addition to Mona Hatoum, who was mainly involved in performance at that time.[51] Years later, I came to know artists such as Jananne Al-Ani and Zineb Sedira, whom I met in 1997, both were based in London and about to gain recognition for their artistic contribution.[52]

Mona Hatoum, working in the media of sculpture, installation and performance, exhibited and dealt with the subject of women, sexuality and displacement in her video piece *Measures of Distance* (1988), showing a woman (her mother) in a Hamam (bathroom), naked, but thinly veiled, with the artist over-layering a letter from her mother (written in Arabic) that is veiling the shot, while the voice-over (Hatoum herself) reads in English, revealing her distance. Hatoum contextualises and connects the work through signifiers, such as the Hamam scene of the Oriental woman,[53] calligraphy and the veil, and addresses an English-speaking or Western audience.

Like Hatoum, Jananne Al-Ani involves her Irish mother in her work *Veil* (1997),[54] but also represents her sisters and herself within the frame, telling the story of veiling and unveiling the woman expressed against a black background. The women sit in a row, dressed in black veils, partly uncovered, and merge with the black background. Al-Ani continues to work with territories/geographies and politically resonant Middle Eastern landscapes. Her more recent work includes distanced aerial camera shots of territories now devoid of people. Often, she photographs what are referred to as 'shadow sites', only visible from the air at dawn and dusk, when long shadows reveal the history of the place.[55] The strategy of using veiling as a signifier of the female Muslim body applies to Zineb Sedira in her photographic works of the *Virgin Mary* (2000). During the early 2000s her work engaged with the gaze, the veil and the woman. Subsequently, she developed her work using film and photography to explore cityscapes, ruins and migration.

---

[51] Shirazeh Houshiary is a sculptor, installation artist and a former Turner Prize nominee who lives and works in London. Mitra Tabrizian is a British-Iranian photographer, director and a professor of photography at the University of Westminster, London.
[52] Zineb Sedira is a French-Algerian artist who works mainly with film and photography. Jananne Al-Ani is an Irish-Iraqi artist who also works mainly with film and photography.
[53] Such as *The Turkish Bath* (1862) by the French painter Jean-August Dominique Ingres
[54] Al-Ani's mother was married to an Iraqi man, the artist's father.
[55] This is also known as 'God's-eye view'.

3.4 Artistic platforms since 2000

To examine the artistic activity and recognition of women artists of the Muslim diaspora and the later impact of 9/11 on their artistic productivity, this section maps out some platforms available to women artists of the Muslim diaspora, followed by more analytical reviews of exhibitions as they were introduced and received in the UK. I choose the year 2000 as a beginning point since there was an increasing interest in the presentation of artists of the Muslim diaspora. The selected key exhibitions and subsequent developments since 2000 that are investigated include Shirin Neshat's one-woman show at the Serpentine Gallery, *Shirin Neshat: The Changing Lives of Women and Men in Iran and Beyond* (2000); the exhibition *Veil, Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* at the Institute of International Visual Arts (Iniva; 2002–03) and the exhibition *30 Years of Solitude* (2008) at Asia House, followed by the exhibitions *Unveiled: New Art from The Middle East* (2009) at the Saatchi Gallery and *Light from the Middle East* (2012–13) at the V&A. The reviews of the exhibitions in this chapter are examined from different vantage points to investigate the socio-political, intellectual and artistic contexts and the development of female artists' work since 2000.

Figure 19: Shirin Neshat, *I Am its Secret,* (*Women of Allah* series), 1996, gelatin silver print, 25.4 x 20.3 cm

3.4.1 Shirin Neshat: *The Changing Lives of Women and Men in Iran and Beyond* (2000)

Almost a decade after the Islamic revolution, the late 1980s began to see some women making their presence felt both behind and in front of the camera in the film industry in Iran and, subsequently, in the diaspora (Europe, the US and North America).[56] Among these was Shirin Neshat (Naficy 2003). Years of animosity (as discussed previously), war and sanctions led to a lack of access and communication with Iran. In the first decade after the revolution, it was not only women who wore the veil but, in effect, the whole country veiled itself against the accusing eyes of the West. Iran, distrustful of the West, closed itself off from the Western world. This led to a lack of images from Iran, generating a desire to know what is happening inside the country, in particular about women, who had to wear the chador since the revolution. Iran became a hot media subject again (Javaherian 2008) for a Western audience. Two decades after the Iranian Revolution and the subsequent success of Iranian cinema and the appearance of some women directors who succeeded in international film industries (Danielpour 2015), the desire to see images from the Islamic revolution became pressing. Against this background, the Serpentine Gallery exhibition described the following on their website:

> This exhibition came at a time of enormous social transformation in Shirin Neshat's native Iran. Returning for the first time to Iran in 1990, Neshat was deeply affected by her homeland's radical transformation and resolved to return to working as a practising artist (a career she had put aside for years after completing her studies) to record her impressions of these changes.
>
> (Serpentine Gallery 2000)

This exhibition introduced Neshat's work, which was little known to a UK audience.[57] As discussed in previous chapters, the UK public had limited and negative news coverage about Iran and the Iranian Revolution. On the website of the Serpentine Gallery, the exhibition is described as 'the changing lives of its men and women' through the 'native', through the Iranian female who can 'record' and give impressions of these 'enormous and radical changes' in her country of origin (Serpentine Gallery 2000, original italics). Since Neshat's success, which won her the

[56] This was marked by an official recognition of the Ninth Fajr Film Festival (1990) - Iran's foremost film event devoted a whole programme to women's cinema.
[57] See newspaper article *Private View: Shirin Neshat* by Richard Ingleby from 19 August 2000, available at https://www.independent.co.uk/incoming/private-view-shirin-neshat-697286.html. Accessed on 22 October 2020.

Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1999, among many other prizes, she has become one of the most celebrated and popular female Iranian visual artists, with global success. Neshat's success interests this research for two reasons: first, she has become one of the few female artists from the Middle Eastern world to receive international attention and exposure in the world of cultural media; and second, she has become one of the most influential and recognised artists in the academic study of the subject of women, women artists, Islam, Iran and the veil.[58]

When Neshat, who has been based in the US since 1974, briefly returned to Iran in 1990, she found a drastically changed country. This was not only because of the advent of Islamic law, which required a particular public dress code for women, as discussed in Chapter 2, but also because Iran was deep in mourning due to the Iran–Iraq war and over a decade of economic sanctions. This dramatic history inspired Neshat to create a body of work that led to many major exhibitions.

I first encountered Neshat's work in the major exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 2000, featuring photographs from her series *Women of Allah* (1993–97) and her film trilogy *Turbulent* (1998), *Rapture* (1999) and *Fervour* (2000). Captivated by the aesthetics of her work, the use of sounds, songs, words, poetry, seeing people and familiar sights, I was deeply affected and felt a compelling emotional proximity to the songs, language and poetry of her work. What I found most intriguing was the enthusiastic reception and the captivated and, often, the charged silence of the audience. I already had a connection to the songs, had read much of the poetry and was brought up with the sight of calligraphy and the veil and even the traumatic sight of guns during the 1979 revolution, but what was connecting the audience to Neshat's work?

As I recall, the exhibition rooms were full of visitors, the audience was quite transfixed, the only sound was from the videos next door, which filled the central space of the gallery where the black-and-white photographic series *Women of Allah* hung. There was a sense of curiosity about the reception of the exhibition, where an exchange seemed to take place in the space between her work and the viewers.

I explore this exchange and argue that the popularity, reception, and success of Neshat's work had a dual effect on women artists and cultural producers of the

[58] Nishat's success is featured in *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st century*, edited by Uta Grosenick (2001) and was also presented in numerous radio and television programmes on the subjects of art, film, female, Muslim and Iran.

Muslim diaspora. On the one hand, it had implications for empowerment, in the sense that it has highlighted the possibility of claiming our own image and being present and visible within the landscape of contemporary art. On the other hand, and more important as I argue, a dilemma began to emerge regarding the issues around self-representation and the use of signifiers. Subsequently, as in my case, some female artists from the Middle East, Asia and parts of Africa, perhaps somewhat intuitively, began to avoid engaging with this subject and the image of the woman, Islam and the veil, given that all three aspects were highly contested subjects (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2). In the following section, I engage with the range of exhibitions that developed after 2000 and, in Chapter 4, I further investigate the complex issues around the use of aesthetics.

Figure 20: *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art,* published by the *Iniva* (2003), book cover

3.4.2 Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art (2002–04)

Soon after Neshat's exhibition in 2000, many in the US, the UK and around the world witnessed the events of 9/11 through the media. As explored in Chapter 2, this event and its representation created an air of suspicion, particularly around Muslim bodies, and women artists of diaspora were no exception to this. However, exhibitions, such as *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* (2002–03), *were already* in

development when 9/11 happened, and the exhibition went ahead as planned (Bailey and Tawadros 2003). First organised at the *Institute of International Visual Arts* (InIVA) in London, before it travelled to various locations in the UK, the *Veil* exhibition claimed to be the first exhibition devoted to exploring the representation of the veil, its politics and poetics in contemporary art.[59] The exhibition received considerable attention within the art world, including from the press, particularly in the light of the 9/11 attacks, which led to some controversy regarding two of the artworks in particular.

The works in question were images created by the Moscow collective AES Art Group. The first work depicts an image of the Statue of Liberty dressed in a burkha, and another artwork in the form of photo-montages of the Houses of Parliament superimposed with minarets and an urban Arab population (complete with a London double-decker bus adorned with geometric patterns). The latter artwork playfully and mischievously visualises the 'threat' of migration, which was particularly topical in the UK at the time. These works were taken down at the New Art Gallery, Walsall and banned by the city council (BBC News 2013). The exhibition produced a significant catalogue, which includes a series of insightful essays, a few of which I discuss and reference in this thesis.[60] Moreover, I also reference several newspaper and journal articles that reviewed the *Veil* exhibition, including BBC Radio (2003), Halasa (2003), Lutfi (2004), Smee (2003) and Zahir (2003).[61]

Addressing the Western obsession with the veil, the catalogue begins with a preface by Reina Lewis, who points to the fact that the veil is essentially a garment, the meaning and significance of which cannot truly be contained or represented. She states that its changing meaning throughout time, geographies and contexts had more to do with class and status, as well as the distinctions between urban and rural dress codes when practising the veil (Lewis 2003: 10). This preface is followed by an introduction by Bailey, Cotter and Tawadros, who write,

---

[59] The *Veil* exhibition further travelled to New Art Gallery Walsall, Bluecoat Gallery, Open Eye Gallery Liverpool, and Modern Art Oxford during 2003 and 2004.

[60] First, Alison Donnell's essay *Visibility, Violence and Voice? Attitudes to Veiling Post- 11 September* and Frantz Fanon's *Algeria Unveiled*, as discussed in previous chapters.

[61] Cornall, John, 'Art which won't hide behind a veil' from 14.04.2003, *Birmingham Post*.
Sumpter, Helen, 'Veiled Reference', *The Big Issue*, No. 525, 3-9 February 2003.
'Burqa Backlash', *Eastern Art Report*, Issue 48 (2003/1)
Cornall, John, 'The Scarf Show', *Art Preview*, April 2003 or *Art Review*, February 2003
Artnotes, 'Veiled', *Art Monthly*, No. 264 (March 2003), available at <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/issue/march-2003>. Accessed on 23 October 2020.

> Why is it that this item of clothing has had such a huge impact on our culture?... [F]rom a historical perspective, one can see this earlier obsession with the veil in the discourse of travelogue writings over the last two hundred years, in postcard imagery, in Western literature, in nineteenth-century photography, in painting and in early cinema.
>
> (Bailey, Cotter and Tawadros 2003: 6)

The above rhetorical question is in part explored by Lila Ahmed's opening essay. Ahmed provides a comprehensive history of how, when and why a historical obsession (on the part of the British colonisers) and fury within the ranks of the Ulama (religious scholars) began to form after Qassim Amin's publication of *Tahrir Al-Mar'a* (*The Liberation of Women*) in Egypt in 1899. This occurred at a time of national reform, the ongoing Westernisation of Egypt and cultural reforms, including a changing of costume (Ahmed 2003). As Ahmed explains,

> Veiling – to the Western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies – became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies.
>
> (Ahmed 2003: 43)

Ahmed's essay explores the historical context and reveals a study of the relationship between coloniser and the colonised. She explains the moral justification and hypocrisy of British agents using the rhetoric of feminism to launch an assault on the religion and culture of the colonised. At the same time, they actively suppressed the Women's suffrage movement at home in the UK. Ahmed points to Lord Cromers' Victorian colonial 'paternalistic convictions' and his belief in the subordination of women.[62] She explains,

> This champion of the unveiling of Egyptian women was, in England, a founding member and sometime president of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage.
>
> (Ahmed 2003: 46)

The exhibition *Veil, Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* and its accompanying catalogue uses images centred around the signifier of the Muslim

[62] Cromer was a British agent and consul-general in Egypt from 1883-1907 during the occupation of Egypt and the subsequent intervention by the British in Alexandria (the 1882 Anglo-Egyptian war).

woman and her veil. The many images in the publication focus mainly on reprinting colonial and Orientalist imagery, as well as the work of artists – with the exception of a few, such as Ghada Amer (*Majnun*, embroidery on plastic, 1997) and Emily Jacir (*From Paris to Riyadh*, installation 1998–2001) – who push the work and the image away from this code.

Much of the work within the exhibition seemed more in dialogue with colonial, historical and stereotypical images of the veil by depicting it being worn, rather than engaging with contemporary practices of veiling in relation to class, status and the bodies of women who practice the veil. As Huda Lutfi reminds us, veiling is not limited to Muslim women and their bodies only; men too practised veiling and continue to do so in various countries (North Africa, Mali, Libya, Morocco and by Tuareg men; Lutfi 2004). Veiling, in general, was (and is) a practice that historically included many cultures, including women of different European classes, religion and traditions (Bailey and Tawadros 2003).[63]

In a sense, the exhibition fails in its claim to be 'the first project to address the question of the veil in all its complexities and ambiguities from the vantage point of contemporary visual art practice'. Due to myriad pre-existing *colonial* images and the *physical* appearance of the veil in connection to the body of *women* of the Muslim diasporas, little is done (through images of the exhibited artworks and selected historical images within the catalogue) beyond a repetition of the stereotypical image and affirmation that the veil relates to the body of the woman.

In her essay *Mapping the Illusive* (2003), Zineb Sedira, the initiator of *The Veil* project, a participating artist and one of the four curators of the exhibition, reflects on the responsibility of the artist and curator by posing the following questions: 'Can the artist escape the burden or cultural responsibility of representation? Is the artist, or indeed the curator, responsible for reinforcing the stereotypes of an audience?' Sedira's questions reveal a concern for perpetuating simplistic portrayals and receptions within the arts, including her own desire as a French-born Algerian in her self-portraits or the *Virgin Mary* (2000). Her work connects to what Neshat did a few years earlier in her *Women of Allah* series, using the veil through photography and performing a single figure as the focus of the frame about this other place and time. Although Sedira ponders the responsibility of

[63] Referenced by Bailey and Tawadros is the Fadwa El Guindi's in *Veil, Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, New York and oxford: Berg, 1999.

representation, reinforcing stereotypes and critiquing the veil as an object of representation, the show and her work are framed through this stereotype, which, as noted previously, almost always connects the Muslim woman with the veil.

While the catalogue examines the historical and colonial stereotype through the essays, the images of the artists' works seem to float between the essays and the historical images of mostly Algerian and Egyptian women. In relation to colonial history, the images in the publication become mostly a reminder of this history that can only reinforce old stereotypes. Most of the work depicts the veil or enlarges the image of architectural patterns of ornaments. This only creates more images of these other places that the European powers colonised, a historical fact that the essays were quite capable of addressing.

If the works in the exhibition claimed to 'explore the symbolic significance of the veil and veiling in contemporary culture' (Bailey and Tawadros 2003: 18), then how, for example, did it engage with Islamophobic attitudes towards the Muslim women and men who became the focus of this threat within Muslim communities in London? Sedira argues that, '[m]apping out an environment is not enough; instead, we must, as bell hooks suggests, transform the image' (2003: 64).[64] I find myself agreeing but continue to ask the same question as Lutfi in her sharp review of this project:

> I believe that the editors made a careful selection of essays, which succeeds [sic] in exposing and contesting the stereotypical re-presentation of the veil in the Western context. But did they succeed in transforming the image?
>
> (2004: n.p.).

[64] Gloria Jean Watkins, author, feminist and social activist, best known for her pen name bell hooks.

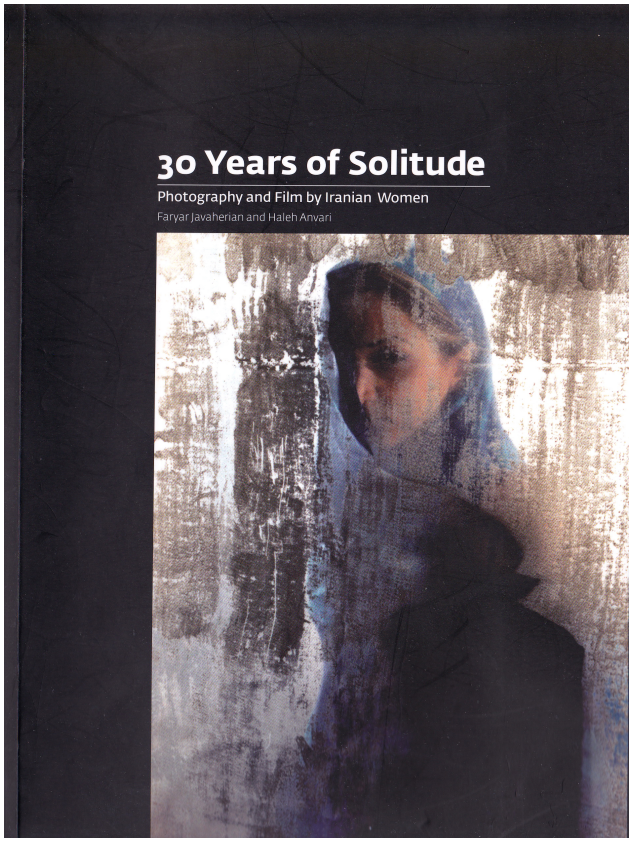


Figure 21: *Be Colourful,* Shadi Ghadirian (2004), cover page of *Thirty Years of Solitude* (2008)

3.4.3 *Thirty Years of Solitude* (2008)

While the *Veil* exhibition and its catalogue focused on a Western obsession, subsequent exhibitions predominantly adopted a strategy of representing the Muslim woman expressed through the veil and, significantly, their discontent with it. An example was *Thirty Years of Solitude* (2008), organised in collaboration with Asia House in London. This exhibition was entirely dedicated to Iranian women artists and film directors, yet, despite its professed intention to challenge stereotypes, the exhibition arguably projected *existing* stereotypes (such as discontentment with aspects of women's existence symbolised by the subject of the veil) onto the female contributors as much as it discussed their work. In the introduction to the catalogue, with a foreword by Katriana Hazell, Cultural Director of Asia House, Hazell expresses such discontent as follows:

> The exhibition and films reflect the feelings of anxiety, isolation and loss, experienced by Iranian Society over the last thirty years. It is this that has been captured by the artists whose work are presented in this exhibition.
>
> (Hazell 2008: 7)

The foreword is followed by Faryar Javaherian's essay. Javaherian, the senior curator of this exhibition, provides a historical account of the changes that Iran has undergone since the 1979 revolution, namely the emergence of the Islamic Republic. She further discusses the Western interest in Iranian contemporary art due to Iran being isolated from the West, stating, 'there has been an itch to know about Iran ever since the revolution' (2008: 11). Javaherian further offers a detailed survey of exhibitions of Iranian art and artists held abroad, mostly in Europe and the US.[65] However, I now analyse two essays from the exhibition catalogue, *Thirty Years of Solitude,* written by art historians and curators who aimed to contextualise the exhibition and the women artists who participated. In this way, I mark and locate the problems and dilemmas that many artists and curators (including myself) continue to confront in the production and reception of our artwork. The following reviews illuminate curatorial positions under the narrow spotlight of identity politics that not only impacted artists, but also curators and art historians of the Muslim diaspora (and, in this particular study, the Iranian diaspora).

3.4.3.1 A review of Shiva Balaghi's *What fills Emptiness? Reflections on Iranian American Women Artists Since 1979* and Faryar Javaherian's *How Can We be Iranians, Artists and Women?* (2008)

As an Iranian female curator and art historian, Balaghi's voice reveals complexities and schisms. As Balaghi states:

[65] To demonstrate this interest, she provides the following chronological survey:

- *A Breeze From the Gardens of Persia*, a collection of fifty-seven paintings, curated by Nancy Mathews. Touring US from 2001 to 2003, was co-sponsored by search for common grounds, (an international organization which tries to bring enemy nations through arts, culture, sports, etc.), setting for itself the political task of making Iranian culture better-known to American people.
- *Iranian Contemporary Art at the Barbican*, London, Curated by Rose Issa and Carol Brown 2001.
- *Regards Persans, Iran, Une Revolution Photographique*, held in Espace Electra,(contemporary Iranian Photography, curated by Michket Krifa 2001.
- *Iranian Contemporary* curated by Sami-Azar, organized by Christie's; 2003.
- *Iran Under the Skin*, curated by Firouz, the cultural Contemporary Centre of Barcelona, exhibition from diaspora artists including photography, installation and video art, 2004.
- *Far Near Distance: Contemporary Positions of Iranian Artists*, House of the Cultures of The World, Berlin, curated by Shaheen Merali and Martin Hagar and coordinated by Rose Issa; 2004.
- *After the Revolution: Contemporary artists of Iran*; curated by Octavio Zaya for Casa Asia in Donostia, San Sebastian focusing on mainly diaspora artists; 2005.
- *Persian Visions*, Contemporary Photography from Iran; curated by Hamid Severy and Gary Hallman; Regis Centre for Arts, University of Minnesota; 2005-8 touring.

> Biography becomes paramount. The ultimate purpose of making art becomes a search for identity in an impossibly fractured landscape. The experience of exhibiting art becomes a pedagogical, anthropological exercise. A visit to a gallery to view contemporary art produced by exile artists becomes like an afternoon spent at the American museum of natural history whose glassed-in exhibits help us imagine what life amongst the dinosaurs was like. [I]n the United States, interest in contemporary art made by 'Muslim artists' peaked after the terrorists' attacks of 9/11, in 2006, the museum of Modern Art in New York mounted the exhibit, Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Seeing, featuring, in the main, work by artists who had moved from Islamic countries to the United States and Europe.
>
> (Balaghi 2008: 78)

Balaghi's statement reveals a climate of reception and a series of preconceived ideas about women's art, identity and productions. She further argues that there is a desire to know artists of the Muslim diaspora post 9/11 in a voyeuristic sense, one in which a power construct is played out that inevitably affects artistic work and creations. Balaghi adds, 'there is a desperate desire to know the Muslim subject in categorising, showcasing and cataloguing these artists within a Western context' (ibid.). It can be argued that artistic work is not measured chiefly or solely through its own artistic merit but through a hierarchical categorisation embedded in a historical methodology of Orientalisation. As Balaghi further explains:

> As museum-goers and art writers, our gaze must be ethnographic. The artist's body may have moved from her homeland to this West that is always embracing and freedom loving, but her art must remain embedded in the past, the East. Exile artists become defined by place or homelessness. They are wandering dervishes twirling about in the spaces in between. They live perched precariously on that tiny line of a hyphen, making art like Scheherezade who wove her fairy tales each night in order to live yet another day.
>
> (Balaghi 2008: 79)

The first half of the above quote is revealing in that an established ethnographic method of curation, presentation and reception is already in place. Othering defined through identity in relation to place of origin and homelessness (i.e. being displaced from her homeland) is a clarification that a Western audience for her artwork can easily understand, defining themselves as embracing and freedom-loving. Hence, the reception of the Muslim female diaspora artist is received and is dependent upon a very particular premise of her perceived identity.

This power dynamic and the survival of the artist or curator is implied in the example of Scheherezade, whose survival depended on her telling fairy tales – narrating yet another tale through the spectre of her identity, enabling her to live another day. What I wish to highlight through this example is the dynamic exchange between an audience eager to know the Otherness of the Muslim artist and the artists themselves eager for a platform for their work, facing the challenge of meeting the somewhat predetermined expectations of specifically curated shows.

A review of Javaherian's essay *How Can We be Iranians, Artists and Women?* (2008) offers us a different perspective. Noting previous exhibition platforms of Iranian artists and their work, Javaherian says:

> What these exhibitions have in common is the desire to heal the relationship between Iran and the host country. They are goodwill missions trying to give a more human face to a country which has been labelled as terrorist.
>
> (Javaherian 2008: 12)

The above quote suggests that there are still binary relations in creating and framing such exhibitions. A desire to appeal to the host country (in the case of *Thirty Years of Solitude*, a UK audience) to prove and give a human face to the country (that is, Iran), as if Iranians have to prove their humanity and, in this way, to strike a peaceful relationship with the West. This apologetic position reveals a colonised mind but also a 'Western hunger-desire' that is reciprocated through an anxiety-desire on the part of 'Iranian Society' not to be seen or marked as 'terrorists'. This idea, in this case, is expressed and represented by all women artists in the exhibition whose work seemed to satisfy such a desire through the mediums of photography and filmmaking. The question arises as to why these media forms are significant here. Javaherian reveals the perspective of critics who reach the following conclusion:

> Art critics tend to agree that it was because of the tremendous demand for images from the Islamic revolution – there were no cable news networks at that time – that photo-journalism and documentary films flourished in Iran.
>
> (Javaherian 2008: 13)

Such a demand determined the medium of art production, which was symptomatic of a political situation (i.e. the lack of network restrictions at the time) in this particular exhibition that was represented by women and about women in Iran. Javaherian goes on to point out another issue:

> The pitiful situation in our country is that everything has to be ratified by the West before we acknowledge it ourselves. It's East by West, as though we ourselves do not have clear criteria for what is valuable or not.
>
> (Javaherian 2008: 15)

Javaherian seems to be clearly indicating an Orientalist structure already embedded in the cultural sector, citing the West at the centre of a power imbalance present in recognising and approving the work. This, in turn, must impact the kind of work, the shows and their titles under which diasporic artists are promoted within a primarily Western context.

Figure 22: Cover page for the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Unveiled: New Art from The Middle East,* featured image by Kader Attia (2009)

Returning to Balaghi about the 'desperate desire' (2008: 78) to know the Muslim subject, this is true of many exhibitions that responded by categorising, showcasing and cataloguing these artists within a Western context. Other exhibitions presenting Middle Eastern artists were subsequently developed into far larger and higher profile spaces, including *Unveiled: New Art from The Middle East* (2009) at the Saatchi Gallery and *Light from the Middle East* (2012–13) at the V&A. These exhibitions offered a UK audience an enthusiasm and curiosity about the Muslim world through its art and artists, which included several political women artists of the Muslim

worlds.[66] The question of who or what type of polity are being celebrated and how this is expressed and received is perhaps best revealed in the way the exhibition was advertised, introduced and ultimately received by the press.

3.4.4 *Unveiled: New Art from The Middle East (2009)*

Unveiled: New Art from The Middle East (2009), held at the Saatchi Gallery, produced a large catalogue featuring 21 artists from Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria Tunisia and Algeria, and showed 90 works comprising installations, paintings and photography. The cover of the catalogue used an image of Kadar Attia's installation *Ghost* (2007; Fig. 22). The first page is dedicated to the word *UNVEILED,* and a photograph on the next page shows a veiled woman (Shadi Ghadirian's photographic work, *Untitled* from the Ghajar series 1998–99). The woman looks at the camera and holds on her shoulder a ghetto blaster / portable tape recorder, symbolising the modern, in contrast to her traditional Ghajar period attire. The foreword by Lisa Farjam (Chief Editor of Bidoun Magazine) is entitled *LOOK AGAIN* and incorporates images of the Iranian Revolution and offers a brief discussion of the artists' work. The catalogue is simultaneously introduced from right to left but written in Arabic script (as well as left to right, written in English), starting with another photographic work by Ghadirian: a traditionally clothed woman is holding an electric vacuum cleaner, which continues the theme of modernity versus the traditional.

The sequence of images of women, first pictured as an empty group of veils made of aluminium foil on both cover pages, is strategically significant in the design of this large hardback catalogue – whether reading in English (left to right) or in Arabic (right to left), the image of the woman and the significance of the veil and veiling are introduced on *both* front covers. A further piece of Ghadirian's work (*Like Everyday*, 2000–2001; Fig.23) is placed in the middle of the book, as the final image, whether the reader reads from left to right in English, or right to left in Arabic.

---

[66] "In its second show since moving to the King's Road, the Saatchi Gallery offers us a major survey of recent Middle Eastern painting, sculpture and installation. Nineteen artists are represented, most of them in their twenties and thirties, from Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Syria and Algeria, and their works reveal something of the range of their experiences and of the cultural and historical traditions of their homelands. This is a fascinating survey [with] revelatory views from the inside." Excerpt from *The Times*, 27 January 2009. For more details and reviews visit www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk.
The exhibition included the following artists: Diana Al-Hadid, Halim Al-Karim, Ahmed Alsoudani, Kader Attia, Nadia Ayari, Ali Banisadr, Shirin Fakhim, Shadi Ghadirian, Barbad Golshiri, Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, Khaled Hafez, Wafa Hourani, Hayv Kahramam, Jeffar Khaldi, Laleh Khorramian, Farsad Labbauf, Tala Madani, Ahmed Morshedloo, Sara Rahbar and Marwan Rechmaoui.

Given the subject matter these images deal with (Figs. 22 and 23) and their position in the catalogue, I first analyse and discuss Ghadiraian's photographic work within the show.

Figure 23: Shadi Ghadirian *Untitled* from the *Like Everyday* series (2000─01)

Ghadirian is a contemporary photographer whose work has featured in numerous exhibitions and been used as cover pages on various significant catalogues and magazines that represent Iranian art or art from the Middle East (Figs. 21, 24 and 26). In the exhibition, her work *Like Everyday* (Fig. 23) was displayed in a dedicated space. Using the chador to veil herself, she also covers her face with kitchen utensils to hide her identity, leaving the Oriental and Muslim signifying aesthetic of the veil prominent within the work. The combination of the two elements serves to contest her, or Iranian women's, social and domestic position. In this series, the chador (specific to Iranian women) is juxtaposed with a variety of domestic utensils: plastic sieve, rubber kitchen glove, iron, food grater, *jaroo* (traditional brush to sweep the floor), brass bowl and meat chopper. These utensils symbolise a range of female domestic chores.

Displaying such images in Iran may contest domestic labour in relation to some women, as it does in this country (U.K.), but the sheer size of her photographs (each is 183 x 183 cm) and the repetition of the same message within the exclusive

white space of the Saatchi Gallery endow it with a different value within a Western context. The visibility of the chador as a defining symbol of the Muslim woman, combined with the kitchen utensils, draws a direct and reductive relationship between the veil and the woman's domestic chores. The images frame, categorise and regionalise the work, the woman and her veil once more. If this point sounds familiar, it is because we have already seen Alloula's postcards and looked at Lila Ahmed's observations on the historical significance of the veil (see above). This point is continually being repeated and centralised within current debates about women of the Muslim diaspora, which also extends to artistic expressions. In other words, although the *title* of the exhibition promises new art *from* the Middle East, the *artworks* are concerned with art *about* the Middle East through the lens of the Middle Eastern diaspora or artists whose mobility allows them to move between cultures and countries, mostly between the Middle East, Europe and the US.

The exhibition attracted over 90 reviews internationally (listed on the Saatchi website), ranging from simply informative to 'blatantly ignorant' (Janet Rady 2009), and some reviewers looked at individual works more critically. Below are three reviews that provide some idea of the range of reception this exhibition received.[67]

> [I]n these globalised times, to be an artist is to be a Western artist, by which I mean that the traditions and styles and materials and techniques of the work in Unveiled are Euro-American ones. If the devil has all the best tunes, the Great Satan has also cornered the market in visual representation. A couple of Unveiled's participants play games with Middle Eastern art history – Hayv Kahraman, for example, who makes blown-up Persian miniatures in Phoenix, Arizona – but the preoccupations of these young painters and sculptors are the same as they would be if they had gone to art school in London. (And several of them did).
>
> (Darwent 2009: n.p.)

Darwent, writing for *The Independent*, claims that the traditions, styles, materials and techniques belong to Euro-American artists, questioning what techniques could be expected of artists who are mostly in their twenties and thirties in a global twenty-first century. Does he seek to imply that these

[67] Reviews are by Charles Darwent, a regular columnist for the Guardian, the Art Newspaper and Art Review. He was the *Independent on Sunday*'s chief art critic from 1999 to 2013. Laura Cumming is the art critic of *The Observer* newspaper, a position she has held since 1999. Before that she worked for *The Guardian*, the *New Statesman* and the BBC. Estelle Lovatt is a freelance art critic for the BBC (radio and TV), Radio 2's flagship arts programme *The Arts Show with Claudia Winkleman* as well as for various independent radio stations throughout Great Britain. She is also a professional art mentor at University of Arts London (UAL).

artists should work with traditional materials, designs and techniques that are geographically specific to the East, and thereby easily identified as 'Eastern'?

In response to Darwent's piece, the styles, materials and techniques required in the making of sculpture or works of art are practised, historically developed and established all over the world but are also very much a product of today. They are constantly changing and morphing at different speeds and in different places. Modern techniques develop across the world but at different rates (Araeen 2002) and are now exchanged at a staggeringly fast rate. The artists in the exhibition, as well as artists working in the Middle East today, had and have access to the Internet and international travel.[68] The many objects, sculptures and artefacts at British and European Museums are a testament to the long and varied tradition of art creation in the Middle East. Techniques have developed over time and artists did not, and do not, live in a vacuum.

A rather negative and literal description of Ghadirian's work is in the writing of Laura Cumming:

> What a taunt this would be in an uncensored society, but over and again, these artists protest the daily constraints on freedom. Veiled women with graters, sieves and irons instead of faces; veiled women whose features are fading fast like exposed negatives; ranks of veiled women, kneeling in prayer, who turn out to be empty husks of tinfoil when you stoop to look into their eyes. Identical, faceless, made of kitchen materials: no getting away from the message.
>
> (Cumming 2009: n.p.)

Written for *The Observer,* Cumming spotlights both the work of Ghadirian and Attia (Figs. 22 and 23) as signs of protest, which may very well be a part of the artists' intentions; however, at the same time, and in the context of this work being shown in the West, this review does not seek to engage further with the topic and reinforces much of the same colonial narratives and familiar ideas of female repression and submissiveness, as well as the notion that somehow this work represents an entire country.

Finally, Estelle Lovatt offers the following review:

[68] Modernity travelled all over the world including Asia, Africa and the Caribbean and when these artists arrived here "they were not carrying another culture but a different levels of the same culture which they had left behind" (Araeen 2002).

> Iranian-American, Sara Rahbar's 'Flag # 19 Memories Without Recollection', has the US flag constructed from Persian textiles. Hanging upside-down, an insult to the Stars and Stripes and Americans themselves; and only to be used in times of dire emergency to signal distress. This ragged flag, approaching a traditional Amish-like Native American quilt, is worn-out with suicidal bullet belts. In Shadi Ghadirian's photographs, 'Like Everyday Series', women under burkhas have their faces replaced by everyday kitchen utensils. Reinventing themselves from the stereotype to the empowered, their one-dimensional monotone black chador replaced with Westernised floral-inspired prints…..Many artists are in the States, safe from Middle Eastern challenging political and religious oppression…The victimized Middle Easterner, once subservient and suffering under Islamic culture, is now free to enjoy American liberalism. Having chosen to live in 'Land of the Free', why do they attack their saviour the United States?
>
> (Lovatt 2009: n.p.)

The review by Estelle Lovatt fails to distinguish between the burkha and the chador in Ghadirian's work. Such a lack of differentiation is common in my experience when talking to people about Islamic dress. However, for this to occur in an article about a specific exhibition in which the author may reasonably be expected to know the difference is both disappointing and familiar. Lovatt's attitude and lack of knowledge about the visual worlds I have experienced is not an exception in my artistic and contemporary cultural context.[69] What defines the above review is a reliance upon colonial narratives and the idea that modernity happened in Western cultures or regions and has not permeated or developed anywhere else.

The above three reviews clearly mark the diasporic status of the artists but also how these artworks and artists became representative of the Middle East. Common to all three reviews is a stereotypical argument, one of the free West, as opposed to the repressed women of the East, of privileged artists with access to freedom, techniques and styles that somehow belong to a progressive and modern West. They suggest that such works are only capable of showing what exists in this other, war-torn Middle East, faced with censorship and lacking in agency, although there is absolutely no doubt

[69] It was not so long ago, while I was speaking to a senior academic, that she asked me, 'But aren't you guys forbidden to create images of people in Islam?' The fact that she was apparently viewing all that was Islamic collectively (expressed as "guys") gives one a clear indication that we continue to be viewed in general with religion as the primary criteria.

that some of the points raised about censorship and lack of freedom are valid. There is limited and almost next to no appreciation of the contribution these artists are making to the contemporary art worlds, nor the visual language brought to the modern art scene. What regularly seems to occur in many of these reviews is the idea of the Muslim woman and her lack of freedom in Iran, Afghanistan, or, in more general shorthand, the 'Middle East'.

3.5. Images and titles: under the banners of the veil

The exhibition *Light from the Middle East, New Photography* (2012–13) at the V&A followed much the same strategy as the above exhibitions: 30 'Middle Eastern' photographers were selected from North Africa to Central Asia, many of whom were based in Europe. The show dealt with political issues and life in the Middle East. Ghadirian's work was used as the cover page of this exhibition, this time with modern sunglasses and Ghajar gown.

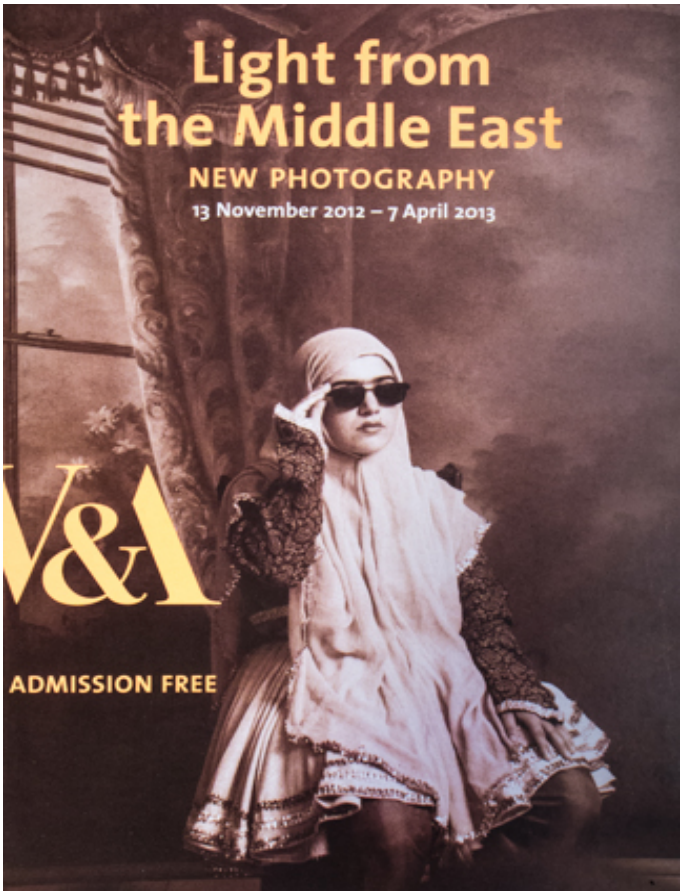
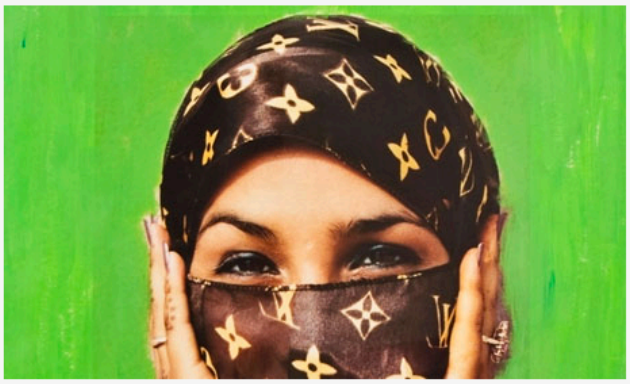


Figure 24: Cover page for the exhibition catalogue, featured image, Shadi Ghadirian (2012), screenshot

Light from the Middle East offers a true reflection of a complex region



Hassan Hajjaj, Saida in Green. Photograph: Art Fund Collection of Middle Eastern Photography at the V&A and the British Museum

Powered by theguardian This article titled "Light from the Middle East offers a true reflection of a complex region" was written by Jonathan Jones, for theguardian.com on Tuesday 13th November 2012 15.42 UTC

Figure 25: *Light from The Middle East* (2012), Hassan Hajaj, screenshot

Figure 26: Shadi Ghadirian, featured work on front cover of *Bidoun* art journal (spring 2004)

When considering *Light from the Middle East* and other exhibitions, the images (and thus, ideas) relating to Muslim women presented and taking centre stage in these exhibitions may be said to define and distort, emphasising issues of subjugation, lack of self-agency and freedom. Historical and political events inevitably feed into this narrative, most notably post 9/11, which enhanced fear and negative stereotypes. This, at times, charged and negative miasma (seen regularly in the media along with images of the Muslim woman), as seen above, also impacted issues of self-image and self-narration for female artists of the Muslim diaspora under the banner of the veil. I argue that the overuse of the veil as a signifier and the emphasis upon the veil could only create further reiterations of Oriental and colonial narratives that distort and continue to focus upon issues of subjugation, ideas of modernity verses tradition, lack of agency verses freedom, and so on.

Figures 27 and 28: Newspaper headlines and articles (left) and collage of exhibition catalogues and artist magazine cover pages (right)

Continued emphasis upon the veil as a central signifier of the image of the woman in any context (whether gallery, as discussed above, or newspaper, as discussed in Chapter 2) indicates that the *idea* of undifferentiated uniformity continues to be achieved through the repetition of words, image and rhetoric. Sanaz Fotouhi refers to this problem in a paper presented at the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia:

> Over the last several decades, particularly in the last ten years following 9/11, there has been an influx of narratives by Middle Eastern women themselves that promise to unravel and unveil the lives of Middle Eastern women. Among them, Muslim women of

> Arab, African and Iranian backgrounds have published hundreds of books recounting various aspects of their lives in the Middle East. Yet many of these narratives, despite aspiring to become a platform for the voices of Middle Eastern women, appear to be involved in further self-Orientalisation. While the covers of many of these books, with the veiled woman peering out at the audience, invite the Western reader to free her from her oppression by reading her tale, the contents of these books confirm what the Western reader already assumes about the oppression of Muslim women in the Middle East.[70]
>
> (Fotouhi 2012: n.p.)

Fotouhi reminds us of the influx of images (Fig. 27) that support the many memoirs published following the events of 9/11 in the West. Similarly, this process was happening in the world of visual arts, which saw a further distortion of creative and artistic voices, not only encouraging some artists to adopt self-Orientalisation and self-Othering as a continuation of the pre-eminent manner of representation presented through exhibitions, but also driving a considerable number of artists into confusion and self-censorship (Fig. 28). Some artists became silent rather than contesting this new imaginary that was subjected to visual and ideological Orientalist ideas. This aspect is examined regarding selected individual artists' work in Chapter 4.

It is worth considering the title and/or text that frame the cover page of catalogues such as *Unveiled: New Art from The Middle East* (Fig. 22) or *Light from The Middle East* (Fig. 24). While both catalogue covers focus on the veil, they do so in different ways. The image of Attia's *Ghost* (Fig. 22) alludes to Muslim women en masse, centralising and emphasising the veil as a signifier and indicating uniformity through repetition, as opposed to individuals wearing the garments. In the work, the women are missing, presented as hollowed-out figures and only represented through their metallic veils. Nameless, faceless and only recognised through the signifier of the veil, such representations draw upon a geographically located position (through connecting the title with the image on the cover) where there is a significant history. In contrast, Ghadirian's work depicts an Iranian woman wearing the traditional hijab, which is juxtaposed with modern sunglasses, emphasising the contradictory positions of women in Iran and the country's relationship to colonialism, privilege and class

[70] This paper was first presented at the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Conference *Cultural Re-Orientations and Comparative Colonialities* in Adelaide, Australia, in November 2011.

(Fig. 24).[71] The two works also have a direct relationship, both exoticised and troubled, which adds to the established colonial trope of needing rescue and pity, making the image both desirable and familiar.

Figure 29: Collage of book covers and titles

The titles and the images on the cover pages of the books combine to form an easily digestible approach, indicating a familiar story of a troubled region and the veiled woman who comes to represent it (Fig. 29). The titles and the images are in harmony, playfully and powerfully tapping into the curiosity of the public towards a country with a colonial history (Ahmed 2003). These representations become a focal point that indicate and implicate not only the artists involved, but also publishers, institutions and galleries. Donnell writes:

> A cursory glance at a cluster of publications on and by women in Afghanistan that have appeared post-11 September registers the persistence of the veil. Several life narratives of women who left Afghanistan have been published; all describe terrible personal sufferings as well as the afflictions [sic] of other women under the Taliban, but they also narrate these women's

[71] Fotouhi makes a clear observation of what this might mean both to Iranian women and the western viewer. She explains that to the Iranian woman, the message of modernity taps into a history of class system that was created and heavily influenced by colonial discourse that distinguished between a modern, western, educated and progressive woman and the women who were none of that (Fotouhi 2012). This formed a new binary relationship between women who had opportunities and the privilege to access to education and profession, which set them apart from their working class counterparts.

> ability to stage resistance and to escape. Despite the differences between the protagonists and their stories, the covers of three separate books – Siba Shakib, *Afghanistan: Where God Only Comes to weep*; Zoya with John Follain and Rita Cristofari, *Zoya's Story: An Afghan Woman's Battle for Freedom*; and Latifa with Chekeha Hachemi, *My Forbidden Face* – all show a woman or women wearing the burka. This very same image covers M.E. Hirsh's *Kabul*, Cheryl Benard and Edit Schlaffer's *Veiled Courage*: Inside the Afghan Women's Resistance, and also, most ironically, Harriet Logan's *Unveiled: Voices of Women in Afghanistan*…The persistent circulation of visual images of veiled Afghan women seems to suggest that George W. Bush's 'war' has translated their status from that of indifference into that of difference…[i]t is not always easy to decide whether the coverage has helped to campaign for social justice or has simply reiterated simplistic assumptions, stereotyped representations and political justifications for continued Western military intervention in the Middle East.
>
> (Donnell 2003: 124, original italics)

Donnell's list can be extended using many more examples of the veiled images of women, often emphasising the face or the eyes, directly gazing outward at the viewer and drawing on the notions of 'veiling, unveiling, oppression and imprisonment' and to highlight 'the acute difference between women's lives over there and here' (Fotouhi 2012: 29).[72]

How can female diaspora artists respond to such a deliberate concentration on veiling? The question arises as to whether artists, writers and cultural producers can avoid the reductive identity politics we are surrounded by, as expressed through various platforms (exhibitions, books, etc.) that continue to speak to the public through the narrow spectrum of images of the veil. In practical terms, for example, would Donnell refuse to publish her work in a book that applies the same pre-existing ideas to the front cover image (Fig. 20), and which typifies the concentration upon the image of the veil, which she contests and aims to highlight?

Hypothetically, if these criteria were applied to Bailey, Cotter and Tawadros, even though they acknowledge the preoccupation of their Western audience, saying 'that the word conjures up images in the mind's eye' (2003: 18), they *nevertheless* use the word *Veil* in bold red over the black-and-white image of an Algerian woman, a visual exemplar of differentiation, which announces and brings this reiteration back into focus via the cover page. The artists' images within the book, as well as numerous historical and exotic images of colonial photography, are a testament to this

[72] She gives examples of such images as book covers, including *Unveiled* (1995), *Prisoners of Tehran* (2008), Journey from the land of no (2004), *Rage Against the Veil* (1999), *In the house of my Bibi* (2008) and *Watch Me* (2010).

very problem, further reinforcing the title of the show, which itself makes full use of this Western obsession, *The Veil*.

At a recent book launch and Q&A at SOAS (2019), I raised the question to Peter Morey, author of *Islamophobia and The Novel*, why clichéd images of Muslim women and the veil are continuously being used on cover pages, together with equally sensationalist titles, even when the contents of the books speak of complexity regarding this subject.[73] The responses from the audience and the panel of writers were revealing in that publishers clearly use these knowingly as a selling point. What this indicates is that the apparent appetite of the public for loaded images that are familiar historical symbols remains something that may be both readily provided and perpetuated. What is of interest to this research is that artists, curators, photographers, publishers and the art market are seemingly quite aware of such desires and continue to oblige the market.

3.6. Concluding observations

Thus far, this thesis has traced an Orientalist history of perception among Western audiences and examined how this history and perception of the Other continues in a range of contemporary exhibitions. Drawing together the various points raised by Hazell (2008), Javaherian (2008) and Balaghi (2008), the following observations and ideas that not only concern the exhibition *30 Years of Solitude,* but also apply to the exhibitions, images and titles previously discussed are evident:

- The idea that, somehow, an exhibition (such as *30 Years of Solitude*) by unhappy women can represent an entire unhappy nation.
- The tremendous demand for images from the Islamic revolution.
- The desperate desire to know the Muslim subject in categorising, showcasing and cataloguing these artists within a Western context.
- That art must remain embedded in the past and in the East. Diaspora artists become defined by place or homelessness.
- The desire of an American or Eurocentric public/audience for shows and for artists who demonstrate an identity different from, and Other to, that of their own.

[73] Donnell gives reference to three different book covers including that of the front cover of Latifa My Forbidden Face (2002) but examples are many such as the cover of Reading Lolita In Tehran by Azar Nafisi (2003).

- A hunger for getting to know the Otherness of the Muslim subject through their work and specifically curated shows, images and titles.
- Anxiety-desire on the part of 'Iranian Society' not to be seen or marked as 'terrorists'.
- That everything has to be validated by the West before we acknowledge it ourselves. It is, in effect, in the words of Javaherian, 'East by West.'

I further add:

- That the woman appears veiled or exotic (repetitively) suggests, through image and title, an upholding of colonial narratives, which adds to the established colonial trope of needing both rescue and pity, making these images both desirable, threatening and familiar.
- That dialogues and images continue to engage with colonial history rather than confronting its present.
- That imagery around the veil almost always seems to draw upon these other geographical spaces that are not here, where there *is* a significant history.
- That a Western preoccupation with the veil, both in its *textual* form (as a book/book title) and in its *visual* form (images of veiled women, and I would include exhibitions and exhibition titles), provides a ready-made or clichéd platform for the creative and literary industry.

Combining these points, we begin to see a colonial power dynamic that persists and makes its presence felt in our contemporary socio-political and artistic environments. It can be argued that the above observations make it more difficult for creative agents to establish and project a different visual narrative and image as a way of achieving an independent voice that does not comply with the above. This dynamic sets a contradictory context for artists and curators alike, through which they can respond with an apologetic voice (within a Western artistic context), seemingly constrained to prove their innocence or compliance through a modernity that is in line with colonial power structures through their artworks. Platforms are available if we can express our 'exotic or political Otherness' (Araeen 2002: 341) or define the Other as backward, passive, unhappy or discontent and devoid of agency. In short, one may gain a platform if one aspires to a pre-eminently Western form of modernity, which,

at its heart, has a colonial discourse, and if one is happy to be collectively presented as all or some of the above as artists from the Middle East (Ahmed 2003; Fotouhi 2012).

Issues of reductive identity politics are not simply a process of artists producing exotic work or wearing the veil but indicate an underlying and unspoken dynamic that served to determine the platform, the production and the representation of the work, limiting the scope of conversation and dialogue with a Western audience and in relation to coloniality. This factor constitutes a multifaceted challenge for many in the production of art with 'post-colonial agency' (Dabashi 2009), which, in essence, is more interested today in conversing transnationally and in dealing with global inequalities.

The complexities expressed above reveal and reflect a challenging position that involves all parties: curators, audience, artworks, artists, cultural producers and critics. This is a phenomenon that I suggest results from a colonialist and Orientalist history, coupled with current Islamophobia propagated through the media. Particularly since 9/11, this phenomenon performs from this part of the world with an accusing eye that sees Muslims as potential terrorists and women as passive or unhappy and repressed within the confine of their own cultural and traditional context. This view points to an Otherness that inevitably impacts Muslim diaspora women artists and will arguably take much more than essays and exhibitions to cast out from the collective mind of Western audiences.

So far, this chapter has considered the complexities involved in the type and range of exhibitions, as well as what some art historians and curators in this field of contemporary art are subjected to. The above analysis reveals the power relationship not only in the dynamic of the binary created, East versus West, but also in relation to 9/11, which leaves women artists of the Muslim diaspora as vulnerable as the women at King Sharyar's discretion (Balaghi 2008).[74] It is a subaltern relationship struck in relation to artistic platforms, art productions and their audience.

I pause here and suggest that the conditions of women artists of the Muslim diaspora are neither isolated nor disconnected phenomena. There is a history and experience of other diaspora artists and exhibiting Black and Asian artists in Britain that may illuminate the advantages and limits of identity politics.

[74] Shahryar (the king) and Sheherezade's husband.

3.6.1 The question of self-Orientalising

During the early years of the new millennium, while the success of Neshat's exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery generated a great deal of interest, the popularity of such shows was questioned and debated by a number of artists and critics, such as Raimi Gbadamosi's questioning of 'self-Orientalisation'.[75] In his essay *Black Skin, White Space* (2006) for *Axis*, Gbadamosi refers to self-Orientalisation and self-exoticising as possible deliberate strategies to explain how artists are capable of aligning themselves with an art market with a particular agenda and appetite. The quote, below, demonstrates such a point.

> Within the British and international art market, the need to establish the raw nature of the artist has become pertinent in order to compete. This means that marketable elements of artists' identity (religion, gender, deviations of any kind, sexual preference, race, nationality, language) are actively isolated. The more obvious the better, most of all it has to be visually available or definable in the short span of time it takes to view the artwork. Artists are aware of this demand and choose to position themselves accordingly.[76]
>
> (Gbadamosi 2006: n.p.)

Gbadamosi pays particular attention to questions of Blackness as an oppositional stance, a political and developmental strategy and the way this Blackness is performed in the public realm. He considers two artists who respond to the discussion of self-Orientalisation as a strategy for exposure: Harold Offeh and Suki Chan. Gbadamosi's essay gives Chan and Offeh the opportunity to reason this position of self-exoticisation/Orientalisation. As an artist, Chan reveals an important point regarding the lack of opportunity for artists on the margins, coming from a non-Western background, to benefit from exposure and to develop their work. As Chan says:

> It can be tempting to adopt an easily identifiable identity, especially if you are an emerging artist, but if the work cannot stand up on its own merit – as an art work in itself, perhaps ultimately, it will not stand the test of time. Artists can disappear as quickly as he or she appeared, however they were catapulted into the limelight.
>
> (Chan 2006: n.p)

[75] I was part of such debates with artist friends, including Gbadamosi.
[76] For *Axisweb* creating platforms for artists.

In response to the same issue, Offeh comments, 'in this climate, I think it's very difficult to escape a process of self-Orientalisation and, in many ways, it becomes an attractive strategy' (Offeh 2006: n.p.). Given such responses, it is perhaps not surprising that we saw many more exhibitions and artists who fulfil the roles of the exoticised and political Other as a point of interest within their artistic productions.

Figure 30: Harold Offeh, *Being Mammy* (2004)

Although Gbadamosi withholds judgement towards any particular artist or using self-exoticisation as a strategy, he is concerned that the artist and the artwork can become bound to cultural identity and, therefore, perhaps commodified in the process. He concludes,

> What happens to the artist who has compromised too much in its creation to be able to step from the periphery to the centre? All artists seek their work's independence, unfortunately self-Orientalising practices render distance difficult in their umbilical relationship, a ceaseless two-way referral denies the growth of art and artist.
>
> (Gbadamosi 2006: n.p.)

Gbadamosi's concern, based on self-exoticism, and Araeen's heavy criticism of masquerading of a political Otherness on account of a distinguishable self-identity, as well as the potential pitfalls of such self-representation, indicate serious concerns for the diasporic artists who by necessity have to deal with identity as an issue, such as in the work of Offeh, commenting upon racial stereotyping (Fig. 30).

The choice facing diaspora artists may be either to self-Orientalise and, thus, become or adopt the mantle of political Otherness as Araeen (2002) critiques and as

Gbadamosi (2006) explores, or to negate or distance themselves from what may be termed an artificial and inauthentic stance by removing or avoiding all such significations on the basis that it is a contrivance.

In the case of women artists of the Muslim diaspora, the events of 9/11 arguably rendered the appearance of veiled Muslim women more significant and complex, partly because there already existed an established and loaded series of symbols.[77] Such identifiers isolated and performed can only ascribe the women diaspora artists of the Muslim world a reductive identity, which can neither push the dialogue forward nor transform the image. This thesis marks this moment as significant to what I locate and define as the *IOFO* as a key problem in artistic productions and reception.

3.6.2 Conclusion: The Islamo-Orientalised Female Other (IOFO)

It is this focus on women, traditionally veiled, their images conflated as Muslim female, at times exoticised and Othered for Western consumption that establishes a historical and contemporary phantom I call the IOFO.[78] The IOFO was born in the Western imagination, a phantom described and depicted in literature, art, music and cinema, making such imaginings widely available to its Western, European, American audiences and later across the world.

What I term the IOFO is a visualised idea-product of Orientalism that has elements of expectation, reception and production. It has qualities and attributes but no fixed specific form since it may respond as contexts and times dictate. It has elements of desire and availability (e.g. the odalisque or the belly dancer), elements of submissiveness (the unrepresented female-dominated within a patriarchy), elements of threat and violence (the protesting, vocal marcher en masse wearing a chador or a hejab) and the potential of an obscured threat (such as guns and terrorism).

The IOFO stands for the representations and projections of women who have been 'Othered' by a systematic Western gaze that is historically burdened with the specific preconceived visual identity of 'Orientalism'.[79] As such, the image of the IOFO constitutes a palimpsest of art and culture, television and radio programmes,

[77] For example the veil, the belly dancer, the passive and backward, the available odalisque, etc.
[78] Phantom refers to the discussion in previous chapters on how the history of Orientalism remains in the contemporary imaginary like a phantom.
[79] This written, painted, reported, filmed and photographed history.

reportage and cinematic representations as women from the Muslim worlds, which I have explored throughout the previous chapters.

The IOFO may be viewed as a constructed 'Frankenstein's bride' made up of many different parts, assembled to represent a phantom defined by the audience's assumptions, constructed over time, and continually reimagined through subsequent, regular reanimations and revisualisations. The IOFO, then, is partly about an imagining – a psychological space created that takes place somewhere between the subaltern female artist of the Muslim diaspora, her work, and her Western audience.

Inspired by Mulvey (1999) and Spivak (1993), who explore unequal power relations through the cinematic gaze and voice, respectively, my thesis draws on such theoretical positions to illustrate the representation and the role of women of the Muslim diaspora, especially the representation of their bodies at the forefront, as a visual and psychological screen that becomes the battleground for implementing hierarchical power structures.[80] It is in locating this problematic position as women from elsewhere with a particular history, and in recognising these women as 'phantoms' with a 'subaltern' status, describing their 'muteness' and their history, that my thesis locates the IOFO in the Western contemporary art environment.

Adding to the historical picture above, this thesis tests the construction of this Frankenstein's bride, this IOFO, to understand and contextualise the epistemic violence within my/our own artistic productions and those of women artists of the Muslim diaspora in a similar predicament as a way of moving forward. The central question is whether the subaltern (the IOFO artist) can speak despite this environment. Is it possible to negotiate a different space for communicating and interpreting her artistic productions without having to self-Other? Given that subversion and resistance through an identity can have an adverse effect with the potential to reiterate and resurrect the centrality of the Imperial narrative, Part 2 of this thesis further develops the strategies of decolonising and de-Orientalising by decentralising and disengaging with such strategies.

The following chapter, Chapter 4, pays attention to the practice of other artists. I discuss and highlight the possibility of agile thinking on the part of some artists in their work (to use Fanon's analysis) to respond to and resist the IOFO gaze

[80] The subordinate was first adopted by Antonio Gramsci to those groups in society who are subject to hegemony. In critical studies of postcolonialism, the term subaltern designates the populations, which are socially, politically and geographically outside the hegemonic power structure of the colony and of the colonial homeland (Ashcroft et al. 2013).

through the act of subversion. Finally, I depart from the problematic of the IOFO by using my voice as a woman artist by decentralising reductive identity politics through my own practice in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Voice and self-representation

4.1 Introduction

In Part 1 of this thesis, I explored and defined the IOFO by ascribing its historical, socio-political and artistic contexts. Part 2 examines the concept of the IOFO based on the work of specific women artists of the diaspora. I focus on Iranian artists in particular due to my own cultural proximity to explore the use of voice through their artistic production and contribution to the contemporary art scene. This chapter examines the practices of artists such as Shirazeh Houshiary, Shirin Neshat, Atousa Bandeh Ghiasabadi and Maryam Hashemi to explore their artistic approaches to the subject(s) of women, Orientalism, Islamophobia and visual signifiers. This approach develops an understanding of their subjective positioning in their artworks and in relation to the IOFO. I then discuss the work of two Iranian film directors, namely Ana Lily Amirpour, in her film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2007). The aim is to examine how they respectively represent the image of the female, and how their characters reflect on issues of agency and voice without falling into the trap of self-Orientalisation and self-Othering. This discussion enables a consideration of specific approaches to cultural aesthetics, signifiers such as the veil, calligraphic text, Tazhib (ornamental patterning), and the exploration of self-representation through image and visual narrative.

In a review of the exhibition *Iran Inside Out – Influences of Homeland and Diaspora on Artistic Language of Contemporary Iranian Artists* (2009) in the Chelsea Art Museum, New York, Yulia Tikhonova overhears the following remark from two viewers of the exhibition: 'Well she is doing this Orientalist shit because they buy that' (2017: 110). Such comments about the works of women artists who use Orientalist aesthetics and signifiers are not uncommon.[81] Tikhonova discusses some of the artworks in the exhibition and the use of what has come to represent the 'Middle East' through common signifiers such as calligraphy, religion and war. She claims that such signifiers are used deliberately by the artists concerned to fulfil the

[81] In fact the overuse of the veil and its popular reception has earned itself the nick name of 'Chador Art' as a cliché. As referred to in a recent discussion with Katy Shahandeh on *the Iconography of the Veil* as part of the research network series of talks *Veiled Allusion* (InIVA, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PifaXpo-_qY). Accessed on 20 December 2020.

expectation of a Western market for clichéd subjects, thereby risking the work falling into a self-Orientalising category (Tikhonova, 2017).

Tikhonova provides examples of the many artists, such as Ala Ebtekar, whose painting *Ascension* (2007) uses calligraphic text appropriated from the pages of a prayer book overlaid on images of American bombs and missiles. Other examples include Ahkami's use of the odalisque in a naive and cartoon-like style that merges into a quilt of Persian patterning. Tikhonova claims that many of the artists in the exhibition applied exotic and sensational motifs that attest to a desire to match the viewer's expectation. For her, these artists belong to a 'yes generation', who fall into the trap of 'ethnic marketing' applied to art strategies that play on the ethnographic references that are desired by the West, pushing these artists towards self-exoticisation and self-Orientalising (2009: 110).[82] She further refers to Tan Walchli's (2004) essay in *Bidoun* (2004) and Tirdad Zolghadr (2007).[83] Walchli references Zolghadr's definition of ethnic marketing in the arts and explains:

> In applying the term [ethnic marketing] to the art market, Zolghadr has reversed its meaning. In the realm of the arts, ethnic minorities are no longer customers, but rather, are rendered producers. International artists are welcomed to the new global art market — but only if their works bear witness to an ethnically specified, cultural background....Zolghadr's mantra: the process of globalization forces non-Western artists to produce works that both follow the Western tradition and differ from it.
>
> (Walchli 2005: n.p.)

Such terms and markets, as explained by Walchli, concern artistic productions developed in response to policies that went beyond artists and curators. In an email interview for a report on the future of public funding for contemporary art in Europe (European Cultural Policies 2015) with Raimund Minichbauer, Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin discusses an attempt by the European cultural sector to invent a southeast European region that was not only based on economic, geographical and political concerns, but also on a need for 'Otherness' in relation to Europe. Hence, a desire to and need for the exotic, folkloric, ethnic, marginal, peripheral, which frames cultural

[82] Tikhonova elaborates on the 'yes generation', explaining that 'those who cherish any exhibition opportunity that comes their way, a kind of podium or catwalk with a bit of travel, rest, relaxation and networking as perks' (2009: 110). Tikhonova further draws on Tan Walchli's (2004) term 'ethnic marketing': 'a reference hitherto widely used in economics, public relations and advertising; a classically defined ethnic marketing references a strategy of shaping products according to customers' desires — desires supposedly determined by their cultural habits'.
[83] Tirdad Zolghadr is a curator and writer and author/Editor of Ethic Marketing (2007). Published by Jrp Ringier.

policies too. As Alptekin says, '[t]he issue of the "other" and "otherness" has been discussed for the last fifteen years and has become a cliché, but the problem still exists' (Alptekin 2015: 73). The comment by Alptekin not only makes sense of the development of exhibitions since 2000, but also of why and how some artists positioned themselves as 'self-Orientalising' after the millennium and in response to public funding in the field of contemporary visual arts. As Alptekin explains,

> The structure of funding and supporting the projects is hierarchical. One side is applying, the other is offering; one is proposing, the other is answering; one is asking, the other is compromising; one is wishing, the other is negotiating. One is supposed to be such and such and therefore the applicant claims that he/she is such and such… One's position is controlled and he/she answers to that. One is supposed to be 'the other'.
>
> (Alptekin 2015: 77)

In Chapter 3, I discussed the problems articulated by Tikhonova, Zoghadr and Walchli in relation to exhibition histories regarding the exotic titles and themes of the exhibitions, images of veiled women and book covers as stereotypes pertaining to the IOFO. In this chapter, I demonstrate how strategies of self-Orientalising and self-Othering are implicated in artistic work. I do this through a detailed study of Shirin Neshat's photographic series (*Women of Allah*, 1993–97) and pose the question as to why her visual strategies in these works acquire a self-Orientalising quality. Subsequently, I concentrate on women artists who question such strategies (despite the expectation of their Western context in relation to Orientalist aesthetics and colonial visual references). Such artists employ complex artistic strategies and thereby seek their own voice and visual language through their artistic output. I discuss how women artists develop deliberate artistic strategies that are additional to the binary choice above and that develop substantially in nature throughout time.

I begin this investigation with the work of Shirazeh Houshiary, a prominent British-Iranian female artist who moved to the UK in 1973. Houshiary was chosen as a starting point to contrast and examine artistic concerns before the year 2000.

4.2 Shirazeh Houshiary

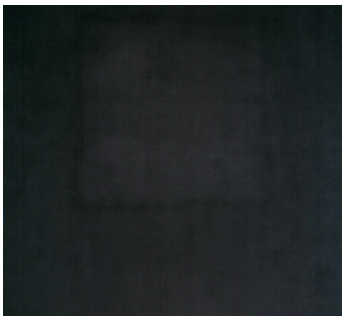


Figure 31: Shirazeh Houshiary *Veil* (1999), from series *Self Portraits*, 1902 x 1902 x 36 mm, acrylic paint and graphite on canvas

Houshiary is a prominent sculptor and installation artist who I was introduced to in 1985 and subsequently visited her at her London studio while completing my fine art degree in sculpture. At the time, Houshiary was one of the very first women artists in the UK I knew who was practising sculpture and to whom I could relate in terms of my own practice as a diasporic Iranian female artist. Distinct to her practice is her approach to subject and form in space (she draws her inspiration from the poetic spirituality of the Sufi tradition) and the challenges that the physicality of sculptural forms exert upon the relationship between mathematics, poetry, art, and architecture.

Having started as a sculptor, Houshiary gradually moved towards two-dimensional work. Of particular interest to this research are her self-portrait series in which she presents us with a black square painting/drawing entitled *Veil* (1999; Fig. 31), which is now in the Tate collection. The title of the work relates to Sufi poetry as much as it does to the traditional black chador often worn by Iranian women. Houshiary's two-dimensional work (in the above series) often uses the density of graphite and pencil to inscribe single word/s as a textual mantra that is repeated, applying varying degrees of pressure to the canvas, changing shade and shadow, making the surface of the canvas into a subtle but complex experience. In a sense, Houshiary's work, and the experience of it as the gaze touches the surface of her painting/drawing, may be said to constitute a spiritual exercise that is influenced by

the works of the Sufi poet Rumi, which often refer to knowledge found through darkness.[84]

The subtle changes in the varying intensity of black defy any signification or message in placing the work as the coded veil worn by a woman. The veil is separated from the physical image of a face or body, changing and shifting in meaning and experience, which leaves the viewer in a state of curiosity, of unknowing. The surface denies photographic capture as it sensitively changes its density of colour and texture: the quality of graphite fluid lines and marks morphs as they respond to light and the immediate environment. Houshiary refers to the work as a 'protest against knowing', which she describes as follows:

> The whole purpose of doing that painting is not to be able to see. You go across. [Y]ou see just the materiality of the surface …, and it's finite, its nothing there …and then you begin to see, slowly, it takes time, almost a kind light opens at the centre of this black and then you see space, you see infinity because what it's trying to say is how difficult it is for us to perceive the nature of reality. We always think we know but yet we really don't know, and black square is a protest against knowing.
>
> (Houshiary 2015)

This rather intuitive, abstract approach, which contrasts with the strongly image-based qualities of Shirin Neshat's work, gives us a sense of the materiality of the veil and an absorbing depth in experiencing the darkness of the surface. This is how Houshiary claims to 'find light', since the surface becomes for her a place of comprehension and eventual understanding. This is interesting because of the way we examine photographic poster images of veiled women, often with few ambiguities attached to them. The veil is fixed to the image of the woman and the words accompanying the image define that fixity. In her depiction of the veil, Houshiary adds a different take and sensitivity: a quiet voice using the density of the surface engendering reflection and thought rather than the direct messaging that serves to define the audience's interpretation.

Houshiary's approach to the veil, one that is not physically worn and is, therefore, not graphically placed on the body of the woman, did not find a place in *The Veil* exhibition (2003) or register in the academic study of the woman, veil and Islam or in geographically specified exhibitions (mentioned and discussed in Chapter

[84] Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, also known as Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī, Mevlânâ/Mawlānā, and more popularly simply as Rumi, was a 13th-century Persian poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic originally from Greater Khorasan.

3) as Shirin Neshat did, even though Houshiary clearly does deal with both the subject of veil and vision of the veil, with an (Islamic) Sufi approach. This begs the question as to why?

What differs in Houshiary's veil is that it is *not* a graphically performed representation that would tap into a graphic sign of identity defined by myth, image and text to convey and reinforce the IOFO attitudes and perception. Houshiary's veil does not sit easily with categories of Iran and Muslim women being repressed and yet simultaneously threatening. Instead, Houshiary's work, as I have noted, is quietly and deeply rooted in the Muslim tradition of Sufi mysticism. It is not in step with Oriental or colonial aesthetics or region-specific exhibitions such as *Light from the Middle East* (2012). It explores the veil spiritually and, therefore, one may say, beyond a reductive Orientalist or colonialist association with, and categorisation of, the 'other'.

4.3 The Islamo-Orientalised Female Other in the work and reception of Shirin Neshat

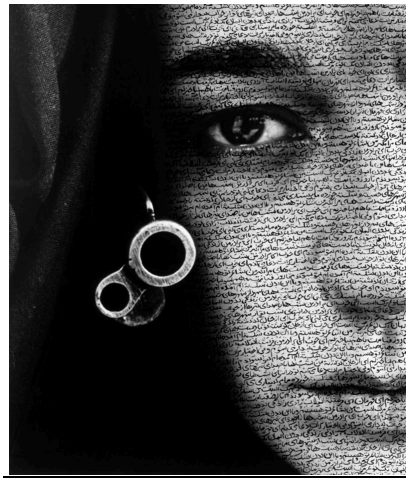


Figure 32. Shirin Neshat, *Speechless* (*Women of Allah* series), 1996, gelatin silver print, 25.4 x 20.3 cm

In the previous chapter, I discussed Neshat's work within the context of exhibition histories and the value of this exhibition within a British contemporary art context (Fig. 19). Now, I discuss her work in the context of other Iranian-born artists and in relation to her use of signifiers, through which it is possible to identify the IOFO both in her work and its reception (Fig. 32, same as Fig. 19).

In Chapter 1, I introduced Orientalist aesthetics, referencing Orientalist painters and their elaborate use of colour, decorative internal architectural spaces such

as the harem, half-naked women, and so on. Such signifiers did not go unnoticed by Kabbani, who referenced visual signifiers such as cloaks, daggers, sword, turbans, sashes and shawls, slippers, veils of silk and satin, tambourines and scrolls, cushions, patterned carpets, *mashrabiyya* (elaborately carved wooden screens often through geometric shapes), tile-work, arches and domes (Kabbani 2008: 41). All these elements have the potential to signal the Orient to the viewer. Added to the above were the black-and-white photographs, reminiscent of the colonial period, as illustrated by Alloula. One such signifier is the black chador, a symbol of the revolutionary Iranian woman (see Fig. 8, Chapter 2). It is significant to, and associated with, the political context of the Iranian Revolution, women's marches, hostage crises and through reportage in the media; the latter creates a new aesthetic in depicting the black chador as an Islamic visual signifier suggestive to the viewer both in relation to women and to an Islamic Iran.

Figures 33, 34 & 35: Shirin Neshat, photographs from the *Women of Allah* series (1993–97), 35.5 x 27.8 cm, B&W print & ink

In the following section, I unpack some of these visual signifiers in Neshat's photographic work *Women of Allah* (1993–97). Her photographic works pertaining to the IOFO help to create an IOFO aesthetic, which is at once politically and aesthetically Othered.

- The prominence of a black-and-white photographic theme. A theme that, while it is not an uncommon mode of expression, historically predates colour photography and, therefore, is visually reminiscent of photographs from a time in the past, in which a relationship begins to take form between the woman, the past and her chador.

- The black chador has become, and had been for some time when Neshat's work was produced, a potent and recognisable symbol associated with Iran and Islam. Donning this clothing sets her clearly as both an Iranian and a Muslim woman (gendered, religious and located geographically).
- The use of heavy, black eyeliner accentuates her gaze but also is a further signification of her difference and is similar to colonial photography of women of the East (e.g. in Fig. 20 of Algerian woman).
- In the photographs (Figs. 33, 34 and 35), Neshat is covered in a chador – with only the face, the feet and the hands uncovered. In this way, Neshat performs a visibly Muslim role. Associating the *self* with the signs of difference is inherent in the work.
- The Farsi text inscribed on the woman's face (the same alphabet as Arabic) renders Neshat's *Speechless* (Fig. 32) as an identifier of her both as different and associated with the East.
- The Farsi script allows Neshat to represent the revolutionary Iranian woman by inscribing the words of a revolutionary poem, that of Tehraneh Saffarzadeh (1980), which reads: 'O, you martyr, hold my hands… I am your poet … I have come to be with you, and on the promised day, we shall rise again.'[85] In this poem, martyrdom is the fantasy of a hero for a young woman (Saffarzadeh), but for Neshat it is not only a major trauma, but also a central inspiration for works.[86, 87] By creating this juxtaposition, Neshat seems to partake in the ideas or values of a revolution, but it is one which, despite presenting familiar images of this revolution to her Western audience, she had not experienced herself.

[85] Tehraneh Saffarzadeh (1980)

[86] In the poem, Saffarzadeh addresses her revolutionary brothers as angels of freedom and speaks of revolution and her desire to be with them, asking them to take her hand, to let her look after them. She describes them as protectors of her cities, and how waking up at night with the sound of their gunshots, she helplessly begins to pray for them. However, when Saffarzadeh wrote this poem, or indeed when Neshat herself inscribes these words, she was hardly aware of the role these heroes would play after the revolution and the power they subsequently exercised in relation to Iranian women.

[87] Much of Neshat's poetry applied to the photographs uses Forough Farokhzad poetry [Forough Farrokhzad (1934-1967) was an influential, controversial Iranian poet, feminist and film director. Movies include *The House Is Black* and *I Will Greet The Sun Again*.] . For further read please see Hamid Dabashi, *The Gun and the Gaze, Shirin Neshat photography;* in Shirin Neshat, Women of Allah.

- The use of Farsi script[88] and Tazhib (Figs. 34 and 35) are perhaps likely to become decorative elements on the face to a Western audience unlikely to be able to decipher the textual and poetic elements when included or overlaid on the face, leaving the work to become a symbol open to viewers' interpretation but one that can be readily geographically identified, reinforcing both the Oriental and Muslim woman (using the same visual method as already discussed in Chapters 1 and 3).[89]
- As a result of the combination of elements outlined above, she is cast as a representative of Islam, female, veiled, past, Iran and revolution. Despite Neshat's distanced and oblique view of the women who took part in the Iranian Revolution and who bore the consequences during and after, she nevertheless is cast as the champion due to her close proximity with, and deployment of, the symbols and identifiers discussed above.
- In Fig. 33, the veil, the gun, and the gaze of the woman are thrown back at the audience, making the woman doubly threatening with the denial of the gaze, revealing a gun that could be a threat.
- By embodying the signifiers in her photographs, both political and artistic, she becomes the character or narrator of a contemporary exploration, both in cultural media and in academic scholarship within the visual arts.

Neshat's desire in participating and representing the female Muslim revolutionary lies not only in the veil, but also in other symbols and the poetry which she inscribes over her face and body in the photographs of the *Women of Allah* series. In this way, Neshat projects herself as an artist, donning the visual imagery of the Islamic revolution. Somewhere between the artist communicating the Muslim veiled woman of Iran, stylised and decorated by calligraphy, and the audience viewing the work, is a space where an IOFO is both communicated and received. The distanced Iranian female artist Neshat constructs an image of what she comes to represent of the Iranian

[88] The intricate calligraphic quality of the script as well as its application onto the flat photographic surface.
[89] Tazhib is a non-figurative Islamic decorative art used as illumination that has traditionally adorned the margins of holy books and epic poems, as well as being an art form in its own right.

Muslim woman through script, dress and design as she embodies and performs it in her own Islamic and Oriental photographs. The Orientalist Oriental becomes 'Islamicised' within the frame of Neshat's visual narrative and is given voice within the prominent space of the Serpentine Gallery.

The audience reciprocates this medley by calling upon its colonial memory. The IOFO is then received on the familiar terms of the audience, who *already know* the female Oriental subject (through historical stories, media representation, popular filmic representations, *etc.*). The gaze of the audience is once more informed by Neshat's artistic output. In the context of her exhibition, the implied subaltern (the real Iranian Muslim female revolutionary) never spoke, never represented herself. It is Neshat, the intellectual from a privileged position as an Iranian artist distanced from Iran (who did not participate in the historical events referred to in the exhibition), who speaks for her.[90]

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the extensive exposure and success of Neshat's exhibition could be said to have encouraged many more exhibitions and representations of the Middle East and its female artists, such as Shadi Ghadirian *Like Every Day* (2000–01) discussed in the previous chapter and her use of the veil in relation to women and domesticity, as well as contrasting modernity *versus* tradition reiterating colonial and Orientalist historical narratives, as explored by Ahmed (2003) in Chapter 3. A similar point could be made regarding Zineb Sedira's photographs of anonymous veiled women with her *Self-Portraits of the Virgin Mary* (2000), which are 'elegant and beautiful', reinforcing the mystic of the feminine veil (Lutfi 2004). Seeming to echo a similar technique , I would also mention Jananne Al-Ani's *Veil* (1997), which contrasts exposure versus the veil. While seeking to negate the gaze, these artists nevertheless (through the use of devices such as the veil), came closer to enforcing particular established representations – arguably evoking Orientalist and colonialist narratives/readings within their work.

In light of the idea of performing an Islamic Orientalism and its Otherness as practice, I now examine the work of artists who have gradually become aware of this complex exchange and who seek alternative strategies.

[90] This is not to say that we as artists do not have the right to speak of another place that we have a proximity to, but rather what I wish to reflect upon here is the reception, representation and finally the impact of such representation and on the subsequent exhibitions thereafter.

Reaction, Rejection: self-censorship or self-Orientalise?

4.4 Atousa Bandeh Ghiasabadi

In 2006, Atousa Bandeh Ghiasabadi established a collective of four artists and two writers as an artistic initiative in response to a call by the Ministry of Culture (Netherlands) to create a culturally diverse project.[91] In this section, I discuss this artist's project, which was first exhibited as an installation at the Azad Art Gallery in Tehran in 2008 before it was developed into a publication entitled *Sideways: Reflections on Changing Contexts in Art* (2010).[92]

Ghiasabadi's motivation was to explore the challenges she faced as a student at art school in a European context and a diasporic Iranian female artist in the Netherlands. The six individuals were selected based on their diversity and difference.[93] By working with these individuals, Ghiasabadi was interested in the geographical and cultural contexts of an artist and how this change of context might affect her artistic aesthetics and production, as well as other artists' work. Ghiasabadi's research not only resonates with myself as an artist, but also demonstrates a common experience of women artists working mainly within a Western context.

As a result of her project, Ghiasabadi compiled a series of locators, which she used as the title and cover page for the accompanying publication (Fig. 36). The title came from a list she used in her work to avoid two different functions: first, being 'generalised, simplified and exoticised' (2010: n.p.); and second, resisting a perception that inevitably denies what represents her 'authentic self' and individual identity.

[91] Atousa Bandeh Ghiasabadi is an Iranian artist and film maker who was educated within a European art institution.
[92] The exhibition was subsequently shown at the Museum for Contemporary Art in Arnhem in 2010.
[93] The names of the six artists were Sara Blokland (Netherlands, born 1969), Bassam Chekhes (Syrië, born 1965), Katrin Korfmann (Germany, born 1971), writer Nickel van Duijvenboden (Netherlands, born 1981 and philosopher Tina Rahimy (Iran, born1975).

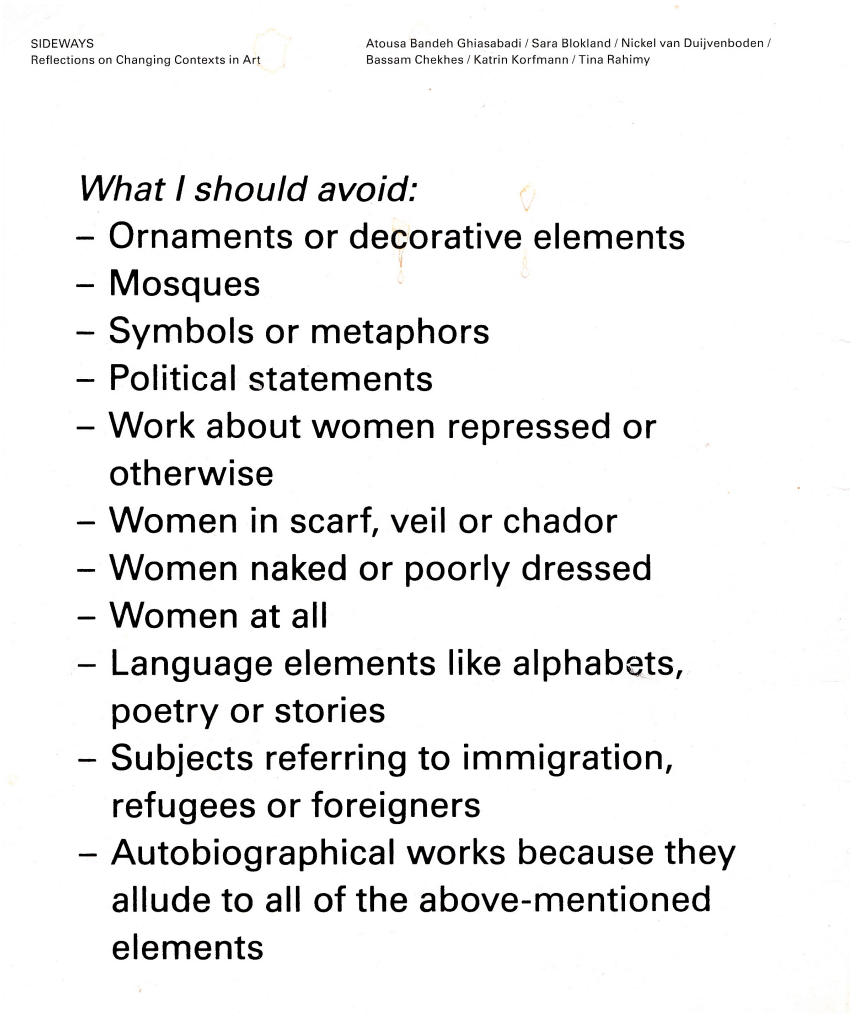


Figure 36: Cover page, *Sideways: Reflections on Changing Contexts in Art* (2008)

The list suggests locators and references to Ghiasabadi's cultural background, such as ornament, symbols, metaphors, religion and mosques, politics, women, women's dress, alphabets, poetry, stories, immigration, refugees and biographies. Ghiasabadi then used the list above to make her work look the same as that of her contemporaries, but later decided to take the same list as a starting point from which to discuss stereotypes and assumptions about her cultural identity. She argues that, due to being in a different context and through internalising the values and assumptions projected onto her, she made work and used aesthetics that did not truly reflect her own ideas. She writes,

> The responsibility to be representative of a whole culture made me reject the idea of being me – an individual with my own specific cultural background, reflecting my own personal experiences onto all aspects of my life – in favour of a media-made political, Orientalised projection of my birth country. The images I produced during this period at the art academy had no real relation

> with me as an individual, but instead represented the idea I thought was expected from me.
>
> (Ghiasabadi 2010: n.p.)

In the above quote, Ghiasabadi demonstrates the problems of engaging with preconceived ideas of political, cultural and artistic identity projected on to female diasporic artists, as well as the dilemmas of facing a choice between compliance with a clichéd artificiality of iconic content and the reaction against this situation by visual artists. She further explains,

> The more my teachers pushed me to make works related to my background the more confused I became, not knowing what this background was that they were always talking about…the background they were actually talking about was a generalized one, the idea of me as a person from a non-Western culture. As I continuously tried to look at myself through their eyes, I started to shape a clichéd image of myself that had nothing to do with who I was. I had become a foreigner to myself, an Iranian who represented a culture. Something vague to do with being a woman, Islam, wearing scarves or chadors, being suppressed and so on. ... The images I produced during this period at the art academy had no real relation with me as an individual, but instead represented the idea I thought was expected from me.
>
> (Ghiasabadi 2010: n.p.)

Of interest to this thesis is Ghiasabadi's sense of being ambushed by perceptions surrounding her, such as her art school tutors and the audience/market expectations, which impacted her practice. She explains that her personal experience of art school in the Netherlands and the expectation to produce work related to her background by adopting and expressing a particular cultural identity of an 'Iranian woman' is an imposed representation of a particular cultural construct of the Other. Yet, this representation is easily digested by her tutors as both political and safe.

The personal dilemma this caused prompted Ghiasabadi to make art that did not reflect her genuine self and she became – contrary to expectations – impoverished by the visual material she worked with. This resulted in her imposing a type of self-censorship on the use of aesthetics and content to exclude what represents her identity by avoiding the use of cultural signifiers that had no relation to herself.[94] Her response was a reaction. She explains that, '[n]aturally, this rejection left me with almost nothing to work on' (Ghiasabadi 2010: n.p.).

[94] Please see fig. 36 of Ghiasabadi's visual signifiers.

As I read about Ghiasabadi's experience, I realised that such issues echoed my own experience, my dilemmas in portraying my image and context as a diaspora woman. I realised that it generally corresponded to a mental, imaginary list – one that I had drawn in my own mind for years: what to use or not and how to avoid cliché in the context of my artistic production was an ongoing question. In other words, how does one avoid self-Orientalising and fitting into what Walchli refers to as bearing witness to an ethnically specified, cultural background?

Ghiasabadi's artistic position, that referencing anything to do with her cultural background would place her within 'media-made political, Orientalised projections of her birth-country' has implications for many women artists' positions. In other words, women artists of the Muslim diaspora are not dealing with a neutral understanding of our aesthetics, our past, our culture or our experience.

Figure 37: Atousa Bandeh Ghiasabadi, *Women Looking At Me* (2009), 260 x 240 cm, drawing

Ghiasabadi's resulting publication explored identity and how it becomes a 'fed' cliché (a spoon-fed representation/stereotype) through politics, perceptions of the Other and the changing values placed on context and productions. Taking Ghiasabadi's experience, she expresses exactly in what ways fed clichés impact upon what she produces as an artist. Due to the values and assumptions projected onto her, she makes work and uses aesthetics that do not truly reflect her own ideas. She simply makes what is expected of her and negotiates the aesthetic of her artwork by responding to perceptions, identifiers and expectations in the context of the

Netherlands. Some of her work is easily interpreted as kitsch or exotic, whether it occupies the surface of a page or the space that the artist presents.[95]

The perception and the pressure of expectations Ghiasabadi faced at college are not unfamiliar to many Iranian women artists who obtained their formal art education within a Western or European context. A context that lacks familiarity and knowledge of non-Eurocentric histories of art, with limited access to such materials in the mainstream art world, as discussed in Chapter 3.[96] This situation, in effect, creates a restriction to what can or cannot be included within our artistic productions due to the contextual limits in which we find ourselves, surrounded by and in addition to various 'loaded' images. For example, a veil is automatically interpreted as Islamic, as symbolic of the threat of terrorism from a backward culture, as oppressive to the female body but also as the ghost of the exotic and sexualised female Other in popular Hollywood productions.[97] The artistic activity around the veil becomes potentially burdened with many projected values. On the one hand, the use of such signifiers could be read as self-Orientalising to meet the need of an 'ethnic market' and, on the other hand, as a resistance (self censorship) that has the potential to deny the woman artist and her personal response to such signifiers.

Ghiasabadi's artworks constitute two distinct approaches that seek to negotiate spaces of difference in resisting being Othered through fixed narratives of a place, often shaped through historical narratives and the spectacle of exoticisation. On this basis, she finally decided to ignore what others may read into her work, in her perceived position as 'a foreigner', and argues the following:

> [T]he perception others had of me did not match my own self-image. The process of trying to avoid everything related to me as I knew myself, to reach a certain level of objectivity, was as helpless and hopeless as trying to be blond with blue eyes.
>
> (Ghiasabadi 2010: n.p.)

[95] Not only through signifiers such as script, colour, geometry, the veil and women but also through exhibition platforms with stereotypical titles.

[96] In a recent presentation and discussion (BAN- Decolonising the arts) Yara al Sherbini refers to such a lack of knowledge and information available to artists such as herself. https://www.arts.ac.uk/ual-decolonising-arts-institute/projects. Accessed on February 2021.

[97] Such as Salome: The Dance of The Seven Veils. Dir. William Dieterle (1953) and the numerous variations of this not only in cinema but also in music, theatre, dance and photography.

She concludes that her self-awareness pollutes her subjectivity, saying, 'I welcome every image and idea that comes to me, exotic or not. I consciously try not to avoid anything related to my changing identity' (ibid.).

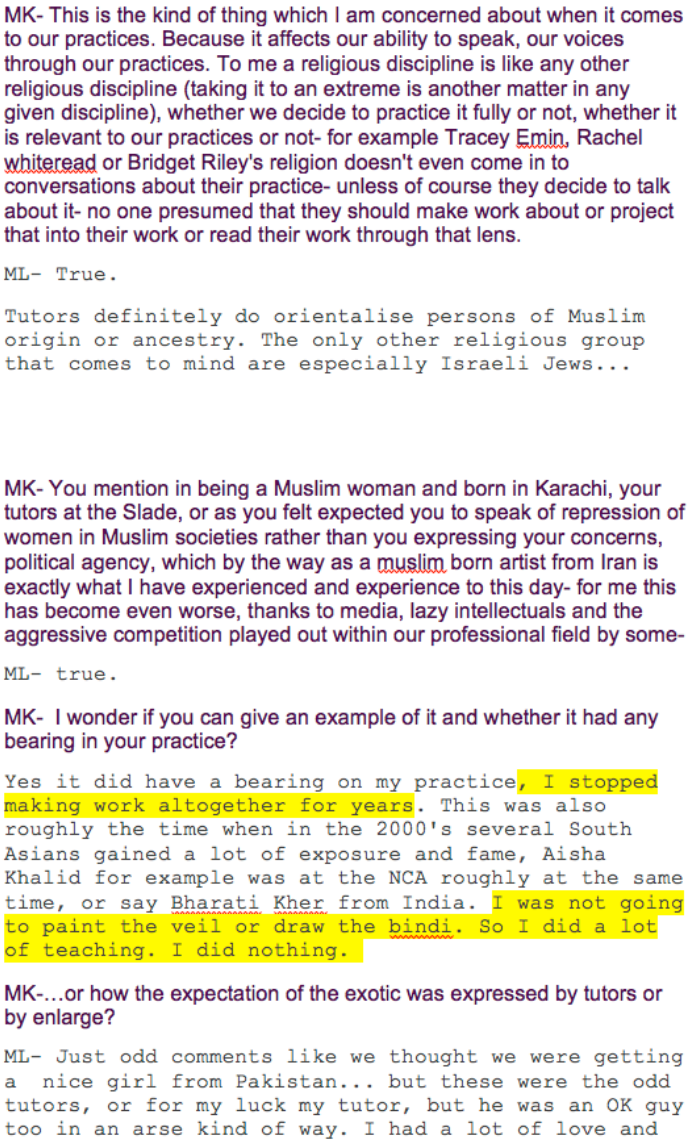
This issue of presentation and representation may manifest as reluctance on the part of the artist to create work that includes signifiers, such as script, colour, geometry, the veil and women, that have the potential to, in effect, masquerade Islamo-Orientalist signification pertaining to the IOFO, an issue I demonstrated and discussed regarding the work of Neshat. However, the aesthetic limits of such resistance may cost the artist the memory of her own context by removing anything that would simply speak about her individual experience in relation to her native Iran, simultaneously stripping the artist of her own story.[98]

This position of self-censorship (denying oneself an aesthetic in order to avoid self-Othering and self-Orientalising) is echoed by artist and writer Maria Lookman[99] (see interview with Mariah Lookman, Appendix 4). Lookman discusses the assumptions and expectations of her as an artist from Pakistan, much in the same way as Ghiasabadi relates to the expectations of her tutors at art college, and where that leaves her as an artist. Lookman stated: 'I stopped making work altogether for years. I was not going to paint the veil or draw the Bindi. So I did a lot of teaching. I did nothing' (Fig. 38).[100] Lookman's pause in making artworks, as she mentions above, is an indication of her resistance to expectations and available platforms.

[98] For example if she was to use, colour, patterns or indeed the veil connected to her experience and previous context.

[99] Mariah Lookman is a Pakistani artist and writer with an MA from the Slade School of Fine Art and D.Phil. from the University of Oxford. Please refer to appendix 2 and her comments about art school and assumption and expectations of her practice.

[100] This interview /in conversation email exchange with Maria Lookman was conducted in 2017 as a result of many informal discussions regarding expectations and practice.



MK- This is the kind of thing which I am concerned about when it comes to our practices. Because it affects our ability to speak, our voices through our practices. To me a religious discipline is like any other religious discipline (taking it to an extreme is another matter in any given discipline), whether we decide to practice it fully or not, whether it is relevant to our practices or not- for example Tracey Emin, Rachel whiteread or Bridget Riley's religion doesn't even come in to conversations about their practice- unless of course they decide to talk about it- no one presumed that they should make work about or project that into their work or read their work through that lens.

ML- True.

Tutors definitely do orientalise persons of Muslim origin or ancestry. The only other religious group that comes to mind are especially Israeli Jews...

MK- You mention in being a Muslim woman and born in Karachi, your tutors at the Slade, or as you felt expected you to speak of repression of women in Muslim societies rather than you expressing your concerns, political agency, which by the way as a muslim born artist from Iran is exactly what I have experienced and experience to this day- for me this has become even worse, thanks to media, lazy intellectuals and the aggressive competition played out within our professional field by some-

ML- true.

MK- I wonder if you can give an example of it and whether it had any bearing in your practice?

Yes it did have a bearing on my practice, I stopped making work altogether for years. This was also roughly the time when in the 2000's several South Asians gained a lot of exposure and fame, Aisha Khalid for example was at the NCA roughly at the same time, or say Bharati Kher from India. I was not going to paint the veil or draw the bindi. So I did a lot of teaching. I did nothing.

MK-...or how the expectation of the exotic was expressed by tutors or by enlarge?

ML- Just odd comments like we thought we were getting a nice girl from Pakistan... but these were the odd tutors, or for my luck my tutor, but he was an OK guy too in an arse kind of way. I had a lot of love and

Figure 38: Excerpt from the text of the conversation between Maria Kheirkhah and Mariah Lookman

The dilemmas around aesthetics and signifiers noted above by Ghiasabadi, Lookman, and myself although 'welcomed to the new global art market' (Walchli 2004: n.p.), also have the potential to constrain the artist with the use of particular aesthetics and signifiers that are intertwined with (her) experience and identity. Thus far, I have not encountered any male critics raising such issues/dilemmas in my extensive research on this topic.[101] It is in response to this dilemma of self-Orientalising, self-Othering and self-censorship (as opposed to self-agency) in women's artistic productions, that the need for another way begins to develop as a deliberate construct. This possibility

[101] For example Tan Walchli or Tirdad Zolghadr particularly with regards to the signifier of the veil.

is sought in the work of women diaspora artists, as well as within my own – the motivation is to explore whether one's own identity can be maintained in the context of colonial and historical ideas and representations. In the following, I explore how cultural identifiers are being developed and negotiated through the work of Mayram Hashemi.

4.5 Decentring the veil in the work of Maryam Hashemi

Figure 39: Maryam Hashemi, *Hanging On* (2010), 120 x 91cm, acrylic on canvas

My first encounter with Hashemi's work was in 2009, when she held a one-woman show at the Canal Museum in London. At the time, she lived and worked on a boat on the canal in London. Her paintings are often illustrations about her life, the people she sees and the life around her. Hashemi often constructs the surface of her canvas to narrate herself and her life by drawing on her memory. Of interest to this research is Hashemi's life story and sense of composition in her paintings, in which she employs a similar strategy to sixteenth-century Persian miniature painting. Where miniature paintings are delicately drawn and painted to illustrate the life of kings and mythic characters to record and speak of their status, Hashemi uses bold brush strokes and solid vivid acrylic colours to narrate and record her own life. Just as Persian miniature paintings place the different subjects in accordance with their importance through relative scale and position of subject, Hashemi adopts a similar strategy to narrate her everyday life in London and encompasses her memories of growing up in Iran.

In her work, at least two signifiers of the veil and text are evident, which is significant to this research. In addition to her choice of producing small scale/miniature paintings (Figs. 39–42), Hashemi depicts the veiled woman reduced in

scale and scattered, planted and positioned deliberately off centre. As a result, she subverts the image of the veiled woman and, to a degree, controls the perception of it within her diasporic context. The figures are simply given the same painterly treatment and value as other elements within the work. What remains in the foreground is her narrative, an amalgamation of her memory, what she imagines and her life in London.

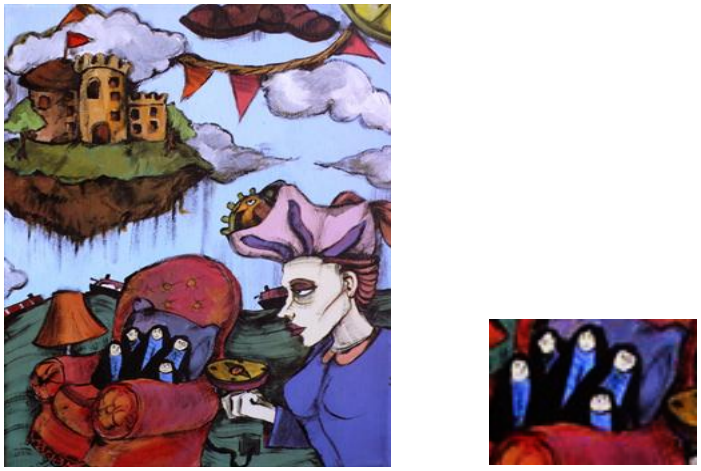


Figure 40: Maryam Hashemi, *Canal's Castles* (2009), 35 x 25 cm, acrylic on canvas

Figure 41: Maryam Hashemi, *Towpath Funday* (2009), 35 x 25 cm, acrylic on canvas

In her painting *Towpath Funday* (2009), Hashemi creates an array of dynamic movement by constructing her narrative around a red-coated woman, depicted at the bottom centre of the picture, who gazes directly at the viewer. The towpath divides the pictorial space into two sections. In the middle background, small figures and the unmistakable hijabis appear in a group holding up boards, seemingly demonstrating a familiar scene of militant Iranian women dressed in the hijab or chador. However, the

title refers to a fun day on a London canal, reversing, partly through the device of scale, the out-of-place militant hijabis serving as a sign of Muslim-ness.

As the narrative of the painting unfolds within the canvas, the female painter/narrator confronts us with a serious yet perhaps whimsical question about the subject of the woman and her context: What is this fun day, peopled with memories on a British towpath? While Hashemi narrates her everyday life, the sincerity of her visual narrative does not sensationalise or exaggerate a simplistic, monolithic view. Rather, it is a modest and personal statement of her life. We see the same strategy and sincerity in her self-portrait *Hanging On*. Of this work, she said: 'I used to work in a boutique and hangers used to get stuck in my hair, I hated it there'.[102] In the work, Hashemi has a perfect opportunity to devise a visual reference by covering her head with a scarf or veil to exoticise further and embellish the face to appear as another veiled Iranian or 'Middle Eastern woman'. However, Hashemi resists this identity ploy and instead makes reference to herself and her history by placing tiny hijab-wearing figures in her hair on top of her head as if, perhaps, to reference her persisting memory. The forbidden showing of hair takes centre stage, not by exoticisation or geopolitical visual identity codes, but simply by placing the little hijabis, as if policing her, peering in her centre parting – the hijabis become pin-like, stuck to her head. Despite being depicted so small, the hijabis' importance is conveyed by being positioned at the centre parting and on top, alluding to Hashemi's memory – their presence still there. What we learn from Hashemi's work is her ability to create a story that is relevant to her background without falling into the issues surrounding assumed identities.

Figure 42: Maryam Hashemi, *Sweet Surrender* (2010), 120 x 91cm, acrylic on canvas

[102] Please see website http://www.maryamhashemi.co.uk/index.aspx?wsid=163690&sectionid=1203081. Accessed on 11 October 2014.

Many people who have moved a significant distance from family and loved ones often find that the only source of communication is via the telephone and other devices such as computers and cameras. Hashemi deals with this displaced and distanced relationship with her country of origin through her position as a self-exiled artist/woman. Looking at the painting (Fig. 42), which she describes as 'My first studio flat in London and my long-distance relationship', my personal experience of leaving Iran allows me to assume how this isolation must have felt to Hashemi in her bedsit.[103] The painting contains descriptive details of her environment: wood panelling, a half-eaten sandwich, a cigarette ashtray with several cigarette stubs, a written letter enveloped and addressed, assumingly ready to be posted to her beloved, and empty bottles of wine all scattered around the floor. Sitting on the floor, she is looking into an eye occupying the whole screen, the emphasis on the eye through size denies the physicality of the screen, displaying perhaps a desire to connect eye-to-eye, in person. There is lipstick in her hand, as if ready to refresh her lips, perhaps to say, 'take me in your arms and love me', knowing very well the impossibility of a close love rendered impossible by distance.

Looking carefully at the bottom right-hand corner of her painting, there is an envelope written in Farsi and addressed to Iran. This connects her to her native Iran; the use of calligraphy is minimised and off-centred. The way Hashemi represents herself as an exiled Iranian can be described not as exotic but rather, perhaps, as decentralised and, one may suggest, almost casual – through the device of a painted envelope in the bottom of her painting. She seems to be communicating her story as a female artist talking about what she faces in her everyday reality, rather than her assumed identity becoming central to painting or her diasporic position as an artist.

Hashemi's work in the exhibition *ImaginHer* (2013) tells the artist's story (an Iranian artist and immigrant in the UK) without Othering or allowing her work to be Othered by simply changing the size of the Muslim hijabi[104] within the narrative of her paintings. Hashemi constructs her experience of being a migrant without paying due attention to an Orientalist narrative/representation of the veil and what it may signify as the object/subject of all that is female, Oriental and represented as repressed or threatening. In this series of paintings, the hijabi or veiled women are present,

[103] Please see website 'Ibid'. http://www.maryamhashemi.co.uk/index.aspx?wsid=163690&sectionid=1203081. Accessed on 11 October 2014.
[104] The concealment of head and body through the dress worn by Muslim women as a sign of modesty.

active and usually carrying out some task or going about their own business, engaging us more with what they do within the narrative rather than who they are. That is to say, Hashemi animates her own narratives, rather than placing a clichéd identity centre stage, subsequently, decentralising the veil or calligraphy as signs loaded with Oriental aesthetic values. Hashemi's way of narrating her life through her illustrative paintings has a direct relationship to Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel, *Persepolis,* and the popularity vested in the genre of Iranian women's memoirs. As Amy Malek explains,

> The fact that there was an eager market for these memoirs is a point that should not be overlooked or underestimated. Amidst the popularity of memoirs in general, and women's memoirs, in particular, the post-9/11 atmosphere has created a level of curiosity towards Iran that, though it may have originated in the 1980s, was never satiated or answered publicly by Iranians themselves until recently. As Americans and others around the world seek insight into a country and a people that have been deemed "evil" and an imminent threat to Western society, Iranian exiles—and their children—have also begun to re-examine and work through their identities and histories. Many have found a voice in the memoir genre, letting go of what Farideh Goldin has termed an "imported taboo" of "speaking and writing candidly from our Iranian past".
>
> (Malek 2006: 361–62)

Malek highlights several important issues I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 regarding the work and reception of women artists of the Muslim diaspora. The issue of the impact of key political events, starting with the televised reporting of the hostage crisis and its later development in the Islamophobic environment post 9/11, brought together all that it rendered as a monolithic, evil Muslim world. As Malek rightly observes, this perception was reflected upon and began to be answered by Iranian exiles through memoirs. However, I argue that such reflections are to be seen not only in the writing of memoirs or written from an exilic point of view, but also found in the work of artists seeking to visualise different narratives. These narratives both respond to assumptions and receptions of the diaspora, as well as expanding upon and contributing to a feminism that is transnational in its approach.

In the following section, I examine two women artists and directors who have contributed to the feminist movement without being discussed, included or highlighted in mainstream feminist narratives.

4.6 Challenging simplistic assumptions in the work of Marjane Satrapi

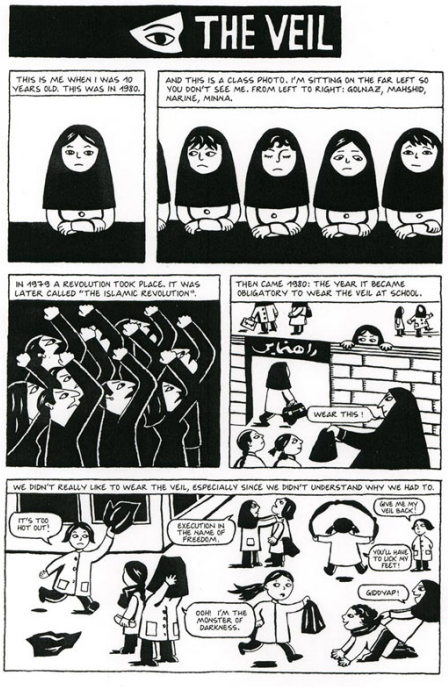


Figure 43: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis the Story of a Childhood* (2003), illustration

> Here's the problem, today, the description of the world is always reduced to yes or no, black or white. Superficial stories. Superhero stories. One side is the good one. The other one is evil. But I'm not a moral lesson giver. It's not for me to say what is right or wrong. I describe situations as honestly as possible. The way I saw it. That's why I use my own life as material. I've seen these things myself, and now I'm telling it to you. Because the world is not about Batman and Robin fighting the Joker; things are more complicated than that. And nothing is scarier than the people who try to find easy answers to complicated questions.
>
> (Satrapi interviewed by Bearman 2006: n.p.)

Perhaps no story is closer to most Iranian women who have moved to the West, either after the Iranian Revolution or due to subsequent religious or socioeconomic pressures, than the autobiographical graphic novel of Marjane Satrapi in her successful series of books *Persepolis*, first published between 2003 and 2004 and finally turned into a film produced under the same title in 2007. Her above quote perhaps best sums up her voice and her frustration at the assumptions and value judgements of simplistic binaries regarding how the Other is created. Speaking to the world through her graphic novels, she gives the readers the opportunity to grasp the

complexity of the reality as she experiences it. *Persepolis* is an autobiographical account of Satrapi's life, originally written in French in the style of a comic strip telling her life story. It is about Satrapi's experience growing up in Iran during the transition from the Shah's time to the Iranian Islamic republic. Soon after this time, she was sent to Austria to continue her studies and avoid the social and political upheavals that affected Iran during this period.

Of interest to this research is Satrapi's diasporic state, where she is situated in a Western context in which her audience/readers are the very people who have largely negative preconceptions about the country she comes from, Iran. On numerous occasions, Satrapi makes clear statements about her work and its intended audience. In her introduction to *Persepolis*, for example, she explains that she wrote this book to show that,

> Iran is not only a country of "fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism" … The only thing I hope is that people will read my book and see that this abstract thing, this Axis of Evil, is made up of individuals with lives and hopes… I wanted people to read this book and say, "Oh, it could have been me." … In today's world it is necessary that people read something like this, so they understand that this other that is so scary, this other that belongs to the "axis of evil", these people have a normal life.
>
> (Satrapi cited in Levy et al. 2003: 35–52)

It is not only Satrapi's narrative, her life experience within a Western context, but also her use of visual aesthetics and mode of self-representation as a woman artist through her artworks that interest this research. Satrapi's diasporic position, her visual text in relation to her biography and her sense of self in relation to identity seem to have much in common with first and second Iranian diasporic generations, as cited by Amy Malek, but her novel also has an international appeal, particularly due to her use of visual aesthetics and narrative in navigating a problematic area of artistic production.[105]

Satrapi's ability to create a relationship between text and image relies upon a thoughtful *mis-en-scène* within each frame, rather than culturally specific Orientalist aesthetics, drawing the readers' attention and engaging them with her story and

[105] https://www.jstor.org/stable/4311834?seq=1. Accessed on 13 December 2020. Written specifically for a non-Iranian audience, Persepolis has achieved wide- spread international success. According to one source, as of 2004, almost half a million copies have been sold worldwide, both volumes spent numerous weeks on the New York Times nonfiction bestseller lists, and over 160 colleges and high schools in the United States use *Persepolis* for gender/political science classes. Additionally, Satrapi's comics and illustrations have been featured in publications across the globe, including Libe´ration, El Pais, Internazionale, Flair, The New York Times, and The New Yorker.

vision, which are different to the negative or sensationalist narratives used in the media.[106] In this way, she seeks to make the story more relevant to an international diasporic experience, as well as shifting perceptions and connecting to her Western reader/audience.[107] The (assumed) IOFO asserts her own story; the Orientalisation and Islamification of the negative assumptions disseminated throughout history drive her to pitch her story with a capacity to narrate a global complexity; the human experiences in her work come to the fore through the use of mise-en-scène, colour and, of course, the simplicity of language. In an interview with Emma Watson, Satrapi remarks on this aesthetic:

> **EW:** You did your comics in saturated black ink, and I'm interested: Why did you choose that? And how do you think that conveys different emotions and atmospheres to other comic styles?
> **MS:** As a literary genre, comics are really connected to fine arts. In comics, with the illustration, you write with your drawing, with your images. So whatever you don't write, you draw and vice versa. So instead of writing, "Well I was sitting in my bed and I was watching out of the window and the bird was singing" and so on, you just draw all of that. So whatever you draw has meaning that people read. If I use color, it has meaning people read. If I draw backgrounds, the same.
> I always thought that what I had to say was too much; it was complicated with lots and lots of words. So I had to go very mellow on the other side because otherwise the rhythm of reading would be destroyed. That's why I went for something black and white, completely, with an extremely minimalistic emphasis, because I thought that was the best for the rhythm of the reading.
> Usually, when I paint, I use lots of color. You can draw anything and if you put a little color here and there, it will look nice. It is extremely difficult to work in black and white because you cannot cheat. In black and white, you can make any drawing, you put a little color here and there and it looks nice, it is immediately evident whether it's good or it's not good. It actually presented a really difficult challenge: How am I going to make it work in only black and white?
>
> (Watson 2016: n.p.)

The stark contrast of black and white and her deliberate choice not to use colour allows Satrapi to engage the reader with the text, which brings her story, her voice, to

[106] In an interview with Pantheon, her publisher, Satrapi recounts: 'From the time I came to France in 1994, I was always telling stories about life in Iran to my friends. We'd see pieces about Iran on television, but they didn't represent my experience at all. I had to keep saying, "No, it's not like that there." I've been justifying why it isn't negative to be Iranian for almost twenty years'. Satrapi 'On Writing *Persepolis' Pantheon Graphic Novels*, available at: http://www.randomhouse.com/pantheon/graphicnovels/satrapi2.html, accessed 10 November 2004.
[107] Satrapi has been commissioned to do numerous illustration projects, including a mural project in Barcelona, and her art has appeared in galleries in Europe. Her graphic novel *Broderies*, published in French in 2003, has already appeared in multiple languages and her 2004 *Poulet aux prunes* is also published in several languages.

the fore. As Patricia Storace points out, the relationship between images and text is crucial:

> In the cartoon world that she creates, pictures function less as illustration than as records of action, a kind of visual journalism. On the other hand, dialogue and description, changing unpredictably in visual style and placement on the page within its balloons, advance frame by frame like the verbal equivalent of a movie. Either element would be quite useless without the other; like a pair of dancing partners, Satrapi's text and images comment on each other, enhance each other, challenge, question, and reveal each other.
>
> (Storace 2005: n.p.)

Satrapi's skills as a storyteller, a memoir writer, and novelist are complemented by her skills as a visual artist. She adopts a clever strategy: she uses lines that are sometimes expressed as Farsi script that appear intermittently within individual frames by giving them the same attributes as the outlines of the characters she creates, decentring an Orientalist aesthetic.

Figure 44: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis 2 The Story of a Return* (2004) print, book

Figure 45: Marjan Satrapi, *Persepolis the Story of a Childhood* (2003) print, book

The same principle appears in her treatment of the characters and their veils, encountered with the same strength and density of black as a block of colour (Figs. 44 and 45). For example, the nuns and the revolutionary sisters equally guard moral boundaries, drawing a parallel between the two through the visual treatment of heavy blocks of colour. This theme of black and white also appears in the work of writer-director Ana Lily Amirpour but is used for an entirely different effect.

4.7 Centralising the Other in the work of Ana Lily Amirpour

Figure 46: Still from the film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), screenshot

Figure 47: Close-up from the film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), screenshot

How can the loaded values placed upon items of clothing such as the veil or calligraphy be challenged when they appear in creative works? Thus far, this thesis has explored how women artists of the diaspora have negotiated, approached and, in certain cases, avoided the female image through their various artistic disciplines. In

certain cases, the identified symbols are highly visible and embodied within the work, such as Neshat's highly visible relationship with the veil and calligraphy, both centred within her artworks, in a way increasing the codes and the identifiers. In other cases, visual signifiers take an equal visual value by making the size, lines and positioning of these codes within the context of the bigger narrative, more visible, decreasing the visual identifiers, as seen in the work of artists Hashemi and Satrapi. This approach may suggest a somehow straightforward way of measuring the extent of, or shades of, signifiers that have the potential to avoid self-Othering and self-Orientalising. However, in contrast, Ana Lily Amirpour, an English-born Iranian-American film director, screenwriter and producer, inverts this notion in her debut film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (Figs. 46 and 47).[108] Self-described as 'the first Iranian vampire spaghetti western', Amirpour turns up signifiers, such as the use of the veil (chador as central to the narrative) and the use of calligraphy and Farsi, potentially making the film geographically specific.[109] However, the film achieves much more, as I argue in this section.

Amirpour's film is shot in black and white. Central to this atmospheric film is a female vampire implicated in a stylised urban drug-related tragedy. Making use of Western horror genres, specifically the sub-genre of the vampire film, the female protagonist becomes an anti-hero in the manner of a Spaghetti Western, with a relativistic moral justification on her side. She is the avenger against preying pimps and drug dealers. She spares not only the life of the prostitute Atti, but also the victim of circumstance Arash, with whom she forms a romantic relationship, departing from a 'bad city' in a hopeful ending, presumably for a new life together.

In terms of the vampire genre, this work clearly draws on many films, but most distinctly on the film *Nosferatu*, with the stark use of black-and-white photography, as well as with playing with time as a dramatic device, slowing down at key points for dramatic emphasis. Later manifestations of the vampire genre (notably *Dracula* as depicted by Lugosi) adopt devices such as the cloak (used by Amirpour) as a tool of covering and revelation, while much later, from the 1950s to 1970s, the Hammer era of vampire films, the gratuitous and sudden baring of fangs became a device that is clearly deployed by Amirpour. The film is also partly a form of fantastic social tragedy, with drug-dealing and diasporic individuals making up the cast.

[108] An Iranian vampire movie, which made its first debut at the Sundance Film Festival in 2014.
[109] Chador acts as a vampire cloak to the female protagonist played by Sheila Vand.

In the following, I argue that the film does something important in the context of this research: it challenges the significance of the veil and has the potential to highlight ideas and preconceptions around codes and signifiers as stereotypes. Thus, it directly provokes Western feminist attitudes towards non-Western women and their agency.[110] Amirpour's female protagonist wearing the chador not only challenges the very white male-dominated film industry and patriarchal cinematic narratives of vampire movies but also, by using the veiled woman as central protagonist, contributes to Western and Transnational feminism, having the potential to include both, as I argue in the following.[111] [112]

The stereotypes of the IOFO are subverted through Amirpour's skilful use of visual references of silent movie techniques. These, as Amirpour herself states, draw upon her artistic background as a painter by holding the moments still and diverting the audience's attention to slight movements, expressions and stillness.[113]
Reviews by So Meyer, Laura Barcella and Mark Kermode offer overviews of the film and reference the many films and genres that it may have drawn on.[114] The reviews by Kermode and Barcella argue that, as a feminist film, it is shape-shifting and cross-bounded.[115, 116, 117]

Dealing with the Other and the marginalised, the film uses little actual spoken language (Farsi); instead, it makes use of the visual language of the silent film.

---

[110] Such as examples of Laura Bush and Cherie Blair as raised in Donnell's essay earlier in chapter 2.
[111] Western feminism: I refer to this term as a feminism that developed in the West and regarded itself as global.
[112] Transnational feminism: Transnational feminism developed out of third-world feminism, women of colour feminism and postcolonial feminisms, among others. Transnational feminism argues that models of sisterhood that presume a white, middle-class feminist subject located in the Global North ignore the meaningful differences between women both locally and globally, as well as imagining white women from the Global North as saviours of their disadvantaged "sisters." Instead, transnational feminism asks how the perspectives of women excluded from such hegemonic feminist imaginings can radically reshape feminist politics.
Oxford Bibliographies, Transnational Feminism, Asha Nadkarni, Subhalakshmi Gooptu.
https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0006.xml accessed 17 August 2021.
[113] Amirpour studied painting at undergraduate level at San Francisco State University.
[114] Mark James Patrick Kermode is a prolific British film critic working for *The Observer* and contributes to the BFI magazine *Sight & Sound* and the BBC, amongst many others.
[115] So Mayer writes, 'In Ana Lily Amirpour's debut *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, the girl doesn't just walk: sometimes she stands more still than humanly possible; sometimes she mimics an old man's skateboards. Conveying both human traits and vampiric otherness', May 2015, 'Film of the Week: A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night', *BFI Sight & Sound*, available at: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwic_uOS-ujhAhVhQxUIHSnSBKUQFjACegQIABAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bfi.org.uk%2Fnews-opinion%2Fsight-sound-magazine%2Freviews-recommendations%2Ffilm-week-girl-walks-home-alone-night&usg=AOvVaw1wo1-RBJBGqlcadJn2Y3zB. Accessed on 1 October 2020.
[116] Laura Barcella (2014) 'The Feminist Vampire Movie That Teaches "Bad Men" a Gory Lesson', available at: https://jezebel.com/the-feminist-vampire-movie-that-teaches-bad-men-a-gory-1662788544.
[117] Review of the film by Mark Kermode, available at: https://youtu.be/NlHbsTb9UtE. Accessed on 1 October 2020.

The patriarchal structures of cinematic vampire tales, from *Nosferatu* (1922) to *Vampyr* (1932), and numerous versions of *Dracula* (1992), with the male blood-sucking protagonist are subverted in Amirpour's film. The fear of the Other in the vampire movies through both victimising and violence mainly towards women is turned upside down. There are no Others, only 'bad men' to act out vengeance on.[118]

Dracula, as portrayed by Bela Lugosi, is a blood-sucking immortal who can appear suddenly, masking himself and perhaps his intent theatrically behind his cloak (Lugosi in his portrayal is possibly the originator of the cape or cloak as a theatrical device of aristocratic menace in vampire films). Amirpour turns the cloak into a chador, through which the female protagonist becomes central and visible as the body of the empowered Other; the female Oriental and her veil (laden with negative significance, seen as suppressed and even backward to a Western audience) give her visibility. This technique turns the visual signifier into one of empowerment and the protagonist's story can become significant through another narrative. Her garment is not a sign of her religion or passiveness – her veil/cloak is what enables her, it functions as a vampire cloak, which deals with patriarchal structures of vampire narratives.[119]

[118] Often men taking over by driving a stake through the female victim's heart, a violent act on both accounts. "'A vampire cannot die unless the evil spirits take her, or she is buried with a stake thrust through her body," said Martin Briolic sententiously.' From *The Fate of Madame Cabanel* by Liza Lynn Linton, published fifty-five years after Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). First published in The New York Times, January 19, 1873, 'It is a short story about an Englishwoman who settles down in a Brittany village, and her "strangeness" is judged by some of the villagers – especially a peasant woman who is suffering from an acute attack of sexual jealousy – to be an example of vampirism' (Frayling, C. 1991: 280–293).

[119] These may perhaps have a certain resonance with Algerian women during the Algerian war of (1954 to 1962) by subverting the veil as a way of hiding their weapons to appear as traditional as argued for by Fanon (1965) where the veil becomes a cloak to hide a threat (as seen in the cloak of Dracula), but we see Amirpour taking this further by shifting the veil's significance.

Figure 48: Bela Lugosi as Dracula being confronted by Van Helsing, from the film *Dracula* (1931), Dir. Tod Browning, photograph: Colombia Pictures

Here, the idea of a Western, masculine vampire of subjection is inverted and male power is met with a vigilance and parallel power – a female hijabi wearing a power cloak. The strength of Amirpour's work is in her ability to draw upon a parallel fantasy occupying a more equal space as part of one narrative rather than presenting a narrative that can then be identified and placed as exotic, or Oriental and Othered. In this way, the narrative and the story put forward can emerge rather than reproduce a reductive geopolitical and religious identity.

In a Q&A with Roger Corman[120] at the Hammer Museum, organised by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Amirpour mentioned that a 'film is always personal' and develops from a feeling of isolation, a sense of loneliness, being misunderstood, wanting to find connections with other people (Corman 2015).[121] This view resonates closely with many marginalised communities regarding diaspora or exilic experiences (Naficy 2003) and certainly with many women of colour. It is a limitation that, in the words of Amirpour, 'can actually encourage creativity' (Corman 2015). Amirpour's challenge to the Western patriarchal film structure is a development of the earlier tradition of filmmaking by women screenwriters and directors. They push the boundaries of filmmaking both in Iran and in the diaspora,

[120] Roger William Corman (b.1926) is an American writer, director, producer and actor. Corman directed and produced over hundred movie's winning him the nickname of *The Pope of Pop Cinema.* Amongst his movies are *The Raven* (1963); *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960), *The Wasp Woman* (1980); *Last Woman on Earth* (1960); *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990).

[121] In a discussion with Roger Corman-Q&A with Ana Lily Amirpour & Roger Corman.Hammer Museum. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egwLenvNG0E Published on 20 January 2015. Accessed on 11 October 2020.

which emerges out of the necessity of navigating as creative women. Iranian women, faced with the challenges of socio-political change, continue to remain creative, productive and creatively resourceful in the face of limitations.[122]

In his essay *Poetics and Politics of Veil*, Hamid Naficy (2003) offers extensive examples of the role of women and their development both in Iran and in the diaspora. As Naficy argues, Iranian women have 'in extraordinary ways' expanded the vocabulary of veiling, voicing and modesty by 'introducing fascinating textual and narrative innovations forced by the imposition of the veil'. Naficy also discusses how 'de-territorialisation and immigration destabilised the traditional Iranian patriarchy, bringing prominence to women's social and political status and the questioning of gender relations, a prominence that was inscribed in the form of strong women protagonists who subverted authoritarian relations' (Naficy 2003).

Similarly, Danielpour (2015) claims that Iranian women screenwriters and directors have significantly contributed to creating narratives that empower women in Iran by centralising them in their own stories and making women's social issues visible.[123] As Danielpour notes,

> Women screenwriters and directors in Iran are in a constant state of negotiation between government regulation, spectators and their own artistic visions. The presence of women as filmmakers stands as evidence that women have not been passive in responding to restrictions or cultural expectations, but rather have participated actively, particularly with films that provide a lens on social issues.
>
> (Danielpour 2015: 102)

Tahmineh Milani and Samira Makhmalbaf are two other examples of women filmmakers who have produced women-centred films within Iran while achieving an international profile.[124, 125] Their films have produced a different and more complex Iranian female characterisation, one that is active, aware and in constant negotiation between spectators' historical/political preconceptions and their own artistic visions. Iranian women film directors have achieved success, arguably demonstrating that voice and creativity are not ultimately hampered or enhanced by cultural modes of

[122] Whether they view the chador or veil as inconvenient, irrelevant and irritating or as a cultural garment to avoid male gaze, or to avert attention in the case of Colonel Kakar.
[123] Danielpour looks at how individual female screen writer directors resisted and challenged national perceptions of women and their identity 'shifting their nation's gaze to a different type of Persian woman: complex, active, intelligent, outraged against injustice and often surprisingly powerful' (2015: 102).
[124] Director of *The Legend of Sigh* (1991); *Two Women* (1999); *The Hidden Half* (2001) and *Ceasefire* (2006).
[125] Director of *Apple* (1998); *Blackboards* (2000); *Two legged Horse* (2008).

dress. What we seem to see emerging is a more fluid development of the issue of reflection upon self, voice and context. In the words of Amirpour, '[f]ilm is an opportunity to make your own universe, your own world' (Corman 2015).

4.8 Conclusion of Chapter 4: Can the IOFO artist speak?

This chapter examined the possibility of artistic voices within artistic practices of women of the Muslim diaspora, and it began by analysing the work of two prominent Iranian women artists: Houshiary's *Veil* (1999) and Neshat's *Women of Allah* (2000). Through a comparative study of their use of aesthetics and signifiers concerning the subject of the veil, I speculated on the popularity of Shirin Neshat's work, which can arguably relate to several factors: first, performing a visibly Muslim role through using familiar and established signifiers such as the chador, script and decorative elements in her self-portraits; second, that the work was framed as representing the whole nation, that of an Iranian Islamic republic; and, finally, the desire and reception by a Western audience already exposed to familiar Orientalist narratives including visual language (decorative elements, cursive script, the covering of body, concealing hair and/or face in public by women), one that tells of her identity defined by myth, image and text.[126]

These factors were discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 (which articulates the historical, socio-political and artistic environments in which I have identified the IOFO). The IOFO not only represents attitudes and expectation towards women artists of the Muslim worlds, but is also at times reciprocated through employing visual signifiers embedded in the artworks expressed through Orientalist and colonial aesthetics (i.e. a self-Orientalising and self-Othering in response to ethnic marketing), a strategy of artistic products according to customers' desires (Zolghadr 2007). I discussed this aspect in the light of Neshat's popularity in performing an Islamic Orientalism and its Otherness, as well as available artistic platforms (exhibition history in Chapter 3). However, to acknowledge Neshat's work merely in terms of self-Othering and its reception would be a mistake; it also began to open new possibilities in which the subject of women and the veil activated women and encouraged a discourse on such a reception within the contemporary arts.

[126] Such as the backward, repressed veiled other who needs rescuing, the odalisque and so on.

In the light of self-Orientalising (Walchli 2005; Tikhonova 2017), Othering (Alptekin 2015)[127] and self-Othering, ethnic marketing (Zolghadr 2007) and available platforms (see exhibition histories, Chapter 3) that did not consider the important place of women, this chapter expanded upon what such notions have meant to practising women artists regarding the use of aesthetics and narratives.

Almost a decade after Neshat's exhibition, we see another clear development, as some artists question such aesthetics and the use of signifiers within their work in relation to their political and artistic contexts and their limits. One such example, as discussed previously, is the Iranian-born artist Ghiasabadi, who responded differently to perceptions, identifiers and expectations in her own context of the Netherlands by questioning the role of signifiers and context (2007–10). The challenge that unfolds is a self-awareness and consideration of issues such as exoticisation, which results in Ghiasabadi self-censoring. The limits of her context and her resistance to particular aesthetics deny her individuality and restrict her simultaneously, removing the artist from her own story. She finally decided to forget about what and how her new audience might think about or how they may interpret her work and resolved to 'welcome every image and idea that comes to (her), exotic or not'. In other words, Ghiasabadi gave up negotiating her aesthetics, as did Lookman, in saying 'I did nothing'.

Around this time, some artists developed different strategies in relation to loaded signifiers, rather than giving up on aesthetics with loaded signification. This approach is evident in Hashemi's autobiographical work, in which image and text play a different role than in Neshat's work, which places the exoticised identity of the veiled woman at the centre of her photography. Sedira's *Self-portraits of the Virgin Mary* (2000), Al-Ani's *Veil* (1997) and Ghadirian's *Like Every Day* (2000) work in similar ways, as highlighted by Tikhonova (2017).

Hashemi, in contrast, reduces depictions of the veiled woman in scale and scatters and positions them off centre, so that she subverts the image of the veiled woman and, to a degree, controls the perception of it within her diasporic context. In Hashemi's work, we find a different possibility that can create a narrative relevant to her background without falling into the issues surrounding assumed identities, without

[127] Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin 'The Issue of 'Otherness' has Become a Cliché, but the problem still exists', *European Cultural Policy* (2015).

Othering or allowing her work to be Othered by simply changing the size of the Muslim hijabis within the narrative of her paintings (Figs. 39–42).

Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel *Persepolis* adopts a drawn, graphic strategy in treating signifiers such as script and the veil, giving them the same attributes as the outlines of the characters she creates, decentring the often-dominant Orientalist aesthetic. She uses the density of black as a block of colour, drawing an equal visual parallel between the different main characterisations in her novel (nuns and revolutionary sisters, who are both characterised as guardians of moral boundaries) through the visual treatment of heavy blocks of colour (Figs. 44 and 45).

Amirpour uses the same signifiers (the use of the veil, calligraphy and spoken Farsi); stereotypes inherent within the problematic IOFO, though this time subverted through her skilful use of visual references by utilising a 'mash-up' system. Amirpour in this way undermines structures of reductive identification, which become redundant within these narratives. It must be acknowledged that Amirpour's success in challenging the Western patriarchal film structure is built upon the earlier tradition of filmmaking by women screenwriters/directors pushing the boundaries of filmmaking both in Iran and in diaspora.[128] Iranian women faced with the challenges of patriarchy and socio-political change in Iran or in diaspora have continued to remain productive and creatively resourceful in the face of limitations by navigating narrative and aesthetics and drawing parallels through difference.

The question of self-Orientalisation and self-Othering has proved complex regarding using loaded images and signifiers. This chapter concludes that to address this new problematic phenomenon – the IOFO – a new strategy is emerging – that of Another, Anotherness. This concept suggests that voice can be achieved outside of reductive identity politics by undermining the framework of the IOFO by remaining aware and critical of how we come to use codes and signifiers. Anotherness is a visual strategy that has the power to interrupt presumption regarding the role of categorisation and framing desired by ethnic marketing (Zolghadr 2007).[129] Anotherness is a response to the idea of the Other, the IOFO and such depictions within the field of feminine artistic practices. It can be argued that Anotherness is an

[128] In Iran: resisting patriarchy and film censorship in portrayal of women within the film industry of the Islamic republic. In diaspora: whether they view the chador or veil as inconvenient, irrelevant and irritating or as a cultural garment to avoid male gaze, or to avert attention in the case of Colonel Kakar.
[129] In the strategy of placing signifiers, be it centrally as in Amirpour's film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014) or peripherally as in Hashemi *Canal's series* (2009) (figs. 39, 40, 41).

ideological position that can emerge through creativity, political agency and creative voice, whether wearing a veil or not or whether signifiers are used or not. Iranian-born diaspora women artists, as explored in this chapter, as well as second- and third-generation Iranian women, can find in these spaces the ability to reflect upon their own creativity and to draw parallels, which will make these complex relationships more fluid than hitherto, contributing to a transnational approach through film and the creative arts.

In response to the above, my practice, as discussed in Chapter 5, utilises several bodies of artworks and strategies to examine and test out ways in which a distinct, critical voice can emerge, a voice that speaks back to the IOFO as Another. This voice has no fixed position by being present and responsive to my own context and expectations to provide a perspective on social issues of my own socio-political environment though an artistic lens. My work tests out its own possibility of Anotherness through deploying sarcasm and humour, fiction, various strategies of placing signifiers, whether they are brought to the fore, placed centrally or peripherally placed within the narrative of each work, negotiating a visual language against its socio-political context and in relation to history.

Chapter 5: *Another emerging* – my own art practice

5.1 Introduction

The artworks and methods developed and discussed in this concluding chapter use visual and textual language, performance, self-representation and digital manipulation to expose, and attempt to undo, a problematic structure – that of the IOFO. Challenging her historic and contemporaneous mute position, my artworks aim to give voice to my own 'anotherness' as a female artist of the Muslim diaspora. These artworks are explorations of, and responses to, critical and theoretical findings as developed and evolved throughout my research. By allowing 'Another' to emerge into contemporary art history, I add my voice to the historical canon – a voice that is independent of the narratives and symbols that surround the conventional visual history of the IOFO as discussed above. In exploring voice and agency, my practice aims to self-represent while remaining sensitive to the pitfalls of self-Othering and self-Orientalising, as discussed in previous chapters. These aspects were further scrutinised through the critique of visual and artistic approaches in Chapter 4, leading to the discussion of my own work in this chapter.

5.2 Method

In tandem with theory, and through developing different visual strategies, each of the artworks tests out different methods of engaging with the history of the IOFO through fictitious exploration, reappropriation, performance and interventions within archives, colour and image-text constellations. The methods employed aim to make visible the female characters I am drawn to, connecting them through proximity and association, seeking to challenge and turn the conventional representations into a critical piece. Offering my voice, my body and subjectivity as a conduit for these muted and objectified female characters (who were often gazed upon and objectified without themselves possessing a voice), I seek to add a new reading of their histories/images, creating space for them in the present through my own practice. In this way, 'Another' emerges, offering a different commentary on the legacies of Orientalist narratives and their stereotypes.

My multidisciplinary art practice revisits specific stereotypical Oriental female representations in art, literature, and the media. It responds to the IOFO to address a

historical absence and misrepresentation. Therefore, it proposes to speak back. Resisting the one-dimensional and dehumanising Western constructions of its Others, as explored in Chapters 1 and 2, my practice occupies a complex space within feminist art practices. It adopts various methods through my own 'anotherness' in response to the Otherness of the IOFO. A project which addresses these concerns is *Little Egypt* (2013), which engages with the real-life dancer Kuchuk Hanem (fl.1850-70) as mentioned but not explored by Said (1978), as well as *Your Gaze Hits the Side of my Face* (2015-19) which deals with postcard images of Algerian, Arab and Moorish women (1900-30), as documented by Alloula (1987), but who does not engage with their subjectivity. Claiming voice and self-agency, my practice contributes to a strategy of rethinking, reworking, altering, inserting, disrupting, foregrounding, juxtaposing, omitting and reinventing these historical omissions/representations of Eastern, Muslim women while remaining sensitive and aware of self-Orientalisation.

5.3 Context

In the years before 2010, my artistic work was concerned with societies in trauma as a means of exploring psychological, political and social experiences and responses. In this endeavour, I employed sculpture, film, photography and performance to unpack prevailing notions of identity and the positioning of the 'Other' stemming from individual and global discourses. This approach led to a series of artistic explorations and interventions[130] culminating in the one-woman exhibition *The Psychology of Fear* (198 CAL in 2008) and an exploration of Mary Shelley's gothic novel *Frankenstein* (1818), which proposed a new set of metaphorical readings for the 'Creature' in the post-9/11 social and political context.[131] The works in that exhibition drew parallels with the issue of Islamophobia and the Muslim body being demonised and depicted as 'the other'.

[130] These included an intervention through performance [*Chaos*, 17min. 2008] and a scripted dialogue based on two fictional characters, namely Safie and the Frankenstein Monster. Both characters integrate the experience of the monster as scripted in Frankenstein and the experience of being foreign and strange as in the case of Safie.
[131] Frankenstein's monster as depicted within Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein* (1818).

Figure 49: Maria Kheirkhah, *I Made This* (2007), mixed media, 1.45 x 1.4 x 1.85 m

While I was able to depict the male Muslim figure through the face and physical presence of Boris Karloff as the Other with some confidence (Fig. 49), visualising the female fictional character of Safie from Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) presented me with a challenge, not only due to her absence in any filmic productions, but also regarding the ethics and aesthetics of representing the Oriental and Muslim woman.[132] The realisation that another way of deploying and reconstructing her image was needed was one of the factors that led to this research project. The inter-relationship between theoretical and practical exploration is expressed through the following research question:

> How does the IOFO navigate and deal with her perceived image, and in what way might her visual art practice seek to challenge this perception through methods employed to rethink, redefine, reconstruct, re-narrate and self-represent?

The following projects are the outcome of artistic research processes that use the methods mentioned above to develop visual strategies for disengaging the imagined Muslim female, Othered by a historical development that has muted her position (keeping her in the realms of the fantastic, the clichéd), through practice and dialogue.

[132] *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), both directed by James Whale, and film-maker Kenneth Branagh's more recent production, *Frankenstein* (1994).

5.4 Project 1: *Little Egypt I* (2013)

Figure 50: Maria Kheirkhah, still from *Little Egypt I* [performance, 5 min], multimedia, produced and performed at *Subjectivity and Feminism Research Group, Chelsea College of Arts, 2013*

> There is very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her.
>
> (Said 1978: 6)

In *Orientalism,* Said highlights the lack of voice and critiques the Oriental female representation in Flaubert's role in creating 'a widely influential model of the Oriental woman', but he does not explore the subject of the woman, in this case, Kuchuk Hanem, later referred to as *Little Egypt*.[133] Thus, Hanem remains mute and underrepresented, and Flaubert's influential written representation continues to speak for her.[134]

Little Egypt I (2013) represents my approach to practice and includes a detailed history to reveal and deconstruct the Othering methods used to convey stereotypes (Fig. 50). My performance *Little Egypt* was conceived as a way of addressing and responding to this lack of voice regarding representing the female body from the East. This raised the question of whether responding to this muteness through re-enacting *Little Egypt* could help to critique inherited images or engage with this absence through an embodied method of performance. In exploring a response, I considered how I might, as a female artist from the Orient, take on this responsibility and respond to this historical absence and voice a position through

[133] Said says about Flaubert '[h]e was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male… and these were historical facts of determination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was "typically" oriental' (1978: 6).

[134] Kuchuk Hanem was a famed beauty and Ghawazee dancer of Esna, mentioned in two unrelated nineteenth-century accounts of travel to Egypt, the French novelist Gustave Flaubert and the American adventurer George William Curtis (1851).

performance. My immediate response was to imagine and adopt the model of the Oriental woman, the aforementioned Ghwazee dancer Kuchuk Hanem, and the sexualisation of her body, in a way in which her absence may be redeemed and critiqued.

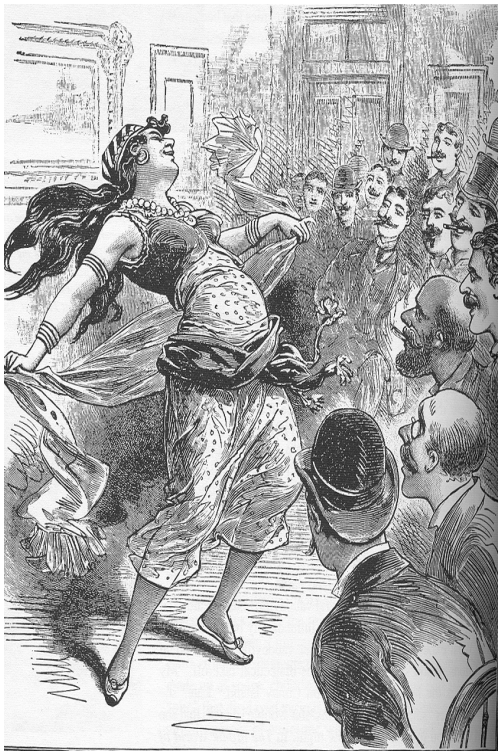


Figure 51: Illustration of Ashea Wabe dance at the Seeley Banquet in New York, *The national Gazette* (1894)

Entering this enquiry, which later became a performance piece, I looked critically at the stereotypical depictions of the female Oriental in Hollywood movies.[135] Many of these are a continuation and manifestation of Orientalism, which, in turn, owes much to existing preconceived ideas of sexuality and exoticisation inspired by stories such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, the first English language edition (titled *Arabian Nights*) dating from the early 1700s.

5.4.1 To undo by going back: progress in regression

Considering the IOFO as the stereotype of a constructed female body onscreen, subjected to the power of the Western male gaze, I considered how such representations became prominent for the popular imagination, as discussed in

[135] In engaging with this history one must understand how these histories are told, written, played out and the ways in which these histories begin to creep into the popular imagination, into our recent histories and become part of contemporary perceptions.

Chapter 1. I decided to analyse, read and work with the musical film *Roustabout* (produced in 1964, directed by John Rich and starring Elvis Presley) to study the performance accompanying the song *Little Egypt*. This footage offered potential in scrutinising the set, mise-en-scène and references/connections made to the IOFO to examine the perception of Hollywood film narratives and the Oriental female body as a constructed exotic spectacle, sexualised and Orientalised.[136]

Therefore, this performance (of the song *Little Egypt* in the film *Roustabout* [1964]) is divided into two sections: first, to read and deconstruct the footage to identify the visual codes or signifiers; and second, to progress to reconstruct and respond. Section 1 begins by scrutinising the name and history preceding it and its significance, locating how and in what way the IOFO is represented within the film. The different elements then begin to be separated within the primary, already selected source, in this case, the original footage in *Roustabout*. To understand the full impact of such representations, it is essential to note visual details, including contextual references, which creates the imperative to scrutinise the footage and how different signifiers and stereotypes are placed within a single narrative.

An example of this scrutiny is the timeline of the movie, with its beginning, middle and end, as well as the way the song is woven in with the visuals and the performance within the footage. Once the visual signifiers are singled out and located, it becomes possible to identify places within the footage where an artistic intervention might make best sense in disrupting the imagined Oriental space within the mise-en-scène of the selected footage. It then becomes feasible to make the new video and use it as a backdrop to the performance. Visual signifiers, such as the accessories worn by the dancers, for example, the coin belts, ornate headdress, and shimmering costumes; the veil, strongly associated with exoticism, the East and the Muslim tradition; the set design, such as the backdrop scenery of painted cityscape and architecture, minarets, domes and *mashribiyya* (wooden railing or screen typical of Islamic design); cushions and carpets on the floor; the traditional belly dancer painted on the proscenium arch; choreography: based on Egyptian paintings (side profile views, female poses and hand gestures), belly dancing and go-go dance can then be subverted, omitted or disrupted in the process of editing or performance.

[136] Examples of such representation of the Orientalised Female Other as woman, as dancer, are many. Hollywood narratives such as *She* (1935), or *Salome and Dance of The Seven Veils* (1961) are worth mentioning, but none seem to connect with 'Little Egypt' in such a literal way.

5.4.2 *Section 1: Regress – the history of the name, the footage and the signifiers within*

Figure 52: Maria Kheirkhah, *Little Lady in Egypt to Little Egypt in the US*, mind map

5.4.2.1 Naming: Little Lady in Egypt to Little Egypt in the United States

Exploring the name *Little Egypt* and how it may relate to the earlier writings of Gustave Flaubert and his sexually charged accounts of Kuchuk Hanem allows the research to follow how the name Kuchuk Hanem begins to shift and change into *Little Egypt* and how it is translated and transformed throughout the century (Fig. 52, mind map illustrating this transformation). Her re-emergence in the 1896 Chicago World Fair, when an (assumed) belly dancer named Little Egypt (in the tent entitled '*A Street in Cairo'*) supposedly introduced a controversial dance, the *Hoochy Coochy* (also known as the 'muscle dance'), to a nineteenth-century US public, is a notable point of entrance into the popular imagination (Fig. 51).[137, 138] The name then reappears some 60 years later as the title of Presley's song *Little Egypt* in *Roustabout*, a reoccurrence

[137] At this event, *Little Egypt* was performed by no less than three different ladies, the popular belly dancers Farida Mazar Spyropoulos, Ashea Wabe and Fatima Djemille.
[138] The term 'Hoochy Coochy' and the dance known by that name comes from the French word *hochequeue* (literally meaning 'to shake a tail'), which refers to a small bird that shakes its tail feathers. The Hoochy Coochy dance is associated with the tune called 'The Street of Cairo' or 'The Poor Little Country Maid'. The dance was introduced to America by Sol Bloom, the entertainment director who presented the attraction 'A Street In Cairo'.

of the same title in popular culture through other media. The portrayal and rebirth of the name Kuchuk Hanem as Little Egypt offered the opportunity to title the performance while also considering an intervention through practice in which an alternative knowledge and understanding of the figure/character may be represented.

Figure 53: *Roustabout* (1964), still from film

Figure 54: *Roustabout* (1964), still from film

Figure 55: *Roustabout* (1964), still from film

5.4.3 Little Egypt 1964: reading the Oriental space in *Roustabout* (Little Egypt scene)

In this scene (Fig. 53), Presley (playing the character Charlie Rogers) stands at the front of a stage-set that depicts an ornately decorated Middle Eastern architectural space while a group of women dances. The stage floor is divided into three areas: first, a painted cityscape backdrop reminiscent of the Orientalist paintings of, for example, Frank Dillon or John Fredrick Lewis of the 1850s, creating a visual fantasy of another place; second, a platform where the dancers can perform their choreographed dances. This 'Middle Eastern space' is represented through the architectural details and furniture of Eastern-style cushions and carpets on the floor, ornate and colourful. The space is positioned close to a painted backdrop that depicts the architecture of minarets, domes and *mashribiyya*. Through these theatrical devices, the platform suggests a faraway land and helps to define the identity of the dancers who perform within that space. The third space of the stage is separated from the second by a thin screen and a proscenium arch, framing the backdrop and the internal space of the stage with its ornate decorations. It is here where the Oriental dancing girls perform their choreographed and caricatured Eastern gestures. The proscenium arch bears a pair of symmetrical panels, each of which portrays a painted belly dancer in the fashion of a miniature painting typical of the Ghajar period in Persia during the sixteenth century.

A thin veil divides the space and enables the audience to see and enjoy what is behind the screen. Dancing girls in golden bikinis, their faces covered with a thin veil, enter the stage introduced by the sound of drums and a clarinet, typical of the sounds played before filmed depictions of war. The drums remind us of Hollywood movies that may be said to have an Orientalist theme, such as *The Drum*, directed by Zoltan Korda in 1938, or *Arabian Nights*, directed by John Rawlins in 1942, while the clarinet simultaneously produces a glissando sound evocative of a sexy girl who walks in. The sound of drums and clarinet, together with the appearance of the dancing girls, announces and punctuate the performance, producing a mixture of pleasure and war-like rhythm. These suggestive sounds and images in combination assert both danger and sensuality – the exotic and sensual yet dangerous world of Egypt.

After the dancing girls enter, saxophones announce a moment of pause, and the girls stop in a line and stand with their hands up, palms out and upward, in a pose

typical of painted depictions of Nubian female dancers and semi-profile figure depictions in classical Egyptian art. The spotlight moves onto a male figure acted by Presley, 'The King of Rock and Roll', who enters at the front of the stage with his groomed black hair and bright red jacket. He moves across the stage, yet when he steps into the third space on stage, which separates him from the dancing girls, the tone of the music changes into Presley's own song and he sings:[139] *I went and bought myself a ticket and I sat … ying-ying, ying-ying.*

Figure 56: Promotional shot for the film *Roustabout* (1964), screenshot

While Presley sings, the girls dance. Their choreography mimics Egyptian tomb paintings that depict dancing figures (stylistically dated around 3000 BCE), animated female poses and hand gestures (Fig. 56). Belly dancing is suggested/staged, with its original intention as a celebratory moment and a ritualistic practice within an all-female context is lost in a public arena loaded by overwhelming entertainment values. The dancers here parade an exotic sexuality of the woman of the Orient, but the belly dancer in this instance may or may not be an Oriental woman. The body carrying the costume, the correctness and the gestures hardly matter; what really matters is that these bodies are told once more, they are spoken by the choreographer and constructed to carry a narrative of representing the Oriental and the Eastern body for all to see, enjoy and fantasise. Ornaments such as coin belts, ornate headdresses and shimmering costumes are clearly worn to indicate a belly dancer. The power of the film sequence lies in mimicking all that is clichéd in representing the dancing IOFO. The set, costumes, dance and other elements recount a history that precedes the

[139] 'I went and bought myself a ticket and I sat down in the very first row
They pulled the curtain but then when they turned the spotlight way down low
Little Egypt came out a-struttin' wearin' nothin' but a button and a bow'.

scene. This history is retold with the same basic message within the narrative of the song.

It is important to remember that Presley, nicknamed 'The King', and 'Little Egypt' (initially the nickname of the *first* of three belly dancers performing at the 1896 Chicago World Fair and, subsequently, that of other dancers) are already recognised as significant within American popular entertainment.[140] Both the performers and the set are framed within an international economic context of popular entertainment. In *Roustabout,* Presley gives voice to Little Egypt. This seems to already represent a power relationship, both in the way it is gendered and in relation to cultures and nations, in the way that Presley sings and voices the female Little Egypt, but also the women who dance around semi-naked in relation to a fully clothed Presley. The term 'Little Egypt*'* is already loaded with a constructed imaginary, referring to a country colonised, reported and recorded through travelogues, French colonial records, and accounts of Egypt and the Egyptians. This sense of superiority is further emphasised by the term 'Little', which could be interpreted as relating to size, or familiarity, or perhaps a projected cultural significance and thereby may be read as some slang form of disempowerment. Perhaps, in relation to this Other geographical space and female body, it be could be seen as a derogatory term of familiarity, a little-ness in some way, a term that serves to 'belittle'.

[140] The nickname 'The King' is given to a specific individual and identified male. However, Little Egypt represents many female dancers from the East and therefore this collective naming undermines individual identity.

5.4.4 The performance *Little Egypt* at the Subjectivity and Feminisms Research Group at Chelsea College of Arts (2013)

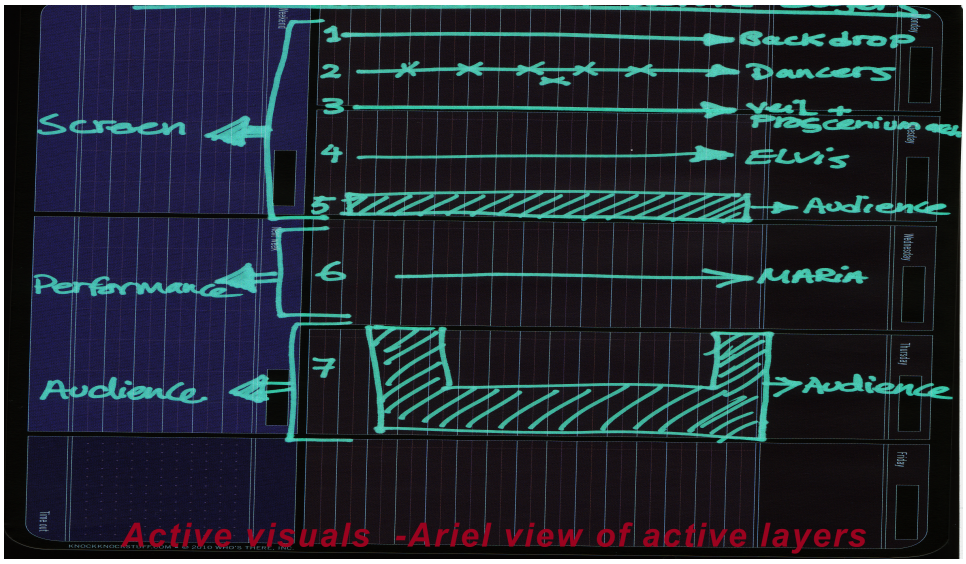


Figure 57: Maria Kheirkhah, spatial design/ mind map (2013), a plan view of the different spaces considered within the physical space of the performance

5.4.4.1 *Little Egypt* – The Performance

The invited audience arrives and take their seats at the dinner table. They are provided with a list of 27 invited presenters, and the respective titles of their works are laid out in front of them. Each presenter is given a five-minute slot. When my turn comes, my name and the title of the performance are announced: *Little Egypt*.[141]

Lending my body as *Little Egypt*, I am seated in front of a monitor at a distance of around two metres, positioning myself with my back to the audience and facing the monitor. The strategy is to create a montage within the space of an imaginary stage/screen, but instead of a stage-set in the background, the film footage from *Roustabout* is used. Previously edited and reworked footage showing Presley singing *Little Egypt* is interrupted by inserting 10 seconds of silent black after every 30 seconds of Presley singing. As he starts singing, I move my body to the tune of the music and swing to the right and left. Swaying my red, light, ornate scarf (veil) from side to side, my head and body are covered under the thin cloth. At this point, the audience can only see my back and the scarf. I chose a red scarf similar to the red coat that Presley wears (e.g. see Fig. 55) and to the red-veiled belly dancer in the video

[141] A direct textual intervention to address lack of visibility and to contextualise the performance, addressing an all-female gathering.

(see Fig. 54) to close the perceptual gap between the screen and its players, setting a unity of layers that acts as though it is one performance and one stage, bringing together disparate elements within the performance space. I become witness to a representation of a dance that presents the stereotype, a representation of me as an IOFO. While the monitor provides the backdrop, I am simultaneously an active commentator and performer, inserting myself into the visual narrative of the performance. Here, two active layers are created: the performance and the audience. My audience first sees me, a living and moving body responding to a moving image, but the colours subtly lead the viewers to make other connections with several elements being played on the screen. The red, ornate scarf is sequined like the costume traditionally worn by belly dancers. Its veil-like, see-through yet covered qualities suggest sensual and sexual connotations.

As the video moves into a silent blank, I turn around to face the audience. My scarf/veil gives way to a covered black-veiled face with a coin belt tied around my head, rather than on my hips (as it would often be in traditional belly dance). A hole has been cut in my black veil at the level of my mouth. This visual juxtaposition replaces the usual depiction of only the IOFO's eyes being visible and displayed, as is often portrayed in the narratives of veiling. I shift the visual signifier of the eyes (on display) to the mouth (covered and hidden), disrupting an aspect of the norm and displacing the usual viewing associated with a veiled Oriental woman. During the performance, I alternatively shift between the frontal position and turning my back to the audience to observe the screen. Facing the screen, with my back to the audience, I watch Presley's performance and the choreographed dancers who dance neither a 'go-go' nor a belly dance but something in between. As my audience witnesses me witnessing my own representation, I start shaking my coin belt as a way of making fun of it. I then turn around to my audience, showing outrage by facing them. An identification with the dancers is established, and then, a dis-identification takes place. At this point, I stick my tongue out at my audience, poking it through the hole in my black veil (Fig. 58). This suggestion is twofold: it is a means of protest and rebellion and a way of drawing attention to my awareness of a ritual, sexuality and science mocked by its audience. The performance acknowledges the perception that is built around it by embodying it in the most visually direct way.

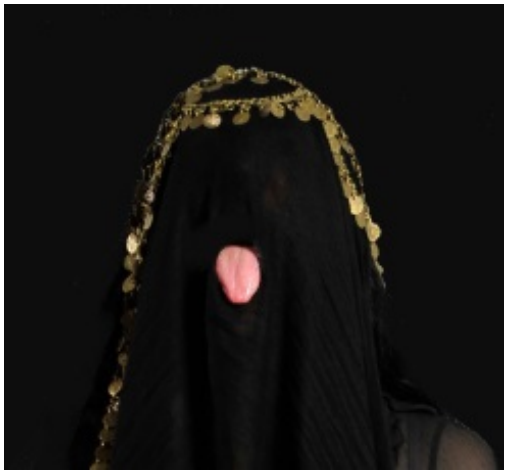


Figure 58: Maria Kheirkhah, *Little Egypt* (2013), detail

I keep moving my tongue in the middle of the blackness of my scarf and veiled face, addressing the largely Western feminist audience with my head, facing and moving to the left and the right, confrontational and active. Interrupting the perception of the veiled woman as passive and mute, I use my tongue to shock and surprise. Sticking out the tongue may mean different things in different cultures. Here, within this audience and cultural context, it is an act of rudeness, of vulgarity and obscenity. With this performance, I demonstrate an attitude of trickery and use my tongue as an extension of my body to challenge the territorial boundary to which women of colour, particularly Islamo-Orientalised Females, are subjected. Within and through this enactment, I sought to renegotiate a space in which the IOFO would be authorised. Presenting myself in costumes saturated with the signifiers of the Orient – the veil-like scarves and ornamental jewels – is a representation of a fully embodied Oriental subject who is perceived as an object in relation to an audience. However, I refuted fetishisation, which would require the Oriental woman to be a sexual object, passive and submissive.

Sticking the tongue out substitutes for a spoken statement but, unlike spoken language, my tongue does not produce a fixed meaning. It is this ambiguity that enables the stuck-out tongue to undermine the opposition between seriousness and silliness: through shock and disgust, between beautiful and disgusting, between sexual and piety, between absolute hidden and an intimate exposure. Through the black veil, occasional laughter can be heard from the invited audience, sounds of disquiet within the room, expressions such as 'Oh my God!' from what sounds like a shocked and surprised audience. The performance used strategies of shock, repulsion and humour

while making references to Orientalists' devices using the medium of video and a combination of dance and ornamental accessories to engage with a selected group of elite feminists to shake up the visual imaginary of the exoticised Oriental woman. This piece contributes to the research by devising a performance and a voice through disrupting the passive image (as often read by Western Orientalist feminists or feminist Orientalists), both embodied and enacted as the performer and by disrupting the normative reading of the Oriental woman within Hollywood depictions and making new connections for the viewer/audience of Western and elite feminists.

5.5 Project 2: *Little Egypt II*

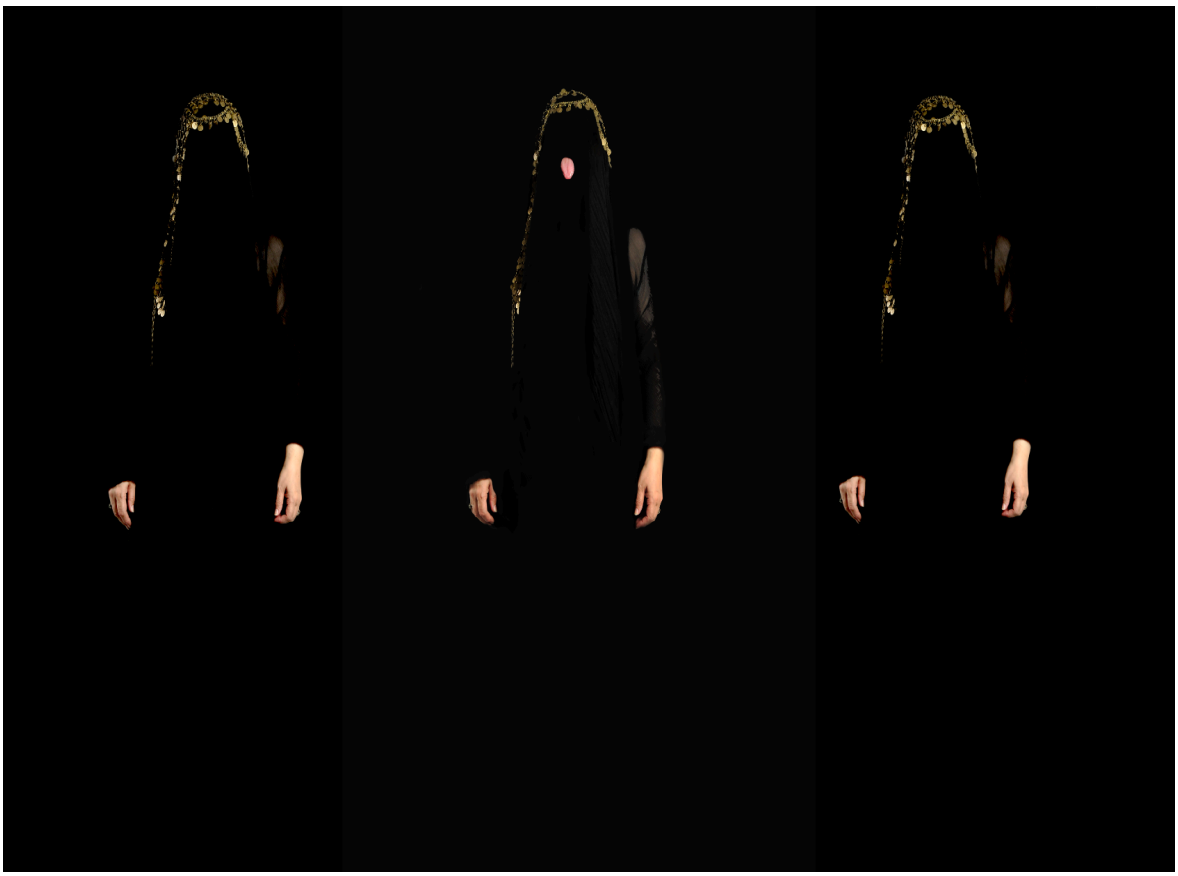


Figure 59: Maria Kheirkhah, *Little Egypt II* (2017), photographic triptych, 111 x 180 cm each

A further development of the performance *Little Egypt I* (2013) was the photographic triptych *Little Egypt II* (2017; Fig. 59), in which the focus is on a static and single gesture standing alone in place of the performance. Using photography and digital manipulation, the photograph is transformed. In the photo, I use the darkness of the background to merge into the darkness of the black veil in order to take the focus away from the veil and instead emphasise the confrontational posture of the figure

and gesture. The figure in the photograph, a standing odalisque, is arguably a contradiction in terms – standing denies the Oriental depictions of a recumbent, half-naked odalisque and confronts the observer with a greater physical presence as the photographs are printed larger than life-size and installed above eye level as a way of claiming a physicality, which cannot be ignored.

The photographic triptych deliberately rejects the exchange of gazes between the subject in the photograph and the viewer; the viewer is deprived of the expression of the face and eye contact. The typically bare breasts of the Orientalised woman, as seen in the postcard series discussed by Alloula in Chapter 2, are denied and her bare hands hang down by her side. The fully dressed figure in the triptych rebuffs the sexualised nudity with which mute belly dancers are often illustrated in Orientalist paintings. This is a statement with its own agency within the context of the triptych. The paradox of 'little' as in the title *Little Egypt* is symbolised by the larger than life-size photographic triptych. The tongue offends the gaze, and the deliberate action of sticking out the tongue is a playful riposte and, in doing so, it offers the implication of voice.

As a way of devising a strategy to speak back, I used the development and method employed through the previous projects to examine possible strategies of resisting the stereotype, addressing void and voice through installation, performance and photography posed in my initial two questions.[142] As the research developed I asked, what of voice and agency in our current post-9/11 context? I found that the research needed to go further. Although the works so far demonstrate presence, they cannot deal with the complexity of the larger question and the voice of the IOFO as it transpires in Chapter 3, in which the projections of history and the current political moment present my practice with greater challenges.

The following projects build on the potential of digital manipulation, as seen in *Little Egypt II*, and aim to visualise the interconnection of history and current political events. They seek to explore how the artist as the IOFO can speak. These projects explore photomontage as experiments to find possible visual solutions to this new concept.

[142] In relation to the mute Kuchuck Hanem and Safie.

5.6 Project 3: *Bearing Witness* Collage Series

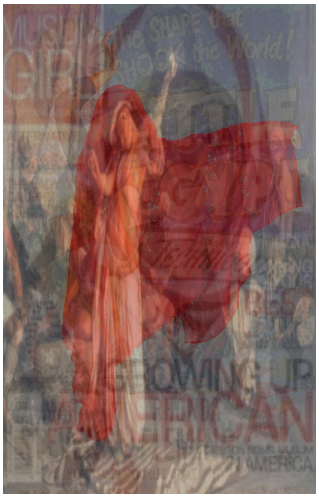


Figure 60: Maria Kheirkhah, *Bearing Witness 1* (2017), Collage Series 1, photographic print, 90 x 150 cm

Figure 61: Maria Kheirkhah, *Bearing Witness 2* (2017), Collage Series 2, digital print size: undetermined

Figure 62: Maria Kheirkhah, *Bearing Witness 3* (2017), Collage Series 3, digital print size: undetermined

5.6.1 Experiments with the visual representation of the context: joining the dots – a visual palimpsest (the IOFO)

The works *Bearing Witness* Collage Series 1, 2 and 3 (2017; Figs. 60–62) explore the contemporary presence of historical Orientalist representations by making such associations visible through methods of photomontage. Disseminated through terror

warnings, magazine articles, films and television, the persistent memory of Orientalist nineteenth-century reports, travelogues, postcards and so forth, is materialised and expressed in the present. My work seeks to contextualise this dynamic relationship between past and present, giving it visibility. It aims to frame the historical representation of the Oriental female together with depictions of Muslim women in the media today through the method of photomontage, which is not an unusual method:

> It is a fact that many of the early photomontages attacked the political events of the day…photography and printed texts combined and transformed into a static film. The Dadaist … applied these same principles to pictorial expressions.
>
> (Hausmann 2009: 29–31)

My work uses photomontage to critique politically motivated stereotyping and Islamisation (from an Islamophobic perspective) of the female body by using photographic material as its source and opacity as a method of image manipulation. The combination of both diverse and contrasting figurative Orientalist paintings, travelogues, recent photos and slogans around the Muslim female is superimposed in a single frame. This method has the capacity to depict different representations of the female Islamo-Orientalised bodies. It further aims to create connections and juxtapositions between history and the present, between words and slogans related to the Oriental female body. Visualising or, as suggested above by Hausmann (2009), creating a static film, has the capability not only to reveal the underlying invisible disparate context of the Muslim Oriental female, but also to critique her Othering: a Frankenstein's bride in the form of a single digital print.

This series of work uses collage as a method by superimposing different layers of images: Oriental paintings of a dancing girl are layered with contemporary headlines related to the veil, as well as textual and image-based representations of Muslim women. In this way, time, images and slogans become condensed and create what may be termed a palimpsest, capable of producing its own history and revealing the connections between history and the contemporary attitudes by making a critical statement through the title and confronting my Western audience through my artwork and my artistic voice. In the series of prints that compose project number three (*Bearing Witness,* 2018), I consolidate the relevance and relationship of the historical

representation with the current political depictions of the Muslim female Other. A further exploration, made later in the research process, extends the argument as a visual method (discussed in Chapter 2) to highlight the political rhetoric surrounding the IOFO as constructed in the contemporary media to shape popular understanding and beliefs (Fig. 64). This piece exists as part of a development towards constructing a Frankenstein's bride linked to an ongoing project.

5.7 Project 4: *Grafting the Skin* (2019)

Figure 63: Maria Kheirkhah (2019), *Grafting the Skin,* multimedia, 47 x 100 cm

Since 2010, I have been developing an archive of visual material containing images of Oriental paintings found online and in books, newspaper articles, and representations of and about Muslim women, in particular media-related material disseminated through the tabloid press. *Grafting the Skin* was a development of visual and contextual materials gathered during research with a particular focus on the current media representation and the rhetoric used to represent the Muslim female as Other (as explored in Chapter 2). This approach was to make visible and to comment critically upon the tabloid misrepresentations aimed at the wider British public at the expense of the Muslim communities that were portrayed unjustly as a threat. This method was used to bring together disparate but related visual published materials

considered within the research and critically embedded within the context (socio-political reality) of my artwork.

Figure 64: Maria Kheirkhah, *Artist's archive, Newspaper Materials reprinted* (2011–19)

Figure 65: Maria Kheirkhah, *Frankenstein, Grafting the Skin* (2019), multimedia, 28 x 42 cm.

In *Frankenstein, Grafting the Skin* (2019), I developed a method of stitching and binding, through which I found a new way of referencing the constructive nature of the IOFO. The idea of collecting, cultivating, or 'stitching together' a 'skin' from popular media graphic images and text allowed me to use this as a metaphor,

revealing the 'stitching together' of the popular idea of the Oriental woman, a process of Othering'. This led to the possibility of exploring image-text constellations, some of which are explored in the following works.

5.8 Project 5: *Your Gaze Hits the Side of my Face* (2015–19)

Figure 66: Maria Kheirkhah, *Your Gaze Hits the Side of my Face* (2015–19), photographic print, 120 x 75 cm

This project made use of the image of an anonymous woman (Fig. 66) selected from postcard images collated from various private collections and archives published by Alloula (1987) and words borrowed from feminist artist Barbara Kruger, who superimposed the words *Your gaze hits the side of my face* (1981) on the side of a photograph of a marble bust of a Caucasian woman. Defying the objectification of the woman, Kruger creates a tension between the image and the words in relation to the male gaze. Superimposing Kruger's statement on the chosen postcard of an *anonymous* Middle Eastern woman (i.e. without identity) is not only aimed at the male viewer, but also towards the relative and privileged position of a Western audience of all genders in the same way as Kruger recognises the privilege of language as a male territory.[143] The words juxtaposed upon the anonymous Oriental female image confront white Western privilege as a male territory. As Jo Anna Isaak (1996) highlights, Kruger emphasises the ways in which language can manipulate and undermine the assumption of masculine control over language by refusing to

[143] The voice of authority and aggression associated with the male voice. (Issak 1996:37).

complete the cycle of meaning and shifting the pronouns to expose the positioning of woman as 'Other'. Isaak remarks upon Jenny Holzer's work:

> Compounding cliché upon cliché, as if to beat the stultifying force of language at its own game. She (Holzer) plays upon the codes already in place, the reality that has already been written for us to make us aware of the ways in which those clichés have saturated us – the degree to which we are shaped by the verbal environment in which we are immersed.[144]
>
> (Issak 1996: 35)

My research/practice plays upon the same codes and intervention, in which the image sought not only to defy a similar positioning for the female Oriental as voiceless other, as the object of the gaze, but also to reinforce the return of the gaze by using the odalisque as a cliché. My artwork places the same nouns and tests the relationship between the Western female gaze and the Oriental woman, similar to how Mulvey (1975) positions the audience as the male protagonist and the female as the object of the gaze on the screen. In this way, my artwork aims to make the power position between women visible. Using intersectional feminism as a lens to address inequality, Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined this term in 1989 says,

> Self-interrogation is a good place to start …. [t]o be open to looking at all of the ways our systems reproduce these inequalities, and that includes the privileges as well as the harms.
>
> (Crenshaw in Steinmetz 2020: n.p.)

Through reappropriating Kruger's text (a canonised feminist artist), and the image of the odalisque facing out and confronting the viewer directly, I wanted to draw out a tension and the possible potential to foreground power relationships rather than gender relationships and to highlight privilege, a privilege reproduced not only through history and culture, but also through image and language.

[144] Both Kruger and Holzer use words and image as raw material to comment upon women's position "exclusion and negative inscription" to intervene the market place of mass culture (Isaak 1996: 35).

Figure 67: Maria Kheirkhah, A2 poster produced in conjunction for the exhibition *Black & White Passing Mediterranean Passing Muslim* (2018–19), Triangle Gallery, Chelsea College of Arts London

My solo exhibition *Black & White Passing Mediterranean Passing Muslim* (2018-19) at the Triangle Gallery, Chelsea College of Arts brought together the different aesthetic qualities and approaches previously explored in this research alongside and against one another. This approach offered the potential to tease out visual nuances inherent within each work and to explore further whether, and in what manner, the concept of 'Another' may emerge. Among the pieces in this exhibition were the following two works – *Black & White* (2018) and *The Ambassador* (2017–18).

5.9 Project 6: *Black & White* (2018)

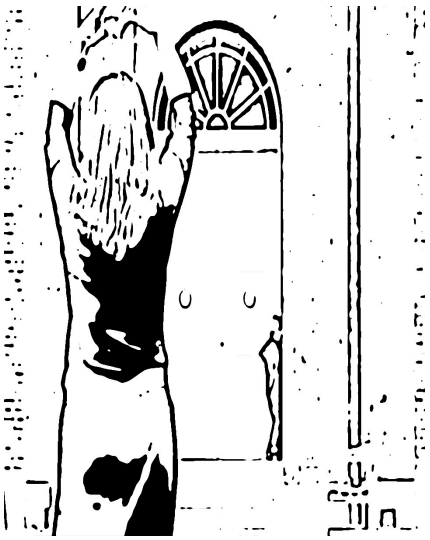


Figure 68: Maria Kheirkhah*, Black & White*, digital print, variable sizes (2018)

5.9.1 Turning up the voice, turning down the image

Black & White is a series of 42 stills extracted from a silent video performance, *DPGI*. The stills were manipulated and refined into black-and-white prints. The prints were wall-mounted and installed 2 cm apart horizontally, in line and at eye level. Each frame depicts a single dance movement frozen in time. This allows the viewer to pause at will and contemplate, while the horizontal rhythm and continuity of each image moves the viewer sequentially from left to right, with a beginning, middle and end, as in the original performance.

Figure 69: Maria Kheirkhah, *Black & White Passing Mediterranean Passing Muslim* (2018–19), installation, Triangle Gallery, Chelsea College of Arts

Figure 70: Maria Kheirkhah, *DPG1, Black & White* (2018), digital print, A3

The visual method developed here builds on the digital manipulations of an earlier photographic experiment (*The Matador,* Fig.71), in which the cultural signifier and the Oriental scarf become more present in the work by saturating the colour to alter its exotic and Orientalist significance. The intensely saturated red of the scarf in *The Matador* becomes solid and static and pushes against the gaze, unlike a transparent Oriental scarf worn by the dancers in *Roustabout*. Using the intensity of the red and the exotic/Oriental scarf could be used to undermine its very function and, through

digital manipulation, I could build upon the cliché, but this time through colour manipulation of the image (i.e. the Oriental and exotic) to undermine its power.

Figure 71: Maria Kheirkhah, *The Matador* (2017), 90 x 150 cm

In *Black & White*, however, I drained the stills of their colour (Fig. 70) to simplify and treat each individual print with the same visual filter as a way of undifferentiating them, giving them uniformity. The implication of this method is to direct the focus away from the surface of the image by removing the photographic quality and simplifying the structure of the images. This was done by turning down and suppressing visual codes, which have the potential to represent a specific individual identity or shift the significance of archetypical depictions/signifiers of religion, culture, or status.

The performance (DPGI) from which the stills were taken, took place soon after 9/11. It consisted of an intervention that sought to resist and protest the kind of cultural and political prejudices that were heightened at the time and directed at me as an individual.[145] Following the events of 9/11, different visual responses seemed to be demanded. These especially related to the media portrayal of Muslims and Muslim women, as well as the reception of my work, which was progressively encouraged through exhibition platforms and played out as the IOFO, shifting from Persian (with an Orientalist emphasis) to Iranian (with an emphasis on Muslim fundamentalism). Such an expectation to bear witness to the IOFO in the form of self-Orientalising and

[145] Such concerns were also reflected in my work *The Ambassador (2017-18)*, discussed in the following section.

self-Othering from my perspective as an artist needed to be challenged, demanding a different artistic response. The process for this performance was developed to remove the visual aesthetic codes of the IOFO, and thereby to renegotiate the Othering of the Muslim woman. Going one step further by reducing the photographic quality of the image to a bare minimum, I aimed to shift the focus to my own words. In this way, my voice, through the words present in the image, gave priority and prominence to my voice, becoming, in effect, a history in the making that not only speaks back, but also has the potential to open up a new space to give an account of my own reality, my own history as a counter-narrative, responsive and responsible to the changing dynamics of my social and political environment.

Figure 72: Maria Kheirkhah, *Black & White* (2018–19), photographic prints

Subsequently, *Black & White* (Fig. 72) uses text as short, salient sentences from my recollection of the moments I experienced: my key emotions, key memories of responses, key points printed as separate excerpts or phrases positioned on each image. Each image is veiled by a tracing paper, taking the image further back. The text/captions were overlaid and take prominence, creating a denser visual presence. The veil (tracing paper) is marked by my words, and their purpose is not to conceal the image but to become more visible. Turning up my voice, by foregrounding my words, and turning down the image, by placing it under the tracing paper, explores the possibility of my voice by stating the assumptions and prejudices, authoring my own words over my image, speaking of my moment in history.

> You who understand the dehumanization of forced removal-relocation-re-education-redefinition, the humiliation of having to

> satisfy your own reality, your voice – you know. And often cannot say it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said.
>
> (Minh-ha 1989: 157–59)

Trinh T. Minh-ha in the above quote points to the missing narratives and voices. She warns us against silence and the possibilities of misrepresentation and omission. In speaking out as embedded in the photographic/mixed media series *Black & White* (2018), my account of the history takes centre stage. Responding to Minh-ha, I endeavour to fill in the *blank* and speak the unspoken.

5.10 Project 7: *The Ambassador* (2017–18)

Figure 73: Maria Kheirkhah (2018), *DPG1, Dancing in the Village I* [video file], duration approx. 1 min 30 sec

Figure 74: Maria Kheirkhah (2018), *The Ambassador* [video file], duration approx. 10 minutes

The video *The Ambassador* is a re-engagement with an earlier performance, *DPG 1* (2006). *The Ambassador* is divided into three chapters and lasts for approximately 10 minutes. The first chapter begins with the original performance (*DPG1*, initially performed in 2006) and runs approximately for a minute and a half. This was an intervention/performance of a belly dance in front of Dulwich Picture Gallery, the oldest gallery in London. It was filmed from across the road, where a camera was set up to record the performance amidst the gallery visitors and passers-by.

In the reworking of *The Ambassador*, the work addresses the absence of the female subject position not only apparent through colonial accounts by Flaubert and Orientalist painters, but also as the female subjectivity missing in Said,[146] Alloula's[147] and Fanon's[148] critiques of colonial and Orientalist projects. Even though they point out, discuss and document the colonist projects in dominating and assaulting cultures through women, they do not include women's voices in their works, as critiqued and pointed out by Mortimer (2005), among others.[149] This absence clearly indicates the gap in knowledge: women must raise their voices to respond to and address these voids by sharing their voices within this contested, socio-political arena of the IOFO.

It is through this gap that I reflect upon my experience of making the work (both during the performance and when scrutinising the video footage).The political moment relates to my personal position, autobiographically, as a means to challenge the problematic IOFO. The sound accompanying the video combines my voice and voice-overs in addition to a range of characteristic Middle Eastern and international musical genres.[150] Still images from the performance were put together through different filters to render them into an abstracted animation rather than to depict a straightforward, filmed documentation. Combining the images of my performance with my erstwhile audience (as captured in the film) through the same visual filter

---

[146] Said mentions both cases of Kuchuk Hanem and Safie but never expands on them in relation to gender.

[147] Megan MacDonald cites Carol Schloss's (1987) review of Alloula's book, *The Colonial Hareem* in which Schloss comments: 'if Algerian women were vulnerable and disgraced by their original display on colonial postcards, they are once again exposed by their display in this book. Their images leave them still silent and newly imprisoned by the very text that purports to liberate them' . *Muslim Women, Transnational Feminism and the Ethics of Pedagogy* (2014: 54).

[148] Megan MacDonald criticises Fanon and writes, 'While Fanon's observations are insightful, again, the subaltern does not speak here. Fanon offers no Algerian woman's voices with or without the veil- and if he did, he would be appropriating them'. *Muslim Women, Transnational Feminism and the Ethics of Pedagogy* (2014: 28).

[149] Reina Lewis (1996: 18) criticises Said, saying 'I find that although Said appreciates Asia Djebar's literary production, calling L'amour, la fantasia "a wonderful fictional and personal reconstruction of the period," his words of praise appear in a footnote to the chapter on Camus, not in the main body of the text'. (*Culture and Imperialism* 1993: 349 n208) … 'Said never questions women's apparent absence as producers of Orientalist discourse or as agents within colonial power' (Lewis 1996: 18).

[150] Such as various versions of Santoor, Exotic beats, Dunbek beats, European waltz, variations of Expo, Dolce Vita and manipulated voice over.

creates a less differentiated visual narrative. This approach further uses my own voice and autobiographical text, speaking of myself and my own experience as a voice-over while the mash-up of the selected music from different parts of the world is deployed as a partly stereotypical, partly diverse and unlocatable sound background from elsewhere and simultaneously from nowhere. The following is a brief description of this project.[151]

The voice-over, the image, the music, and the script

Part 1, titled *The Performance. DPG1, Dancing in the Village*, shows the original performance as an artist video lasting 90 seconds.[152] The colour footage comprises a series of stills, and the video shows my performance of a belly dance in front of Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2006. The video of the dance is interrupted by still shots, removing the opportunity to observe a continuous and fluid dance. Part 2, titled *The Ambassador*, begins with Flaubert's accounts of Kuchuk Hanem.[153] The video runs in silence and the viewer is required to read the text having just seen the performance in Part 1.

The text (Fig. 75) spotlights the descriptive sexualised and eroticised nature of the French writer Gustave Flaubert to emphasise the early misrepresentations of the Oriental women, giving form to a sexualised Kuchuk, rather than being pure entertainment.[154] Flaubert describes her in detail, taking his reader on his sexual journey. As the audience of my video engages with the story told by Flaubert and begins to form a sexualised fantasy, through the edit, the text is pierced and interrupted by a *darbuka* (hand drum) sound and the visuals begin.

The music and voice-over further interrupt the flow; the voice-over recites the autobiography of a different subjectivity, of an embodied experience. At this point, the pleasure of the dance is two steps further removed by a new narrative, overlaid as a voice-over, and then a third time removed as the footage is manipulated, changing the pace, both fast and slow motion, bleached out and saturated with colour.

---

[151] *The Ambassador* 270220 (Full version-2018), video link https://vimeo.com/529036308

[152] I have used the theme of dance for some of my performance works, including *DPGI* (2006) and *See, Hear, Speak (2003).* Adelaide Bannerman discussed these works in her paper *The Uncertainty Principle* presented at Tate Modern in 2007, where she contextualises the above dance videos in relation to artists Adrian Piper (*Untitled Performance at Max's*, 1971), Gillian Wearing (*Dancing In Peckham*, 1994); Pipilotti Rist (*Ever is Overall*, 1997). For this project I have decided to concentrate on the construction of the new video (*The Ambassador 2018).*

[153] Ed. Steegmuller Francis, Flaubert In Egypt; A narrative drawn from Gustave Flaubert's travel notes and letters translated from French. Published by Penguin Group USA Inc. March 1996.

[154] In the Western imagination, which was reliant on the reports, travelogues, and stories of the East, of Other places as explored in chapter 1.

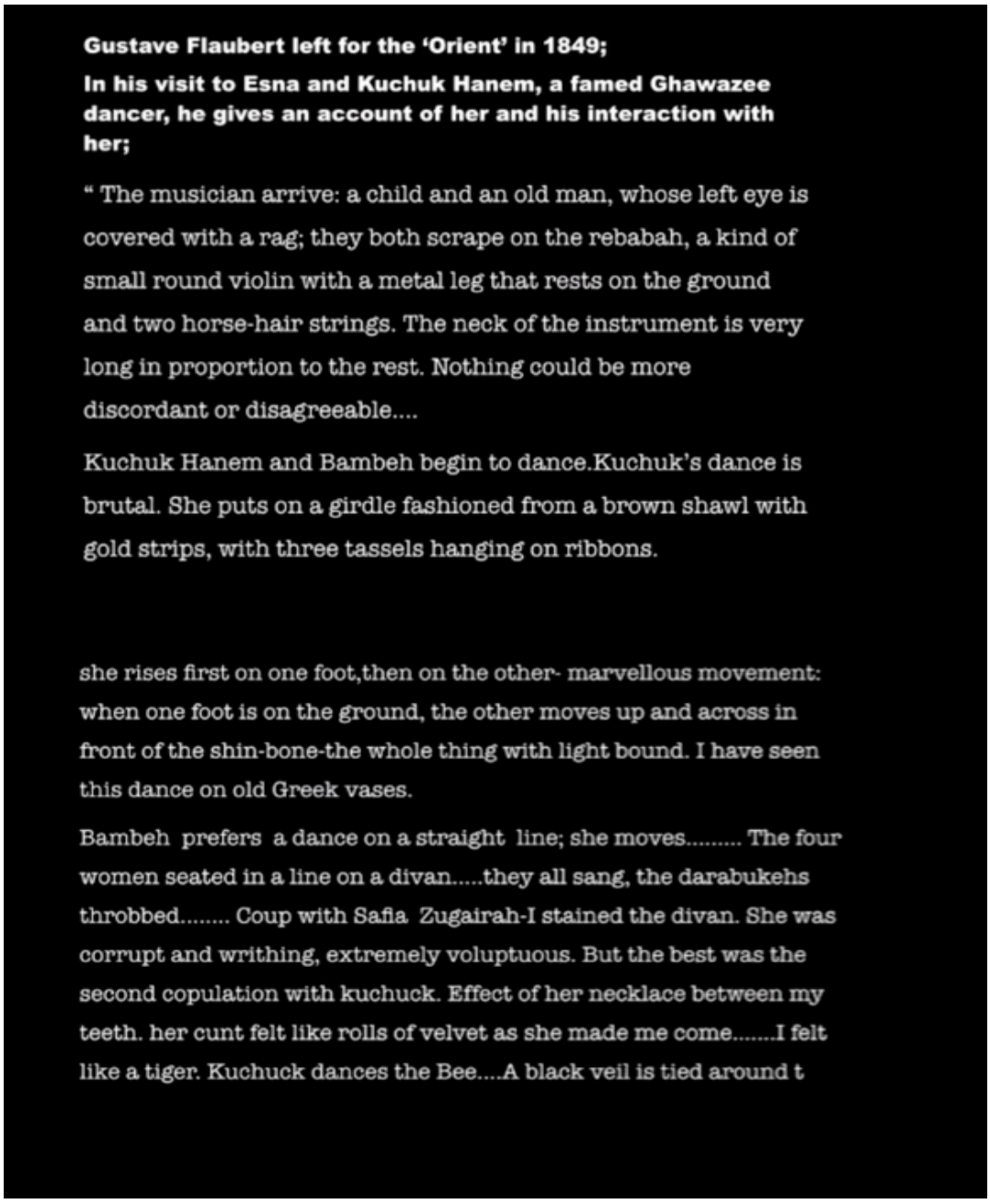


Figure 75: Maria Kheirkhah, still from the video *The Ambassador* (2018)

The rhythm to the beat and music carries the voice as it becomes overlaid and echoed, accompanied by other voices. The voices are laid on top of each other, repeating the same narrative (Fig.76) as if experiencing the same thing, except for my female voice slightly at the forefront, just enough for the listener to follow. As the rhythm continues, the footage changes and the text begins to push its way into the voice. The text stays on top of the image as the voice speaks over the footage. The image disappears in its own shadow, it slows down, it speeds up, and frozen moments

become fluid. It is bleached and washed-out, it is saturated and blacked out (Fig. 75). It dances with the rhythm and against the rhythm. My voice turns into text, the text writes my story, and the music continues to play, like a thread holding on to sound, image and voice. The text reiterates the voice-over, rolling up the screen at a certain speed (Fig. 76), just enough for the reader to engage with the words in relation to time.

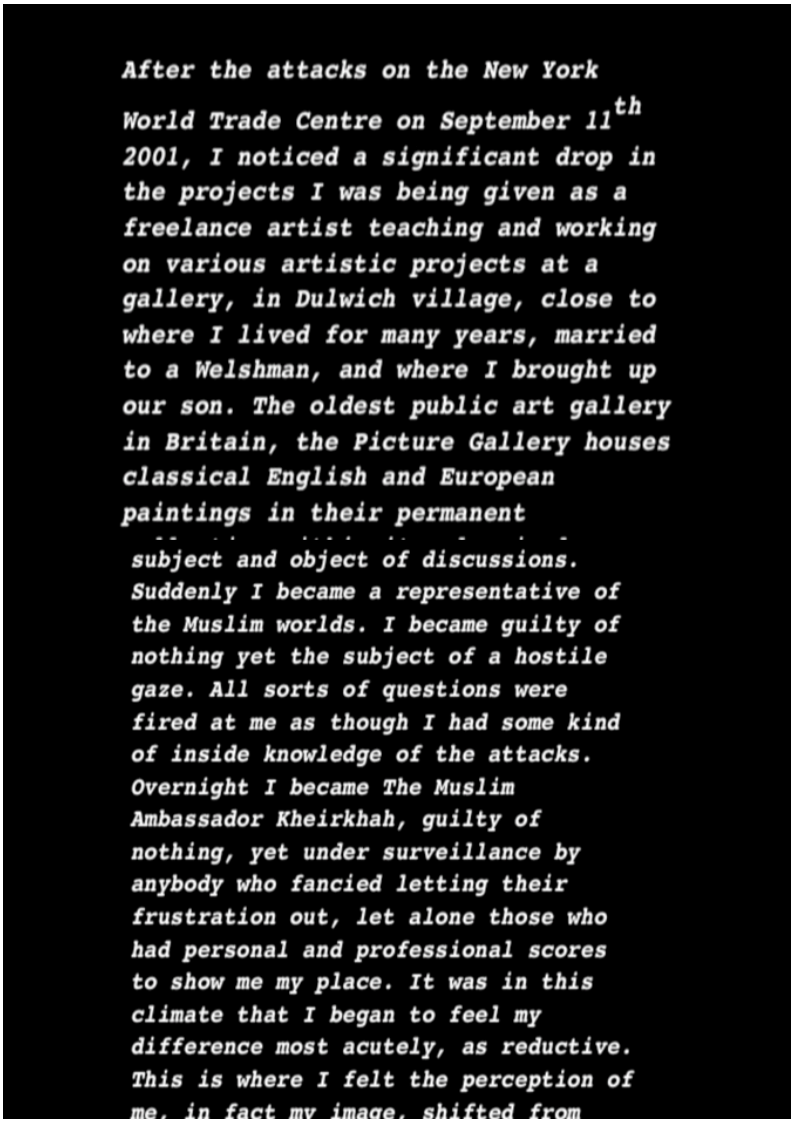


Figure 76: Maria Kheirkhah, still from the video *The Ambassador* (2018)

My original belly dance (*DPG1*) was performed as a form of resistance, a protest in public, but a further manipulation of the video and the insertion of the voice-over turns my voice into a testament as the commentator, the role of my body within it tells of my experience in relation to my own political and social moment. The video

continues and the final chapter begins.

In Part 3, the mash-up music continues and leads to footage of my immediate audience, seeing what I have felt but not seen before, seeing the whiteness of my audience as it gazes upon me. The camera documents my body in relation to my audience and their gaze/reactions. As the focus gets close, the audience become visible in the field of vision, blurred out so as not to focus on individual identities – but to make visible the immediate audience and passers-by, the overwhelming whiteness of the gallery visitors, my context. It is at this point my video makes visible the relationship between the audience, the artwork, and the artist.

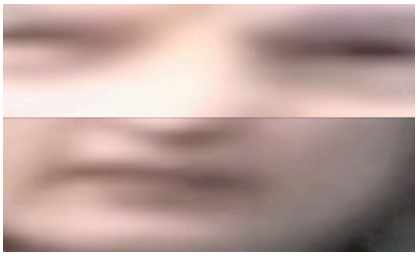


Figure 77: Maria Kheirkhah, still from the video *The Ambassador* (2018)

The Ambassador illustrates a situation in which my dance *DPG1* is being looked at (an assumed power position) by my audience (passers-by). This power relationship is broken by my camera, with both my performance and the audience watching being filmed, later to be looked at by yet another, different audience. I use a mash-up system of multiplicity. In adopting this strategy of collapsing history (i.e. using text and Flaubert's account of Hanem) with the account of my contemporary social and political position together, boundaries are pushed to become less significant to tease out relationships through multiple juxtapositions on one continuous timeline in the video *The Ambassador* (2017–18).

The video – including all parts, the history, the performance, my words through text and voice-over and the audience, which are all part of the same timeline – makes it possible to highlight a complex relationship that exists between history and the contemporary, as well as me, my art, the performance and my context.

My voice rewrites Flaubert's story, replacing his subject position. My story is danced, my voice is spoken and written, my autobiography and subjective space are embedded in my art and into the history of other visuals, rewriting visual history. In

this artwork, I become the author of my narrative, the personal becomes the political, I represent myself, from my unique perspective. I am the author of my image by writing myself into my image. The text on the screen of the video is spoken by me as voice-over:

After the attacks on the New York World Trade Centre on September 11th 2001, I noticed a significant drop in the projects I was being given as a freelance artist teaching and working on various artistic projects at the Picture Gallery, in Dulwich Village, close to where I lived for many years, married to a Welshman, and where I brought up our son. The oldest public art gallery in Britain, the Picture Gallery houses classical English and European paintings in their permanent collection within its classical European architecture. Here there was never any mention of my kind of art, by which I mean contemporary art outside of Europe, outside of a Eurocentric reading, leaving a void – where I could insert my existence, where I could become visible. Here, in this place I felt, as all that was female and that was alien.

Simultaneous to my loss of artistic projects, I noticed a change of attitude at work and even in my domestic space. Even the mothers with whom I used to talk at the school that my son attended in Dulwich started to cross-examine me about the 9/11 attacks. Suddenly I was the subject and object of discussions. Suddenly I became a representative of the Muslim worlds. I was guilty of nothing yet the subject of a hostile gaze. All sorts of questions were fired at me as though I had some kind of inside knowledge of the attacks. Overnight I became The Muslim Ambassador Kheirkhah, guilty of nothing, yet under surveillance by anybody who fancied letting their frustration out, let alone those who had personal and professional scores to show me my place. It was in this climate that I began to feel my difference most acutely, as reductive. This is where I felt the perception of me, in fact, my image, shifted from Oriental to Islamo-Oriental most severely.

I was now part of the Axis of Evil.[155]

In most social interactions when I am not known or as I go about my business in public, I usually pass as a Mediterranean. If my appearance was commented on, and as soon as my accent was questioned and my origins became apparent, the attitudes would change, the smiles would give way to a more sober look and I would become the Ambassador Kheirkhah once again. This was to mark a new period and series of works, which continue to influence my art and curatorial practices today. Here at this point, it was important to communicate and confront the sometimes-accusing gaze of both of people who I came across in the public at large and also my artistic audience. It was at this point that I started to look for visual strategies to challenge simplistic assumptions, views and projections.

After having filmed my last dance project in the privacy of my studio in 2003, I decided to take this next performance outside into the public realm. The location I chose was the piazza in front of Dulwich Picture Gallery, in the heart of Dulwich Village, hence its title, Dancing In The Village DPG.

I placed my camera on a tripod on the pavement on the other side of the road and framed my body in full length in order to capture my belly dance in its entirety as well as all the immediate passers-by. The location is a highly affluent area, where most of the population is predominantly white and middle class. I had to put away my sense of difficulty, awkwardness at the possibility that I might be recognized by some of the staff at the Gallery or neighbours and other people whom I knew locally. I fastened my iPod around my waist. I fixed my earphones, the music started, and once the beat came in, I lost my inhibitions. The outside world and the strange looks disappeared.

[155] Axis of Evil (Iran, Iraq and North Korea) was a term used in a speech made by the American president Bush (2002) to address the common enemies of the United States in support of the war on terror.

As I began the dance, I was aware of my difference, I was aware that I was behaving outside the norm. I was wearing all black, in full view of the public and the camera. My black clothing gave a sense of an all-covering black veil look – This all-black modest clothing is untypical of a belly dancer, who traditionally is semi-naked in a colourful costume that emphasizes her belly and breasts, adorned by coins and jewels.

I was aware, yet I was transformed. In some way, I have always been looked at since I came to this country, by men, by people on the train, buses and places where I have studied, worked and lived. My look, my features, my accent, my body shape and masses of dark hair were always a point of inquiry. Mine was obviously a body from elsewhere. It was now for me to claim it, its difference, not to be inhibited by it, not prepared to be unequal. I was no longer a figure of a higher or lower status, classed, clichéd and gendered, but a figure of unknown complexity.

(Maria Kheirkhah 2006–12)

5.11 Conclusion of Chapter 5

This chapter explored and employed methods of intervention through reappropriation and performance, and used techniques such as image-text constellations and colour manipulation to undo and undermine Orientalist narratives. I contributed my voice through the various interventions and responses as a strategy to de-Orientalise and decolonise female images and other Orientalist fantasies. The study of artists' approaches in Chapter 4 (e.g. Hashemi, Satrapi, Amirpour) indicated that it is not the use of aesthetics and signifiers but the artists' ability to navigate them that has greater significance. In other words, the artists' fundamental issue is to evolve a way to approach the creation of work without any compromise by resisting categorisation and directing the gaze upon the subject rather than to adopt a position of self-Othering (*i.e.* to avoid self-Orientalising).

Considering the issues at stake, I conclude this research through two methods developed in the works *Black & White* and *The Ambassador* by utilising the video footage of a belly dance titled *DPG1 Dancing in the Village* (that I originally performed in 2006). Developing such methods to disrupt the visual language used to convey the IOFO offered my practice the opportunity to evolve new aesthetic tools of my own as a way to decentralise and disengage with the visual elements identified in the construction of the IOFO. Building on the visual methods employed through the above projects, *Black & White* (2018–19) and *The Ambassador* (2017–18) I was able to undermine established aesthetics and signifiers, contributing to new visual and multimedia tools of narration to liberate the image of the IOFO and open up a new space for a different voice. This voice is responsive to the changing dynamics of my social, political and artistic environment and has the potential to open up a new space for 'Another' to emerge.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Reflecting upon this research, I am assured once more that the political is personal. My Persian-ness, my Iranian-ness and being a woman and artist from the Muslim world were all felt and noted during my research, whether personally, socially, institutionally or artistically. From the start of the thesis, it was clear that I was confronting questions of identity and identity politics, not only by personally being placed and positioned as an individual, but that my art, too, was received and perceived through a narrow spectrum of identity. I found that there was something unspoken and unsaid, that there was a history to such reception and perception. I also knew that if I was to articulate this unspoken position (in my artistic environment) and widen this limited identity spectrum I shared with many of my contemporaries – women artists of the Muslim diaspora – I needed to dig down, locate the problem before I could introduce a new strategy to offer the possibility to break out from such limitations. This realisation clarified the boundaries of this research as a way of investigating and informing a new position that is exploratory in locating my practice. At the same time, it offered a new framework through which women artists of the Muslim diaspora can form their own narratives, add their own voices to articulate, include and contribute to a transnational contemporary visual art world.

Considering the above, this research investigated the following key areas: the Oriental and Muslim woman, her image, her Otherness, her media representations, her historical, socio-political contemporary context, women artists, curators and critics of the Muslim diaspora, the veil, Orientalism, artistic environment and the visual language applied within this area. The above considerations posed the following questions for this thesis:

1. How is the woman artist of the Muslim diaspora perceived and received within Western contemporary visual arts and culture?

2. Can the woman artist of the Muslim diaspora speak? If so, how and what are the possibilities of that voice through her practice?

This research was inspired in part by Spivak (1985) and her critical position in relation to the term ‘subaltern’ and for me within the context of this research, the subaltern status of women artists of the Muslim diaspora and their marginalised voice and visibility. To answer the above questions, this thesis was structured in two parts:

Part 1 comprised Chapters 1, 2 and 3, which examined the above key aspects to identify and locate the problematic connections I observed in the reception of my work. Part 2 consisted of Chapters 4 and 5, which investigated artistic approaches to the subject(s) of women, Orientalism, Islamophobia and related visual signifiers.

Taking a historical approach, in Part 1, I examined the relationship between the artists of the Muslim diaspora and the Orientalist, colonial and visual representation of the Oriental woman. Specifically, Chapter 1 unpacked three complex areas when looking at Orientalist interpretations and representations of the Oriental female: first, the void and lack of voice in Orientalist representations (Said 1978; Kabbani 2008); second, Orientalist and colonial narratives that filled this void (Fanon 1959; Alloula 1987); and finally, that the Imperial and colonial histories and Orientalist aesthetics used to describe the Oriental female's perceived image impact her presence and hamper her ability to *narrate herself* visually.

Chapter 1 further revealed that the task of the female artist of the Muslim diaspora is much more complicated than simply finding and identifying a gap or lack of voice and placing her own voice within it (*i.e*. that *we*, myself included, do not face a blank canvas to articulate our voice and position). I include myself since the findings revealed that the perception of me as a Persian woman had much to do with Orientalist and colonialist history. This view depicted and imagined my world through an Imperial and colonial lens, marginalising, Othering and displacing my image and the perception of me. In this thesis, I argued that it is the Muslim woman (as a perceived single entity) and her representation through the media, post-Orientalist paintings and colonialist photography that are constructed as the Muslim female Other today.

In Chapter 2, via an analysis of media representations, the role of the image and its limits, text (linguistic messages) in relation to representations of Muslim women and of the Muslim world, I argued that it is partly the sight of the veil, partly the background graphics as a mise-en-scène within the frame and partly the words attached to her image that, in combination, constitute a symbolic evocation of the collective memory of an audience or public with a colonial past. This audience may have already encountered such evocative images (not only historically, but also today, through popular culture and/or the media). This investigation finds the projection to be threefold: first, that of oppression; second, of a naturalised Orientalist gaze (historical); and third, of fear and despised difference (Islamicisation). I argued that

the exotic object of fantasy is now replaced by xenophobia and Islamophobia. I claimed that, since the Islamic revolution in Iran and the subsequent televised humiliation of the hostage crisis (November1979 – January 1981) and, later, the events of 9/11, a greater religious emphasis has been placed on the image and representation of the Oriental woman, developed and shifted to what has become Islamo-Oriental.

In Chapter 3, I contended that such findings have a relevance to the Muslim female diasporic artist, since this imaginary perception (the IOFO) has the potential to hamper female artists' ability to self-narrate as it evokes memories of an Imperial and colonial past. Therefore, reflecting on the image of an imagined Orientalised Muslim woman becomes a decisive consideration for the visual artist as she strives to create her own narrative and claim self-agency.

Having initially taken a historiographic approach, it became obvious through the investigation that it was predominantly the unknown and mute woman who was being painted, photographed and filmed through the eyes of the male Western Imperial, colonial and media agents. The acknowledgement of women's lack of voice as pointed out by Said (1978), Alloula (1987) and Fanon (1965), is accompanied by the acknowledgement that their role have been recounted and voiced through the eyes of men. My thesis locates this lack of voice not only through gender inequality, but also through the power structure in visual representations of the Oriental and Muslim woman. Returning to my question: How does the IOFO navigate and deal with her perceived image, and in what way might her visual art practice seek to challenge this perception? This thesis claims that, to deal with our perceived image, both visually and linguistically, it is necessary to re-think the ways that allow us to rewrite and represent our own history.

6.1 Shifting perspectives

This investigation argued that women artists of the Muslim diaspora face multifaceted problems. If one were seeking to claim a voice to speak back to a complex, constructed and perceived image, such as the IOFO, one must adopt different methods of investigation. These include complexity and multiplicity in place of the more conventional structure of a historiography that does not include women's artistic voices, and especially does not represent women artists and critics of the Muslim worlds within art history. This demand became a difficult task when searching for

literature concerning visual artistic productions of women artists of the Muslim diaspora.

I found that, even in the field of theoretical and postcolonial studies, visual culture studies or feminist studies, there is little critical writing by women artists of the Muslim diaspora (e.g. Araeen 2002; Isaak 1996; Cubitt and Sardar 2002; Evans and Hall 1999). The knowledge production in these areas is dominated by men, white women critics or feminists, but to reiterate, rarely by women artists of the Muslim diaspora. Where we do find artists, they are often disparate voices in catalogues, papers or anthropological studies and mostly concentrate on the subject of the veil.

To locate a multifaceted phenomenon, this study found that a renewed structure of investigation of diverse sources was necessary, such as historical travelogues, a consideration of art movements (i.e. Orientalism), contemporary media sources, exhibition history, critical texts by women art historians, writing and art by artists and curators of the Muslim diaspora, as well as theoretical positions.

Drawing together this disparate but related history, as well as contemporary visual and theoretical issues, concluded Part 1 by locating and articulating the challenges faced by contemporary women artists of the Muslim diaspora, which acknowledged and brought together the parts of this contemporary phenomenon I describe as the IOFO. The IOFO, a constructed Frankenstein's bride comprising many parts in one body is imagined, celebrated, and despised by her Western audience.

For the diaspora artist of the Muslim world to navigate and deal with her perceived image (the IOFO) and to retell her story, she must contest and disconnect her image from an existing aesthetic narrative that was, and is, attached to her image.[156] However, the proximity of particular aesthetics and signifiers, such as the veil and patterns, creates a confusion and contradiction between what may or may not be used, as in the case of Ghiasabadi (2009) and myself in our visual output. At worst, this situation drove others into silence, as in the case of Lookman (2017).[157]

The platforms available, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, through a narrow spectrum of identity, effectively encouraged some artists to self-Orientalise and to self-Other, a process that can create a new gaze enjoyed by a Western audience familiar with its own colonial past. This thesis located this problem through the

[156] Such as a visual image that was and is created through rhetoric, the veil, colourful patterns, architecture and objects represented by the Imperial and colonial visual artist.
[157] As in the list Ghiasabadi created.

analytical framework of the IOFO within the artistic environment. Recounting the words of Spivak in her critical use of the term 'subaltern' regarding the status of Muslim women artists of diaspora and their marginalised voice, I framed a new question: Can the IOFO artist speak and, if so, how?

6.2 Speaking back to the Islamo-Orientalised Female Other

Part 2 of this thesis consisted of Chapters 4 and 5 and investigated artistic approaches to the subject(s) of women, Orientalism, Islamophobia and visual signifiers by analysing selected artists' work. The study of six Iranian artists in this research found that exoticised masquerading (i.e. self-Othering and self-Orientalising) cannot provide a way forward unless it can interrupt the presumption and perception of its audience. This approach is possible by remaining aware and critical of the IOFO regarding the extent to which salient signifiers can be used critically and effectively. This finding suggests that artists can resist being culturally typecast (ghetto-ised) in how they can navigate codes and signifiers.

In the concluding chapter, I found ways to navigate and deal with the IOFO, using my visual art practice to challenge this perception and to address the unspoken in relation to the experience of the (violated) object of the perceptual image of the IOFO. Through my practice, I speak back by not staying silent as a witness to the violated objects of such imagery. My voice, through my visual practice, demonstrates that an effective and independent articulation can be achieved in various ways, such as by stripping-down signifiers, through an intensity of colour and through the scale of signifiers, through the use of autobiography, through utilising a 'mash-up' style and, finally, in the way connections and perceptions through practice (photographic layering) are used, amalgamating the historical and the contemporary. My position and response as a Muslim female artist today allowed me to see that decolonising through colonial images and de-Orientalising through Oriental images is somewhat limited within the current position that Muslim female artists find themselves.

I claim that if we are to engage with this problematic, then a more radical approach towards visual strategies must be taken, one that has the capability of not only changing the content to voice a new position, but also one that can change colonial mindsets. We must interrupt the narrative of the IOFO by speaking back and interrupting the image rather than, in effect, replacing one cliché with another to move forward.

6.3 Limitations of this research

This investigation has several limitations. It was only possible to examine a small number of artists, prioritising those of Iranian background and mainly concentrating on the ways they (and, ultimately, I) have dealt with specific signifiers. These few artists cannot possibly represent the entire community of women artists of the Muslim diaspora. Such a limited selection suggests that more extensive research is needed in this area of the visual arts to explore further and to expand our understanding of the subject matter. This should, of course, include a greater number of women from across the region and beyond.

To expand the dialogue with many more women artists of the Muslim diaspora who are scattered across Europe, the US, and other parts of the world, future researchers may wish to insist on financial support for their research. Moreover, they could consider a support network of women who are empathetic and knowledgeable in this area of visual knowledge and who are willing to support them through their research journey.

6.4 The significance and the future of this research

I identified and spotlighted the challenges that confront the Muslim female diaspora artist and the burden and responsibilities that fall upon her when making art. One main challenge is the reception of artworks within the framework of the IOFO, a framework that can make sense of our artistic environment through history and about our current political moment concerning women artists of the Muslim diaspora.

To future researchers, visual and cultural producers, I offer the concept of Another and Anotherness, which may be diverse in its application and development. As for me, in practical terms, the continued curation of artistic work is a natural continuation of this research. Platforms for artists, whether curated in the form of shows or online, are a logical way of answering many of the ongoing questions asked by this research, as is dissemination through artists' books and my personal artistic practice.[158]

One idea that seems appropriate to the direction of travel undertaken through this research is to establish a transnational online archive and website. A realisation arising out of this study is that one has not arrived at a fixed end or destination; the

[158] Questions like: how can women artists of the diaspora navigate and deal with preconceived ideas? How can visual art practice seek to challenge Othering perceptions and through what methods?

opportunities and imperatives are still in flux. I use and test out artistic strategies through my practice, particularly, but not exclusively, concerning Muslim female diaspora artists, as explored in this thesis. This approach continues to evolve through the practice I claim as my voice. Voicing my relationship with my artistic environment is a testament to understanding and spotlighting my contemporary moment, an acknowledgement of a responsibility that must be equally shared between the artist, her artwork and its reception. An awareness of the IOFO not only offers me the knowledge to de-Orientalise through methods employed, but also offers me the possibility of extending my practice to explore a more liberating space of Anotherness.

6.5 Moving forward – Another Emerging: a possible theoretical-ideological reconstruction through practice

In response to the subaltern status of the IOFO, I imagine an ideological position defined as 'Another' within the context of my practice and my contemporary political moment. Authoring the artistic and curatorial narratives within my own work allows me to speculate that such a definition could become a useful tool for many female artists in this predicament. I envisage Anotherness as a space, not absolute, neither central nor peripheral, a place of difference. It is a specific position in time and place, but not fixed or hierarchical, and, within the scope of this research, Another as opposed to an imagined Other. This position suggests resistance to being culturally Othered, either through the narrative embedded within the work or the visual signifiers employed within the work. This possibility was discussed in terms of the work of selected artists in Chapter 4, as well as in my own practice through simplifying the image and highlighting text, manipulating codes and signifiers in the image, through the scale of signifiers within view, through utilising a 'mash-up' style, through deploying sarcasm and humour, and in the strategy of placing signifiers, whether brought to the fore, centrally or peripherally placed within a narrative.

My practice utilises several bodies of artwork and speaks back to the IOFO as Another, which has no fixed position. Another/Anotherness does not crave a fixed identity, nor does it desire to dominate or be dominated; it recognises and acknowledges a temporary position within any given context. My concept of Anotherness is born directly out of challenges such as cultural and aesthetical identities, located as the IOFO. Anotherness through practice is critical, unfixed and

continuously in development in relation to its changing contexts.

Bibliography and Filmography

Including artworks, exhibitions and accompanying texts to exhibitions.

Bibliography

Ahmed, L. (2003) 'The discourse of the veil', in: Bailey, D.A and Tawadros, G. (eds.) *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts.

Al-Ani, J. (2003) 'Acting out', in: Bailey, D.A and Tawadros, G. (eds.) *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts.

Al-Ani, J., Bailey, D.A., Sedira, Z., and Tawadros, G. (eds.) (2003) *Veil: veiling, representation and contemporary art* [Exhibition]. London: Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA), 14 February 2003 – 27 April 2003.

Al-Rawi, R-F. (1999) *Grandmother's Secrets: The Ancient Rituals And Healing Power Of Belly Dancing*, Northampton, MA: Interlink Publishing.

Alloula, M. (1987) *The Colonial Harem.* Missoula, Montana: University of Montana Press.

Amer, G. (1999) *Untitled: Embroidery Pieces* [Installation], in: Grosenick, U. (2001) *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st Century*, Koln: Taschen.

Anastas, R. and Brenson, M. (eds.) (2006) *Witness to Her Art*, New York: Center for Curatorial Studies.

Araeen, R. (2002) 'A new beginning; beyond postcolonial cultural theory and identity politics', in Araeen, R., Cubitt, S. and Sardar, Z. (eds.) *The Third Text: Reader on Art, Culture and Theory.* London: Continuum.

Araeen, R., Cubitt, S. and Sardar, Z. (eds.) (2002) *The Third Text: Reader on Art, Culture and Theory.* London: Continuum.

Armipour, L. and Corman, R. (2015) 'A Girl walks home alone at night', Q and A with Lily Amirpour and Roger Corman, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hylNqGYKlU>, accessed 11 October 2020.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (eds.) (1989) *The Empire Writes Back.* London: Routledge.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (eds.) (2013) *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts.* London: Routledge.

Bagherpour, A. (2010) 'Iranian diaspora in America: 30 years in the making', *Frontline*, 12 September 2020, available at <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/09/the-iranian-diaspora-in-america-30-years-in-the-making.html>, accessed on 11 October 2020.

Bailey, D. A., and Tawadros, G. (eds.) (2003) *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts in association with Modern Art Oxford.

Bakhtiar, L. (2004 [1976]) *Sufi: Expressions of the mystic quest*, London: Thames and Hudson.

Bakst, L. (1910) *Costume design for an odalisque in the ballet Scheherazade* [Illustration]. Cited in: Thornton, L. (1994) *Women as portrayed in Orientalist painting*. Paris: ACR Edition Internationale.

Balaghi, S. (2008) 'What fills emptiness? Reflections on Iranian-American women artists since 1979'. In: Javaherian, F. and Anvari, H. (2008). *30 Years of Solitude: Photography and Film by Iranian Women.* London: Iran Heritage Foundation and Asia House.

Balaghi, S. and Gumpert, L. (2003) *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Barthes, R. (1972) *Mythologies*, New York: The Noonday Press.

Barthes, R. (1999) 'Rhetoric of the image', in Evans, J. and Hall, S. (eds.) *Visual Culture: The Reader*. London: Sage.

BBC News (2003) '"Islamic" art banned from show', BBC, available online <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2757743.stm>, accessed 23 October 2020.

BBC News (2014) 'European Court upholds French full veil ban', 1 July 2014, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28106900>, accessed on 11 October 2020.

BBC Radio (2003) 'Veils' on *Woman's Hour*, 6 June 2003, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/2003_22_fri_02.shtml>, accessed on 23 October 2020.

Bearman, J. (2006) 'An Interview with Marjane Satrapi', 1 August 2006, available online https://believermag.com/an-interview-with-marjane-satrapi/, accessed on 13 December 2020.

Beaulieu, J. and Roberts, M. (2002) *Orientalism's interlocutors: painting, architecture, photography*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Bernstein, M. and Studlar, G. (eds.) (1997) *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Bhabha, H.K. (1990) *Nation and narration*, New York and London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.

Bhabha, H.K. (1994) *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge.

Bird, J., Isaak, J. A., and Lotringer S. (1996) *Nancy Spero*. London, Phaidon Press.

Brady, A. and Schirato T. (2011) *Understanding Judith Butler: subjectivity, identity and desire.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Brah, A. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London: Routledge.

Butler, A. (2002) *Women's cinema: The contested screen.* New York: Wallflower Press.

Campbell, J. (2011) 'Understanding Gayatri Spivak's 'Can the Subultern speak?', available online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hylNqGYKlU>, accessed 11 October 2020.

Chan, S. (2006) Suki Chan in response to Gbadamosi, Black Skin, White Space, available at <https://www.axisweb.org/>, accessed 11 October 2020.

Chicago, J. and Lucie-Smith, E. (1999) *Women and Art: Contested Territory*, New York: Watson-Guptill.

Childs P. and Williams P. (1997) *An introduction to post-colonial theory*. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

Cumming, L. (2009) 'The veil is lifted on hidden talent', *The Observer*, 1 February 2009, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/01/unveiled-saatchi-gallery-review-art>, accessed on 23 October 2020.

Dabashi, H. (2009) *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in a Time of Terror*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Dabashi, H. (2015) *Can Non-Europeans Think?* London: Zed Books.

Daftari, F. and Gumpert, L. (2002) *Between word and image: modern Iranian visual culture* [Exhibition]. New York: Grey Art Gallery and Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, 18 September 2002 – 7 December 2002. Cited in: Balaghi, S. and
Gumpert, L. (2003) *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Dahl, E.D. (2002) 'Criticizing "secular criticism": Reading religion in Edward Said and Kathryn Tanner'. *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses,* 31(3-4), pp. 359-371.

Danielpour, D. (2015) 'Iran', in Nelmes, J. and Selbo, J. (eds.) *Women Screenwriters: An International Guide*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Darwent, C. (2009) 'Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East, Saatchi Gallery, London', *The Independent*, 1 February 2009, available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/reviews/unveiled-new-art-from-the-middle-east-saatchi-gallery-london-1522227.html>, accessed on 23 October 2020.

Debord, G. (1988) *Society of the Spectacle*, St Petersburg, Florida: Black and Red Publishers.

Donnell, A. (2003) 'Visibility, violence and voice? Attitudes to veiling post-11 September', in Bailey, D. A., and Tawadros, G. *Veil: veiling, representation and contemporary art*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts in association with Modern Art Oxford.

Downey, A. (ed.) (2014) *Uncommon Grounds: New Media and Critical Practices in North Africa and the Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris.

Doy G. (2002) *Drapery, Classicism and Barbarism in Visual Culture*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Doy G. (2005) *Picturing the Self, Changing Views of The Subject in Visual Culture.* London, New York: I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd.

Dufoix, S. (2008) *Diasporas*, Berkley: CA: University of California Press.

Ebadi, S. (2006) *Iran Awakening*, New York: Rider/Ebury Publishing.

Evans, D. (ed.) (2009) *Appropriation.* London: Whitechapel Gallery.

Evans, J. and Hall, S. (1999) *Visual Culture: A Reader.* London: Sage Publications.

Fanon, F. (1965 [1959]) 'Algeria unveiled', in Fanon, F. *A Dying Colonialism*. New York: Grove Press. Translated from French by Haakon Chevalier.

Firouz, F. (2004) *Iran Under the Skin: A Compilation Of Conceptual Works, Films, Documentaries And Photography* [Exhibition]. Barcelona, Forum Barcelona, 2004.

Fotouhi, S. (2012) 'Self-orientalisation and reorientation: a glimpse at Iranian Muslim women's memoirs', *International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding*, available at <https://www.unisa.edu.au/siteassets/episerver-6-files/documents/eass/mnm/csaa-proceedings/fotouhi.pdf>, accessed on 23 October 2020.

Ghadirian, S. (2000–2001) *Like Every Day series, C prints*. Cited in: Farjan, L. (2009) *Unveiled: New Art From The Middle East.* London: Booth Clibborn Editions.

Gbadamosi, R. (2006) *Black Skin, White Space.* London: Axis Dialogue.

Gerome, J-L. (1871) *For sale: slaves at Cairo* [Painting]. Cited in: Thornton, L. (1994) *Women as portrayed in Orientalist painting*. Paris: ACR Edition Internationale.

Ghazel, (1997) *Filmed self-portraits series, Tehran-Paris.* [film]. Available from: http://www.culturebase.net/artist.php?3148 , accessed 12 December 2012.

Ghiasabadi, A.B. (2008) *Sideways: reflections on changing contexts in art* [Installation]. Tehran: Azad Art Gallery, 25 October 2008 – 5 November 2008. Arnhem: Museum for Contemporary Art, 28 March 2010 – 20 June 2010. Catalogue: Ghiasabadi, A.B. (2010).

Ghiasabadi, A.B. (2010) *Sideways: Reflections On Changing Contexts In Art*. Amsterdam: Fonds Voor Beeldende Kunsten, Vormg. and Bouwk (Fonds BKVB).

Grosenick, U. (2001) *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st century*, London: Taschen.

Halberstam, J. (1995) *Skin Shows*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Halasa, M. (2003) 'Out of the shows'. *The Guardian*, 23 March 2003, available at https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2003/mar/29/art.iraqandthearts, accessed on 23 October 2020.

Hatoum, M (1994) *Corps etranger* [Installation]. Cited in: Brett, G. et al, (1997) *Mona Hatoum*. London: Phaidon.

Hatoum, M. (1998) *Measures of Distance* [Video]. Cited in: Brett, G. et al, (1997) *Mona Hatoum*. London: Phaidon.

Hatoum, M. (1997) *Mona Hatoum*, London: Phaidon.

Hatoum, M. (2016) *Mona Hatoum, Revised and Expanded Edition*, London: Phaidon.

Hausmann, R. 'Photomontage', in Evans, D. (ed.) (2009) *Appropriation* (Documents of Contemporary Arts), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hazell, K. (2008) *Thirty Years of Solitude* exhibition catalogue, London: Asia House Gallery.

Hentschel, L. (2011) 'N.O. Body', in Boudry P. and Lorenz, R. *Temporal Drag*, Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag.

Hertog, F. (1988) *The Representation Of The 'Other' in The Writing Of History*, Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Houshiary, S. (2008) *Shirazeh Houshiary*, London: Lisson Gallery.

Houshiary, S. (2017) *Shirazeh Houshiary: Nothing is Deeper Than the Skin*, New York: Lisson Gallery.

Hussein, M. (2015) *The Commonality Of Strangers* [Exhibition]. Nottingham: New Art Exchange, 31 January 2015 – 12 April 2015.

Hussein, S. (2017) 'The OFSTED hijab controversy: Beyond the Hijab', *Discover Society*, 6th December 2017, <https://discoversociety.org/2017/12/06/the-ofsted-hijab-controversy-beyond-the-hjiab/>, accessed 11 October 2020.

Isaak J.A. (1996) *Feminism And Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power Of Women's Laughter*, London: Routledge.

Issa, R. and Brown, C. (2001) *Contemporary Iranian art* [Exhibition]. London: Barbican Centre, 10 April 2001.

Janmohamed, S. (2014) 'Muslim Women's Bodies- the Hottest Property in 2014', *The Telegraph*, 29th December 2014, available online <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11312549/Muslim-womens-bodies-the-sexiest-property-in-2014.html?placement=CB>, accessed 13 December 2020.

Javaherian, F. (2008) *30 Years of Solitude* [Exhibition]. London: Asia House Gallery 27 September 2008 – 10 January 2009. Cited in: Balaghi, S. (2008).

Javaherian, F. and Anvari, H. (2008) *30 Years of Solitude: Photography And Film By Iranian Women.* London: Iran Heritage Foundation and Asia House.

Johnson, B. (2018) 'Denmark has got it wrong. Yes, the burqa is oppressive and ridiculous –but that's still no reason to ban it', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 August 2018, available online <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/05/denmark-has-got-wrong-yes-burka-oppressive-ridiculous-still/>, accessed 13 December 2020.

Jones A. (1998) *Body Art, Performing the Subject*. USA: The University of Minnesota Press.

Jones, A. (2003) *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*. USA: Routledge.

Jusdanis, G. (2005) 'Enlightenment postcolonialism'. *Research in African Literatures,* 36(3).

Kabbani, R. (2008) *Imperial fictions, Europe's myths of Orient*. London: Saqi Books.

Kabbani, R. (2008) 'Regarding Orientalist Painting Today', *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, London: Tate Publishing.

Karayanni Stavros S. (2014) *Dancing Fear and Desire*. Canada: Library and archives Canada cataloging in Publication.

Kikuchi, Y. (2004) Japanese modernisation and Mingei theory: cultural nationalism and Oriental Orientalism. London: Routledge Curzon.

Kodmani, B. (2018) 'The Syrian Diaspora, Old and New', *The Arab Reform Initiative*, 5th December 2018, available at <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/the-syrian-diaspora-old-and-new/>, accessed on 11 October 2020.

Kotz, L. (1992) 'The body you want: Liz Kotz interviews Judith Butler'. *Artforum* 31, no. 3, pp. 82-89.

Krifa, M. (ed.) (2001) Regards persans: Iran, une revolution photographique. Paris: Paris Musees.

Kuhn, A. and Westwell, G. (2012) (eds.) *A dictionary of film studies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lamont, P. (2004) The rise of the Indian rope trick: the biography of a legend. Great Britain: Little, Brown.

Leroy, P. (1888) *Arab Dance* [Painting]. Cited in: Thornton, L. (1994) *Women as portrayed in Orientalist painting*. Paris: ACR Edition Internationale.

Levy, L et al. (2003) 'The Newcomers, 2002–03'*, Book 26* (January/February): 35–52.

Lewis, R. (1996) *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation*. London: Routledge.

Lewis, R. (2004) *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*. London: Tauris.

Lorde, A. (1981) 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house', in C. Morraga and G. Anzaldua, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women Of Color*. Watertown, Massachusetts: Persephone Press.

Lovatt, E. (2009) 'Unveiled: a new art from the Middle East, Saatchi Gallery', Estelle Lovatt website, 30 January 2009, available at <https://estellelovatt.com/2009/01/30/unveiled-new-art-from-the-middle-east-saatchi-gallery/>, accessed on 23 October 2020.

Lutfi, H. (2004) 'Lutfi on Bailey and Tawadros, 'Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art', H-Gender-MidEast, available at <https://networks.h-net.org/node/6386/reviews/6636/lutfi-bailey-and-tawadros-veil-veiling-representation-and-contemporary>, accessed on 23 October 2020.

Maharaj, S. (2001) *Perfidious fidelity: the untranslatability of the Other*. Great Britain: InIVA publications.

Malek, A. (2006) 'Memoir as Iranian Exile Cultural Production: A Case Study of Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis Series', Iranian Studies 39(3): 353-380.

Malik, A. (2003) Exhibition review of 'Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art' in *Portfolio: Contemporary Photography in Britain* 37 (June): 58-61.

Marandi, S.M. (2009) 'Constructing an axis of evil: Iranian memoirs in the "Land of the Free"'. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*: 24.

Matthews, N. (2001) *A breeze from the gardens of Persia: New art from Iran* [Exhibition]. Washington: White Meyer Galleries, April 2001 – October 2001.

Marks L.U. (2000) *The skin of the film: intercultural cinema, embodiment, and the senses*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

MacDonald, M. (2014) 'SUR/VEIL: The Veil as Blank(et) Signifier', in Taylor, L.K. and Jasmin Zine (eds.) *Muslim Women, Transnational Feminism and the Ethics of Pedagogy: Contested Imaginaries in Post- 9/11 Cultural Practice*. New York: Routledge

McMichael, C. (2011) 'Some thoughts on 'Algeria Unveiled', online blog post, http://readingfanon.blogspot.com/2011/05/some-thoughts-on-algeria-unveiled.html, accessed on 11 October 2020.

Merali, S., Hagar, M. and Issa, R. (2004) *Far near distance: contemporary positions of Iranian artists* [Exhibition]. Berlin: House of the Cultures of The World, 2004.

Mercer, K. (2016) *Travel and see: Black diaspora art practices since the 1980's.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Migration Policy Centre (2013) Migration Facts Palestine, available at https://migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/fact_sheets/Factsheet%20Palestine.pdf, accessed on 11 October 2020.

Milani, F. (1992) *Veil and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, New York, Syracuse University Press.

Minh-ha T. T. (1987) 'Difference: A Special Third World Women Issue'. *Feminist Review,* no.25 (Spring 1987), pp. 5–22.

Minh-ha T. T. (2009) Difference: 'A Special Third World Women Issue' in *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Minh-ha T. T. (2016) *Lovecidal: walking with the disappeared.* New York: Fordham University Press.

Moore, L. (2010) *Frayed connections, fraught projections: the troubling work of Shirin Neshat*. [online] Taylor Francis Online, accessed on 05 November 2010.

Morey, P. (2018) *Islamophobia and the Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Morrison T. *Race Tony Morrison* (1983) London: Penguin Random House.

Mortimer, M. (2005) 'Edward Said and Assia Djebar: a contrapuntal reading'. *Research in African Literatures, 36*(3), pp. 53-67.

Moyal-Sharrock, D. Munz, V. and Coliva A. (eds.) (2015) 'Mind, language and action: 36th International Wittgenstein Symposium'; Volume 22 of Publications of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society. New series (N.S.). Germany: Walter de Gruyter GmbH and Co KG.

Mulvey, L. (1999) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in: Braudy L. and Cohen, M. (eds.) *Film theory and criticism: introductory readings*. New York: Oxford UP, pp 833-844.

Naficy, H. (1993) The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Naficy, H. (2001) *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Naficy, H. (2003) 'Poetics and politics of veil: Voice and vision in Iranian post-revolutionary cinema', in: Bailey, D.A. and Tawadros, G (eds.) (2003). *Veil: veiling, representation and contemporary art*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts.

Naficy, H. (2011a) A social history of Iranian cinema: Volume 1: The artisanal era. Durham: Duke University Press.

Naficy, H. (2011b) A social history of Iranian cinema: Volume 2: The industrializing years, 1941–1978. Durham: Duke University Press.

Naficy, H. (2012a) A social history of Iranian cinema: Volume 3: The Islamicate period, 1978–1984. Durham: Duke University Press.

Naficy, H. (2012b) A social history of Iranian cinema: Volume 4: The globalizing era, 1984–2010. Durham: Duke University Press.

Nelmes, J. and Selbo, J. (2015) (eds) *Women screenwriters: an international guide.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Neshat, S. (1993–1999) *Women of Allah* [Photographs]. Cited in: Preston-Jones, J. and Matt, G. (2000) *Shirin Neshat.* London: Serpentine Gallery.

Neshat, S. (2000) exhibition available at <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/shirin-neshat>, accessed on 11 October 2020.

Neshat, S. (2000) *The changing lives of women and men in Iran and beyond* [Exhibition]. London: Serpentine Gallery, 28 July 2000 – 3 September 2000.

Neshat, S. (2010) *Shirin Neshat*, New York: Rizzoli International Publications.

Parker, R. and Pollock, G. (1981) *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, London and New York: I.B.Tauris.

Pollock, G. (1988) *Vision and Difference*, London: Routledge.

Race and Class Special Double Issue (1981), *'Rebellion and repression' Race and Class.* London: Institute of Race Relations Transnational Institute XXIII.

Ranciere, J. (2014) *The Emancipated Spectator.* London: Verso Books.

Reilly M. (2018) *Curatorial Activism Towards An Ethics of Curating*, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

Riding, C. (2008) 'The Orient Performed', *The Lure Of The East, British Orientalist Painting*, London: Tate Publishing.

Said, E. W. (1978) *Orientalism.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Said, E. W. (1981) *Covering Islam: How The Media And The Experts Determine How We See The Rest Of The World.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Said, E. W. (rev. edn. 2002) *Covering Islam: How The Media And The Experts Determine How We See The Rest Of The World*. London: Vintage Books.

Said, E. W. (rev. edn. 2003) *Orientalism.* London, Penguin. With 1995 Afterword.
Satrapi, M. (2000-2001). *Persepolis I and II* [Illustrations]. Cited in: Satrapi, M. (2004) *Persepolis I, Persepolis II.* London: Jonathan Cape.

Sedira, Z. (2002) *Mother tongue* [Video]. Available from: http://www.zinebsedira.com/ (18 July 2011).

Sedira, Z. (2003) 'Mapping the elusive', in Bailey, D. A., and Tawadros, G. (eds.) (2003). *Veil: veiling, representation and contemporary art.* London: Institute of International Visual Arts in association with Modern Art Oxford.

Semmerling, T.J. (2006) *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear*, Texas: University of Texas Press.

Severi, H. and Hallman, G. (2005) *Persian visions: contemporary photography from Iran* [Exhibition]. Michigan: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 29 September 2007 – 30 December 2007.

Shelley, M. (1818) *Frankenstein*. London: Anonymous.

Smee, S. (2003) 'Viewfinder: New Freedom 2006'. The Telegraph, 15 November 2003, available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3606484/Viewfinder-New-Freedom-2006.html>, accessed on 23 October 2020.

Soueif, A. (2003) The language of the veil, in: Bailey, D.A and Tawadros, G. (eds.) (2003). *Veil: veiling, representation and contemporary art*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts, p108.

Spadoni, R. (2007) *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming Of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre*. California: University of California Press.

Spivak, G.C. (1987) *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. London: Methuen.

Spivak, G.C. (1993) *Outside in the teaching machine*. London: Routledge.

Spivak, G. C. (1994) ‘Can the subaltern speak?’, in: Williams, P. and Chrisman, L. (eds.) *Colonial discourse and postcolonial theory: a reader*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Staal J. (2019) *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press.

Steegmuller, F. (1996) *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour*, London: Penguin Classics.

Steinmetz, K. (2020) ‘She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ Over 30 Years Ago. Here’s What It Means to Her Today’, Time, 20 February 2020, available at <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/>, accessed on 13 December 2020.

Storace, P. (2005) ‘A double life in black and white’, *The New York Review*, 7 April 2005, available online <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2005/04/07/a-double-life-in-black-and-white/>, accessed on 13 December 2020.

Tapper, R. (2002) (ed.) The new Iranian cinema: politics, representation and identity. London: I.B.Tauris.

Tate, ‘Identity Politics’, available online https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/identity-politics, accessed on 23 October 2020.

Tavakoli-Targhi, M. (2001) *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography*, Palgrave: New York.

Taylor, L.K. and Jasmin Zine (eds.) (2016) *Muslim Women, Transnational Feminism and the Ethics of Pedagogy: Contested Imaginaries in Post- 9/11 Cultural Practice*. New York: Routledge.

Tikhonova, Y. (2009) ‘Self-Orientalise: Iran Inside Out’, available online <http://www.contemporarypractices.net/essays/volume6/review/Self-Orientalise-Iran%20Inside%20Out_108-116.pdf>, accessed on 13 December 2020.

Thornton, L. (1995) *Women as portrayed In Orientalist painting*. Paris: ACR Edition; New Edition.

Throp, M. (2013) *The performance dinners*. Great Britain: UAL.

Tromans, N. (ed.) (2008a) *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, London: Tate Publishing.

Tromans, N. (2008b) ‘Imagining the East’, New Stateman, 29th May 2008, available at <https://www.newstatesman.com/art/2008/05/british-orientalist-paintings>, accessed on 17 November 2019.

Vann, R.T. (2019) 'Historiography', *Britannica*, available online https://www.britannica.com/topic/historiography/Methodology-of-historiography, accessed on 23 January 2019.

Verhagen, M. (2003) 'Veil: The New Art Gallery', *Art Monthly* 265 (April): 29-30.

Viswanathan, G. (ed.) (2001) *Power, politics and culture: interviews with Edward W. Said*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Wainwright, L. (2017) *Phenomenal difference; a philosophy of Black British art*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Walchli, T. (2004) 'Ethnic Marketing', *Bidoun*, available online at <https://www.bidoun.org/articles/ethnic-marketing>, accessed on 13 December 2020.

Watson, E. (2016) 'Emma Watson interviews *Persepolis* author Marjane Satrapi', 1 August 2016, available online <https://www.vogue.com/article/emma-watson-interviews-marjane-satrapi>, accessed on 13 December 2020.

Weber, C. (2001) 'Unveiling Scheherazade: Feminist Orientalism in the International Alliance of Women, 1911-1950', *Feminist Studies 27, no.1*, accessed on 30 December 2015.

Weeks, E. (2008) 'Cultures Crossed: John Frederick Lewis and the Art of Orientalist Painting', in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*: London: Tate Publishing.

Wontner, W. C. (1900) *Safie: one of the three ladies of Bagdad* [Painting]. Cited in: Thornton, L. (1994) *Women as portrayed in Orientalist painting*. Paris: ACR Edition Internationale.

Yegenoglu, M. (1998) *Colonial fantasies: towards a feminist reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Young, L. (1992) *Race, Culture and Difference*. London: Sage Publications

Zahir, S. (2003) Exhibition review of 'Veil': Curators, Artists and 9/11', *Fashion Theory* 7(3/4): 319-326.

Zaya, O. (2005) *After the revolution: contemporary artists of* Iran [Exhibition]. San Sebastian: Casa Asia, 2005.

Zolghadr, T. (2007) *Ethnic Marketing*, Zurich: JRP|Ringier

30 Years of Solitude (2008), exhibition, available at <http://www.payvand.com/news/08/sep/1167.html>, London: Asia House Gallery.

Filmography

A girl walks home alone at night, 2014 [film]. Directed by A. Amiripour.
Ali Baba and the forty thieves, 1944 [film]. Directed by A. Lubin.
Arabian nights, 1942 [film] Directed by J. Rawlins. Hollywood: Universal Pictures.
Cleopatra, 1934 [film] Directed by C. de Mille. Hollywood: Paramount Pictures.
Frankenstein, 1994 [film] Directed by K. Branagh. Hollywood: Paramount Pictures.
Gilaneh, 2006 [DVD] Directed by R Bani-Etemad and M. Abdolvahab. Valladolid: Divisa.
Half Hidden, 2008, Directed by Tahmineh Milani.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxIRINwosJw
Persepolis, 2007 [film] Directed by M. Satrapi and V. Paronnaud. Optimum Releases.
The battle of Algiers, 1966 [film]. Directed by G. Pontecorvo. France: Casbah Films.
The Bride of Frankenstein 1935 [film] Directed by J. Whale. Hollywood: Universal Pictures.
The fifth reaction, 2004 [DVD] Directed by T. Milani. Glendale: Arta Films.
The Mummy, 1999 [DVD] Directed by Stephen Sommers, Hollywood: Universal Pictures.
The Thief of Bagdad, 1924 [film]. Directed by R.Walsh.
300 (2007), DVD, directed by Zack Snyder. Hollywood: Warner Bros.

Appendices

- Diasporas from the Muslim worlds
- Interview with Maryam Hashemi (2013)
- Interview with Ope Lori (2013)
- Interview with Mariah Lookman (2017)
- Curatorial work 2011-15
- Seminars and symposiums initiated & organised (2011-15)

Appendix 1: Diasporas from the Muslim worlds

Over the past five decades, many people from the Muslim worlds, among them Palestinians, Iranians, Syrians and Iraqis, have migrated to eventually settle in various Western countries, including Western Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States. Major political events and conflicts have contributed towards this complex movement of peoples, such as the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan (1979), the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the US invasion of Iraq (2003). All these events have caused instability in the Middle Eastern region and have had an effect on the Muslim diaspora.

Since the 1950's with the Israeli-Arab wars in 1948-49 and the 1967 Palestinian al-ghurba (exile or diaspora), which saw respectively millions of Palestinians displaced and fleeing their homeland, mainly to Jordan, the Gulf and neighbouring states. These migrations were often composed of a significant proportion of skilled individuals, often accompanied by their families (Migration Policy Centre 2013). Over 40 years since the Islamic revolution of 1979, Amir Bagherpour notes,

> The United States has become home to the largest and most prosperous population of Iranians outside of the homeland. The steady stream of Iranians that immigrated to the United States during the 1980s reached its peak by 1990. Since then, Iranian Americans' perspectives on their American residence have naturally changed as they struggled to face the reality that they would be staying in the country permanently.
>
> (Bagherpour 2010: n.p.)

Since 2011, the Syrian conflict has resulted in the displacement of over half its population, some internally, while over 5.6 million fled abroad, causing the most

severe refugee crisis the world has known since World War II. According to Bassma Kodmani, the situation is not only specific to Syrians:

> Altogether with the refugees who fled as a consequence of the conflict, the number of Syrians outside the country is now three times higher than those living inside. This is not specific to Syrians. The number of Palestinians, Lebanese, Armenians and, of course, Jews scattered across continents is also three to four times higher than those inside Palestinian occupied territories, Lebanon, Armenia or Israel. The Syrian conflict and its toll on civilians has undoubtedly triggered a new awareness of the existence of a strong Syrian diaspora which had, so far, kept a rather low profile.
>
> (Kodmani 2018: n.p.)

Amongst such movements are many women artists who have come to settle and have contributed to the contemporary Western visual arts scene.

Appendix 2: Interview with Maryam Hashemi (2013)

There are two Iranian artists whom I am aware of as I look at your work , one being Shirin Neshat and in particular Marjane Satrapi. Are you aware of these artists work and did they have any impact or influence in your work?

Yes of course I'm aware of them and like their work very much and of course they have inspired me, but I can't say it has been in a conscious way , also I have experienced life in a very similar way even though I'm from a younger generation, but the issues and culture are still the same. Since my school days I used to make humorous cards and draw images similar to Marjane Satrapi's and I have always been fascinated by Hejab and used to stare at the ladies wearing the chador for a long time and also made myself one and started wearing it out for a while as I loved the way it made me feel, It made me feel safe and free which is I think it quite opposite to what people expect.

Maryam in your paintings you have many hejabis ‘hanging around’, what interests me is, what are they still doing in your paintings and how do you see your audience reading them, given that you exhibit and make work here in the west ? Are there any other artists that you know who also use the veil in their work?

I love those little ladies, they add a playful and humorous narrative to my work .They remind me of my school faculty as they are wearing the same uniform and I used to be scared of them as they were usually telling me off for being naughty .I think by

bringing them to my work in this form I have made peace with them and have reversed their role, now they are the naughty ones.
Also they are a snapshot to my childhood and my origin, which is becoming more of a signature. I think most people get the humour, even though many of them think they are nuns to begin with. I have noticed many try to find them in each painting. Only a few would assumed there is a political message behind it but sometimes a veil is just a veil. I have seen many artists use veil in their work but one of my favourites is Shadi Ghadirian she has truly inspired.

Do you ever think about your audience when you are making your work? Does it matter to you what they think and how they read it?

I do care about my audience and different types of audience would inspire a different type of work and I enjoy accepting this influence with open arms. What I usually try to do in my work is to merge different dimensions together it could be seen as internal or external dimensions but most definitely they are the most honest reflections of who I really am and what I am, and that could be quite complicated .In our everyday life we could be often misunderstood and the same thing can happen to the artworks but I also think there are different ways of interpreting and seeing things. I am always keen to explore different layers, so every feedback is always welcomed and taken into consideration .I believe that we are expanding our dimensions and having a black and white opinion on anything will not help us anymore.

In Sweet surrender what is really going on? for example where is this room and who are you talking to what is that eye in the computer?

This work is about my first two years in London. It was a hard time, I was longing for my partner at the time in Iran. I was very down and depressed and felt isolated and lonely. I would chat with him online and that would be the highlight of my day.
The interior is the my studio flat at the time, even though it was the first time I had a place of my own but I wasn't happy there and found it very hard to be independent. My partner even though he was far away had a great influence on me and I would constantly seek his approval, which, I have shown by putting a make up on for him while talking on the webcam. The eye also represents the control of others in our lives, this is a very deep cultural problem, not many people can have their own unique identity, they are under the pressure and influence of others and their life goal is to have a presentable image in the eyes of others .

I had discovered that this problem also exists in the western society and I see now that this painting even though its pointing at time long past is still relevant even though this pressure is subtle and hidden to a point that I was shocked to realise it still exists.

In hanging on where was the boutique? Here in England or Iran? Can you tell me a little more about it?

This is about my first job in London I worked at, in a very busy boutique and it was very embarrassing for me to realise that I have no social skills, I had to learn the hard way and was truly enslaved by the owner, I worked long hours and the main job was to stock the shop and spend a lot of time hanging and folding clothes, I remember at times I ran out of fingers and would carry the clothes in my hair.

I felt really trapped in that job and was very sad. I didn't know where I was going and had no strength and knew that there is a lot to learn. This feeling of entrapment stayed with me and often would take over at different stages of my life in London .Now I realise that I felt trapped at the time I painted that work but I couldn't see it, that's why that image had such a big impact on me but I couldn't see it at the time.

In *Mother-ship* where is this hilly place with the sheep running around?

This works still hold many mysteries as it sometime takes me years to process a work. I have a feeling that this works relates to a future event but I believe the hills reference the time I spent at a meditation resort in Wales, which was surrounded by hills and farms. I was working through a lot of emotions and past traumas that in the end gave me a lot of joy.

The mother-ships are elements from my past and present .I'm making peace with everything and combining all my past and present influences and creating something unique and new. It could also mean that I desire peace and quiet and perhaps need to spend more time in the countryside and let out the creative flow with no distraction of the busy city.

In the Canal series I was most interested in the kind of size that you work in and whether you feel that Persian miniature paintings have had any influence in your work?

Persian miniatures have definitely influenced me, even though I didn't realise it to begin with.

In some of the miniatures you can see many stories and angles squeezed in one work and this has always amazed me and clearly had a great impact on me as they

surrounded me in my childhood. I painted my first acrylic series on my boyfriend’s boat and the space was limited, there was so much I wanted to say as I hadn't painted in 2 years and clearly this quality of miniature paintings had sunken and had inspired me.

How do you decide where to place your characters in your paintings? How do you decide about their colour and how do you arrive at the different subjects you paint in your work?

The process is quite complicated to explain but I know I'm not the only artist that works this way. I work best when my conscious mind doesn't have total control. I generally need to distract my mind by listening to something, which is usually a lecture, or interview and meanwhile I let my unconscious mind to take over while drawing and painting.

If I spend too much time thinking about a work that's when I usually get stuck, but of course I need to switch in and out to make necessary changes, it all happens very naturally, I know that everything will work perfect once I have an interesting thing to listen to, something that stimulates my imagination and really makes me think and analyse. What I listen to has a great influence on the work that I do. I know that colours and images have a direct connection in what is happening in my life at the time I'm painting. They are very similar to dreams.

Appendix 3: In conversation with Ope Lori (2013)

Maria: I am really interested in the intimate space and your use of red in this piece of work .Could you talk a little more about this work and your choices of colour, space and people in it?

Ope: It's interesting that you picked up on this intimate space and that was my intention with using a red tinted light to shoot the image. There are two reasons behind its function. Firstly, red symbolizes, love, passion, heated situations and aggression and amplified the situation where these two women were engaged in a play fight. This intimate space, or what the black lesbian feminist, Audre Lorde would call 'the power of the erotic', with her assertion in the erotic as a life force for women and using that as a creative energy for empowerment and reclaiming our own language, in the fight against systems of oppression. I would like to think I am suggesting a romantic notion of women's liberation, by bringing black and white women together.

Secondly the red, acted as a smoke screen for hiding the differences of skin colour of the women. I wanted to give this work a kind of 'colour-blind aesthetic', to play devil's advocate in asking the question, "what if skin colour was irrelevant, how then would we engage with ideals of beauty and gender between women of different skin colours, without being able to tap into colonialized and thereby racialized 'ways of looking'?

Maria: Yes, I picked up on the Red as I have used it in many of my own works as a way of enclosing the space and making reference to emotionally claustrophobic spaces. However, what struck me and I found very interesting about your work was this 'colour-blind aesthetic' as you say and the questions which it poses to an audience. Talking here of the audience, who do you think your audiences might be and are they who you are hoping to reach or is that not important to you?

Ope: The very fact that I call it a 'colour-blind aesthetic' is to make it accessible to everyone, regardless of our own racial baggage that we bring to reading the image. In one respect, through combating the dominant gaze in media representations, film and popular culture, which I see as being white and lodged in a phallocentric order, I have created an oppositional gaze, where as a by-product, a black and queer aesthetic has

formed. From this viewpoint, my audience then is for black women, in celebration of black beauty and re-empowering our bodies in the spheres where we have been left out of. On the other hand, through the association with white and black women, due to my own past experiences of being in an interracial relationship with a white woman, this enabled me to see that there are always many sides to the story, and that in as much as black women are underrepresented, white women are overly objectified. My audience in this respect is for women in general, and is about empowering us, raising awareness in our joint struggle for liberation.

Of course I cannot limit these discussions to just women, black people, lesbians, or white men and women, as we all are part of society and all conditioned into seeing in particular ways. This is why I intentionally aim to challenge the viewer and confront them with their misconceptions, playing with the use of stereotypes as a strategic device, in understanding the value we place over skin colour in a visual economy of beauty and women.

Maria: It is very interesting that you talk about the dominant gaze as white and phallocentric in relation to the female black body. I think what is interesting about this argument is that Laura Mulvey, in her paper *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), poses the audience largely as male and the female, on screen, as an object of the gaze –which equally I am arguing for within the context of my research as a term which I am naming as **"Islamo-Orientalised"** female representations. However, your work "red shift" also reminds me of Steve McQueen's Black and white film/video *Bear,*1993 currently showing at Tate Britain, showing two naked black men wrestling and the work shown within a dominant white space. So here I'd like to ask, are we really here talking about some kind of power hierarchy and whoever owns it also has the power of the gaze?

Ope: I can understand seeing a resemblance to Steve McQueen's Bear, as both use the wrestle as an erotic, yet violent device. When I was actually making the piece, I had in mind the classic homoerotic wrestle scene between Oliver Reed and Alan Bates, in Women in Love. For me, this image of the two men, naked, fighting, cast under a fire lit ambience really did the trick for me, I knew I wanted to do something similar, but rather through women.

You are definitely right about this being a power hierarchy and it operates across both racial and sexual difference, and due to that, in the sexual politics of looking that Mulvey puts forward, black women are relegated or in fact non-existent in the hierarchy, being twice removed on ground of our skin colour and sex, within a white phallocentric order.

Therefore I don't actually agree that whoever holds the power, has the power of the gaze. The gaze which I am critiquing is systematic and institutionalized, however, there are other gazes and what I am showing you with my work are a series of oppositional gazes, which aim to empower. I think the more and more you get alternative images out there, these representations eventually begin to stick and once they become embroiled within society, then that's when one has power of the gaze.

Maria: Yes, I agree with you about dissemination of alternative images of the Other, which aims to empower rather than categorise. This point is also something which you extend to your body of work Beauty and Privilege, Can you tell me a little bit about your intentions with these works?

Ope: Beauty and Privilege (2012-2013) is a series of photographic poster styled black and white images, that play with power hierarchies, representational visibility and makes a correlation between beauty and it's privileges. It is a simple work on the surface, but very layered at the same time. The beauty about the work, no pun intended, is that the images are often read in many ways, especially with the use of the captions which aim to throw the viewer, to bring the viewers consciousness into being by requiring of them to negotiate what they are seeing, with what has been written. Without wanting to say too much, because I would love to hear how you read the images, essentially it is a game of power played around expensive cars, black women who pose in front of the cars, who are a fixed requirement of the work and the owners of the cars, within a discourse that talks about the link between beauty as an ideal and it's privileges, within media representations.

Maria: Okay, perhaps it's time to end this conversation and to give your audience the chance to experience and add their own reading as and when they come to see your work. Thank you & I look forward to seeing the work in the space.

Appendix 4: Interview with Mariah Lookman (2017)

The interview and discussion were conducted from June to August 2017 between Mariah Lookman and myself as a result of a series of informal discussions about artistic practices and our own work as artists educated and working in the U.K. throughout the years prior to this email discussion taking place.

Mariah Lookman is a Pakistani artist, and writer. Her research interests are art and the history of ideas with special focus on scientific ideas/inventions and the political. Presently she is working on the first issue of the multimedia magazine Art South Asia and is Visiting Scholar at the Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Batticaloa. More recently, Lookman piloted the first archival research and data base project with Citizen's Archive Pakistan as the Independent Researcher for Pakistan for Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong 2015-16. In 2015 she collaborated with Sharjah Biennale in relation to the work of Pakistani conceptual artist Lala Rukh. Lookman has a B.F.A. from the National College of Arts, Lahore, M.A. from the Slade School of Fine Art and D.Phil. from the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford. Mariah Lookman lives and works between Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom.

Maria Kheirkhah- Hello Mariah, I first like to thank you for taking part in this conversation/interview. Indeed, it's been a number of years since I've been interested in your work and have wanted to speak to you about your practice more in depth. Before I start asking you what interests me most in your work it would be great if you could introduce yourself and give me a brief introduction to you and your practice please?

Mariah Lookman- Thanks Maria for your interest in my work and invitation to conversation. I think of myself as an artist with eclectic interests in artistic research, looking, how we form an understanding of the world around us by looking and looking through devices that extend looking and shape the way we see things. My work is rooted in drawing, and perhaps drawing is most fundamental to all my art making. I have been inspired by Klee's idea of taking a line for a walk, and the lines in my work become forms, text, objects, films and so on.

MK- Thank you, for the purposes of this research I'd like to take our focus first to Atousa Bandeh Ghiasabadi whom we briefly discussed (in our earlier conversations) mentions, how being identified as an Iranian woman in her art school affects her practice both in the way she is perceived by her tutors and their expectations of her and her practice.
From her point of view, in avoiding this assumed identity she has to avoid particular symbols and codes.(what comes across to me as a politicised and Orientalised objects, subjects, codes and symbols) She makes the following list:

-Ornaments or decorative elements, Mosques, Symbols or metaphors, -Political statements, Work about women repressed or otherwise, Women in scarf, Veil or chador, -Women at all, Language elements like alphabets, poetry or stories, -Subjects referring to immigration, refugees or foreigners, Autobiographical works because they allude to all of the above-mentioned elements
Would you say that this resembles any of your experiences or concerns, during the art college education or after?
Is there anything specifically in her list, which you found most particular to your experience?

ML-Being a Muslim woman, I was born and grew up in Karachi, my tutors at the Slade, or at least I felt expected me to speak of repression of women in Muslim societies... I was, and remain hugely interested in politics, political agency but these concerns or this consciousness did not obviously show up in my work, at least to my tutors. At other times I felt as if expected to perform the exotic, and that too was fully out. I used to be a chain smoker (much to especially my father's absolute distaste) but it was assumed I began smoking in London. Not true, and it was also assumed my

father's distaste was on social grounds, but again not so, it had to do with health...but then in many ways, a similar gulf exists between different cities in Pakistan. At NCA (National College of Arts, Lahore) especially students from Karachi and those who lived in the girl's hostel were considered to be, say 'fast', and not from "good" families. It was quite funny really. I could not understand, especially at that time what these issues had to do with my artistic practice? I mean, if one wants to be free as a woman, to do and to be what she wants to be, then that is what she has to do. I could not understand how painting myself veiled could help any situation. Especially since I have never worn one, and have never been forced to wear one, except when on Umra in Saudi Arabia. Besides culture and religion are two different things, and often they coalesce and what comes as a result is beautiful. Rituals for instance. As far as I am concerned, covering ones head to pray or go to the mosque is part of a dress code. Not too dissimilar to how men are not allowed to wear open toed slippers in clubs set up by the British, the various Gymkhana Clubs, the Wellingdon Club in Bombay (Mumbai), Sindh Club Karachi and so on. These were non-issues for me. Militarisation has been my issue. In Pakistan more money is spent on defence and arms, than on education. The military dictatorship of general Zia, that was an issue. Violence against women was an issue, but I could not understand how complaining about these issues in London could solve problems in Pakistan.

MK- That's very interesting, do you think we can escape frames of identity? Has this affected your practice? Or how has frames of identity and signifiers affected your work during art school or after?

ML- I think it is hard to escape frames of identity. It shapes not only the way each of us is seeing the world, but also how we are perceived. It is not about good or bad, but just so.

MK- Okay let's put it this way, is there a currency in masquerading an identity either as an Oriental/ exotic Other, or as a Muslim woman, as has Shirin Neshat in my opinion; or, is it say black artists who are currently celebrated enjoying a visibility which they did not have say when the black art movement and people like Keith Piper or Sonia Boyce were pushing for it? As was indeed when someone like Rasheed Araeen were pushing for it in the late 70's and 80's?

ML- Probably... the art world is quite fickle. And fashions change. Or to put it in another way, intellectual interests change. Now Black politics are back on the radar. Especially since the election of President Obama, and now the contrast in President Trump. With Brexit, the history of Britain as a nation with a colonial past is of interest again. After all empire was made on the sweat and blood of slaves, people of colour. It was built on violence, racism and extreme forms of prejudice. That said, I am not sure of endeavours such as the "Diaspora Pavilion" help the situation... it for ever renders one's identity as rootless, stateless, homeless. The word has Greek origins, meaning to disperse, the Bible refers to the diaspora as Jews exiled from Israel by the Babylonians. At any rate, the modern usage retains the fundamental idea of some kind of original homeland, or geographical location. Like a stamp, brown people from South Asia, Yellow from East Asia, Black from Africa and White from Europe. And this is a problem.

MK- Yes, there is so much to say about fashion, visibility and platform. A whole or possibly many discussions to be had on this issue alone. I understand from many complaining artists of different diasporic backgrounds mainly that of Asian background who did as much to push for visibility when the going was tough in the late 70's and early 80's and other voices ever since and that Diaspora was somehow highjacked. Yes, in my opinion it was a very close pick of the artists and something over eighty percent of Afro-Caribbean origin just doesn't reflect Diaspora at least here in the U.K. I guess that has something to do with the institutional and curatorial agendas. Another big discussion to be had there….

On 4 August 2017 at 17:17, Maria
kheirkhah <maria.kheirkhah@googlemail.com> wrote:

Dear Mariah,
Thank you so much for your reply Mariah. There are just so many issues that I'd like to take up and discuss with you. However, for now I really would like to hone in on your experience and perceptions/ reception surrounding your practice at art school and thereafter.

MK- It is very interesting that you mention being a Muslim woman in response to the list which Ghiasabadi makes (even though she only implies to being a Muslim woman which in itself presents an interesting issue for me-

ML- I don't know if Ghiasabadi is Muslim, the list included has mosque, and veil or chador. One can also think of the issue of using loaded symbols in another way. I am assuming Ghiasabadi is Iranian. The use images of mosques, tiles on mausoleums, chador as a symbol of woman's repression in Iran etc., are identified with Iranian Muslims. But what is the symbolic capital of say Iranian Bahai, Jews or Christians? This is an issue in Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey etc. In Israel on the other hand, there is restricted space for Arab Muslim Israeli, where the symbolic capital is predominantly Jewish.

MK- Continuing from the last question- ……as if 'Muslim woman' or the word 'Muslim' has become a dirty word these days, loaded with so much negativity here in the west that - she censors it out even though almost all her list points at it as an important factor for the perceptions which surrounds her at this particular moment in history.

I think there is pressure to become secular Muslim, as if being secular or even agnostic or atheist were the panacea to the problems perceived by "west" of "backwardness", "repression" in Islamic societies. Moreover, I think it is essential to celebrate the diversity of Muslim cultures, and not to think of Islam and the Muslims as one monolithic group. Of-course the Saudi's are definitely trying very hard to bring as many people as possible into their particular brand of Sunni Wahabi faith. The difference between the Iranians and Saudi hardliners is [that] the Shia since inception have taken the role of minority opposition. The Saudi hard-line version of Islam is far more dangerous for its imperialist impulse.

And it is quite funny too... The Turks had an Empire, the Iranians did, The Umayyad, Abbasid, Mamluk, or the Sassanid. The Quraish, the Hashemite, the Fatimid, the Alawi etc., have a much longer history. And perhaps it is the turn of the Wahabi's to try. See the Haaj show catalogue that opened at the British Museum. It tells you an interesting story.

So if you are self-censoring your own identity, then perhaps this is due to "pressure" and more so, as a lot of Muslims don't really know much about the political, and intellectual history of Islam. The literature that is mainstream is biased to say the least.

Hypocrisy of especially the British, followed next by the Americans is becoming more and more evident- and gaining attention in the media too. That said, nothing will change, as Britain continues to make arms deals worth billions of pounds with the Saudi, Kuwaiti etc.
More in the next mail.
MK- This is the kind of thing which I am concerned about when it comes to our practices. Because it affects our ability to speak, our voices through our practices. To me a religious discipline is like any other religious discipline (taking it to an extreme is another matter in any given discipline), whether we decide to practice it fully or not, whether it is relevant to our practices or not- for example Tracey Emin, Rachel Whiteread or Bridget Riley's religion doesn't even come in to conversations about their practice- unless of course they decide to talk about it- no one presumed that they should make work about or project that into their work or read their work through that lens.
ML- True.
Tutors definitely do orientalise persons of Muslim origin or ancestry. The only other religious group that comes to mind are especially Israeli Jews...

MK- You mention in being a Muslim woman and born in Karachi, your tutors at the Slade, or as you felt expected you to speak of repression of women in Muslim societies rather than you expressing your concerns, political agency, which by the way as a Muslim born artist from Iran is exactly what I have experienced and experience to this day- for me this has become even worse, thanks to media, lazy intellectuals and the aggressive competition played out within our professional field by some-
ML- true.
MK- I wonder if you can give an example of it and whether it had any bearing in your practice?
Yes it did have a bearing on my practice, I stopped making work altogether for years. This was also roughly the time when in the 2000's several South Asians gained a lot of exposure and fame, Aisha Khalid for example was at the NCA roughly at the same time, or say Bharati Kher from India. I was not going to paint the veil or draw the bindi. So I did a lot of teaching. I did nothing.
MK-…or how the expectation of the exotic was expressed by tutors or by enlarge?

ML- Just odd comments like we thought we were getting a nice girl from Pakistan... but these were the odd tutors, or for my luck my tutor, but he was an OK guy too in an arse kind of way. I had a lot of love and support from others especially Stuart Brisley, Klas Hoek, Liz Rhodes, and the one who influenced me the most, Norman Bryson. So I am really not complaining. Andrew Renton was also my tutor for some time. His Jewish identity was/is pretty important to him. It was from him I learnt of Kosher sushi!

For that matter, even my PhD supervisor, indeed amongst the first conversations we had was that he came from Austrian Jewish immigrant class and did not trust the English!

My PhD viva examiner also opened her questions by stating at the outset that she was Jewish...

So, I think this is perhaps due to my being a Muslim? I don't know. Maybe religious identity is important. I refuse to be sensitive about this. Now I have quite a thick skin. And I don't take up a crusade against other people's ignorance.

MK- ….for example for me I have found it really challenging to negotiate my own image in my own work and how I might be able to speak about my concerns about my context as well as expressing my own political agency.

I would also like to go back to escaping frames of identity, which I would tend to disagree with you. I think, we are only bound by it through perception and context and both of those are changeable, albeit with tremendous effort and persistence. For examples Roman identity historically and contemporaneously are two different spaces.

ML- Sure with time anything can change, including perception. I am speaking of the impossibility of escaping "a frame of reference" bound to identity in the now.

MK- yes I tend to agree with you hence my research in trying to work this here and now. Was being a Muslim woman and born in Karachi, changed your tutor's or indeed your (European? British) audience's perception and expectation of you and your work (I think you partly answered this)

ML- yes, but I don't see it negatively I take it as a richness

MK-…and if so how has this perception impacted the form or content of your work?

ML- I have stopped worrying about what other people think on the basis of race, religion, identity, gender etc. Either the work is strong and raises above

narrow criteria (of race, religion...)but still does something for all that is of concern to race, class, religion ....

MK- I'm also writing about the impact of Shirin Neshat's work on her western audience and the dynamic between them as I witnessed it in 2000. Did you ever see her exhibition at Serpentine in 2000?
ML- Yes I did. I loved it. Especially the films with Susan Deyhim.
MK- ….any thoughts on that on reflection in 2017?
ML- Did not like the Women of Allah series then, still don't like that work.

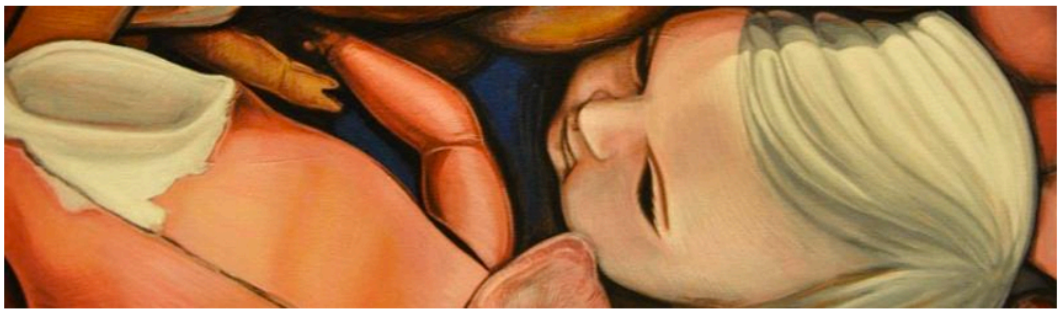
MK- Many thanks again and look forward to hearing from you. I hope all is well and I want to say that I very much appreciate you taking part in my research and your contribution.
Best wishes, Maria
ML- Thanks Maria.
I want to add, I remember people's faces, most did not know quite what to think. `The films showed a very powerful face of women in Iran. Women of Allah weakened it all- and once again the gaze was self-orientalising. Chador, gun, henna tattoo. And this is the difference, all the films have women in chador, one is strong, at least to me, and other is gimmicky and weak. Although, it has to be said, if I am not mistaken, Shirin Neshat was the first to portray women in chador in the art world. And I think because Woman of Allah is a weak work, it was so easy to copy/appropriate by other women artists. Therefore, more than any great impact on the quintessentially "Western" audience, her work had a huge impact on the many artists belonging to the Muslim world/cultures/countries.

Appendix 5: List of Curatorial Work (2012-2015)

- *The Practice Exchange*, A year long series of seminars exploring practiced-led art, design and research across UAL and beyond (2011-12)
  -Feminine narratives – Pink and Red. Gill Addison, Maria Kheirkhah and Alia Syed. April. (2012)
  -Retelling the City- Keith Piper and William Raban Sep. (2012)
- ImaginHer (2012)
  Artists: Maryam Hashemi and Kevina Labbone
- *Dreaming Through- On and Into The Exotic* (2013)
  Artists: Paula Roush and Maria Lusitano
- *I Want Me Some Brown Sugar* (2013)
  Artist: Ope Lori
- *Said Adrus Without An Empire Ghosts Within* (2014)
  Artist: Said Adrus
- *PUKIJAM*
  Artist: Jenifer Allen aka Quilla Constance (2015)
- In\visible cities – International Festival of urban multimedia 3rd-7th June Gorizia - Italy) Member of curatorial team and project management U.K. collaborating with Association Quarantasettezeroquattro and other European partners (2015)

ImaginHer (2012)

Artists: Maryam Hashemi and Kevina Labbone



IMAGINHER

27 September 2012 to 24 November 2012

Maryam Hashemi & Kevina Labonne
Curated By Maria Kheirkhah

As an artist who spends a lot of time thinking about issues of representation I continually stumble on these questions; how can we imagine "her"? How can we penetrate an image and the perception of it which we relate to as women as ourselves and yet as others? Where the knowledge about the context and access to the specifics of that memory is absent.

Maria Kheirkhah September 2012

Through their imaginative approach, and empowered by the paintbrush, Maryam Hashemi and Kevina Labonne use their intensely colourful palettes to create and narrate the self and the other.

In the absence of a living model, Labonne chooses the doll. She manipulates the doll through a series of paintings in order to reveal a profound exploration of the abject. It is through her bold and powerful brush marks that she animates these otherwise lifeless figures. In reworking the image of the doll, Labonne projects an artistic vision of the human condition. In this way, the portraiture of innocence takes on a sinister edge with implications that are both emotional and social. Labonne's restrained, fragmented bodies repeatedly trigger and recall a trauma and its eternal return.

By contrast, Hashemi uses a visual humour that is bittersweet to explore her position as an artist of the diaspora and to make sense of the world surrounding her. Her genuine narration of her current life, and her memory of a life that she left behind in Iran, is told without prejudice: it comes with no political agendas attached. Her purpose is simply to fulfil her desire as a painter, to reflect and to communicate the world that she lives in. Hashemi's use of a visual narrative has a clear relationship to Persian miniature paintings but she tells her story with bigger, bolder brushstrokes. It is Hashemi's independence in breaking free of conventions and fashions that allows her to tell us such a compelling story.

In both Labonne and Hashemi's paintings, the visual narrative is vivid, relevant and true to their existence.

Kevina Labonne is a Figurative painter from Mauritius, now living and working in London. Her work involves the expression of emotional and bodily states, as she depicts figures in existential woe. She is currently completing a practiced-based PhD in Fine Art at Middlesex University.

Maryam Hashemi is a London based artist from Iran, now living and working in London. She uses her own image and female body as the main subjects to explore her subconscious or portray the extremes which give her work a surreal quality.

For more information contact info@198.co.uk

http://www.maryamhashemi.com/

http://maryamhashemi.blogspot.com/

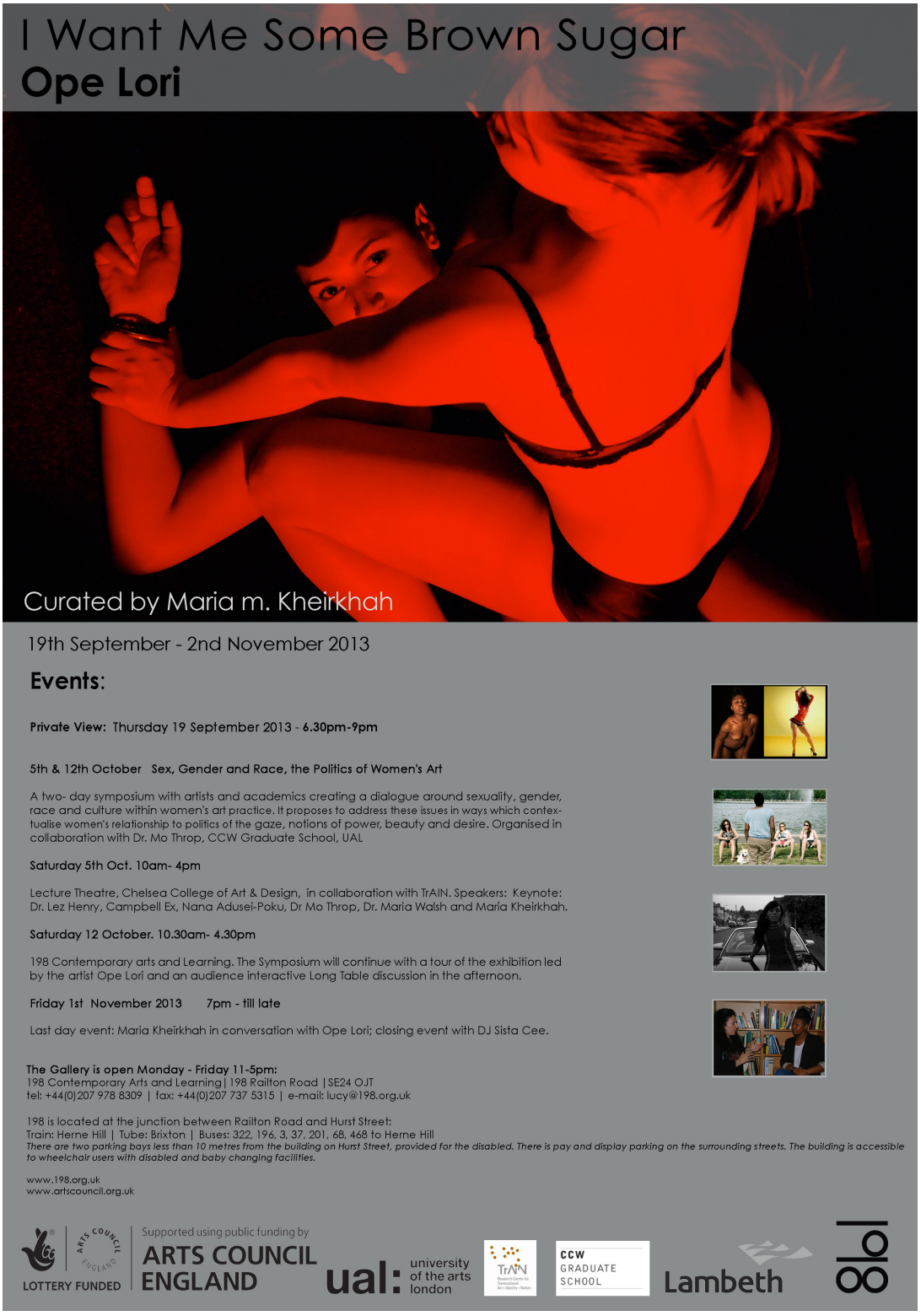
http://www.kevinalabonne.com

Dreaming Through- On and Into The Exotic **(2013)**

Artists: Paula Roush and Maria Lusitano

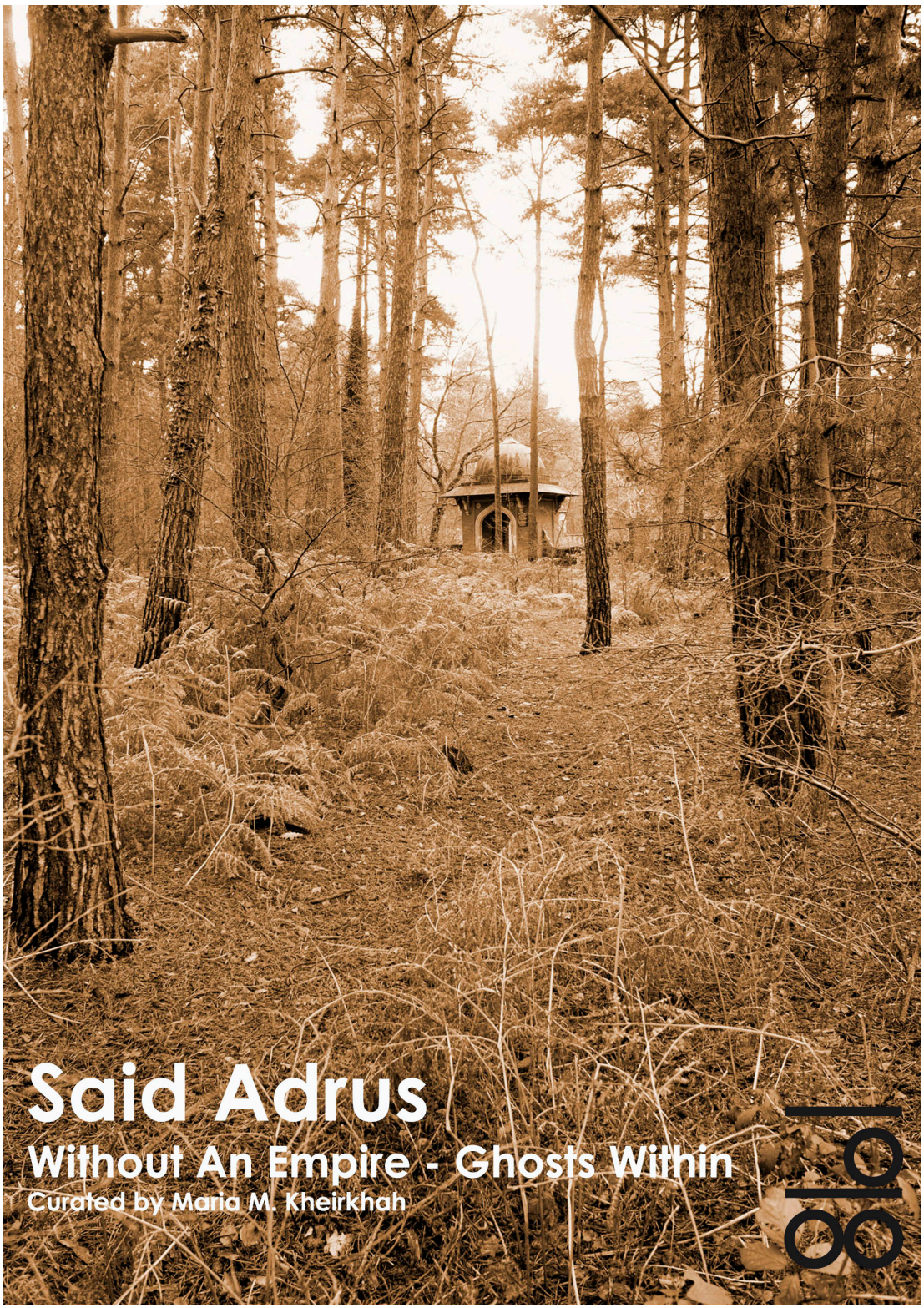
***I Want Me Some Brown Sugar* (2013)**

Artist: Ope Lori



***Said Adrus Without An Empire Ghosts Within* (2014)**

Artist: Said Adrus



PUKIJAM

Artist: Jenifer Allen aka Quilla Constance (2015)

Appendix 6: Seminars and symposiums

A two-day Symposium in conjunction with

"I Want Me Some Brown Sugar" by Ope Lori

Curated by Maria Kheirkhah

@Chelsea College of Art and The 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning

DAY ONE: Saturday 5th October. Lecture Theatre, Chelsea College of Art and Design,

10.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.

Sexuality, Gender and Race: addressing the politics of Women's Art

The Symposium aims to create a dialogue around the demands of feminist politics through the intersections of sexuality, gender and race within the visual arts. It seeks to explore how and why these issues, as part of feminist theory since the late 1960's, are still urgent in contemporary art practices and theories of representation and to ask what are the political strategies for interventions in cultural interpellations today.

Speakers will address the intertwining forces of sexism and racism to allow for all too simple binaries of masculinity/femininity, black/white, to be unpacked by further critical understandings of the intersection of these issues. The concern is to contextualise women's relationship to politics of the gaze, notions of power, beauty and desire, issues which women of today face in recreating and rethinking themselves.

Papers presented in Day One of the symposium

Dr. Mo Throp' presented: Feminism as a contestory practice'

Maria Kheirkhah presented: He who tells the best story holds the most power; so why aren't we telling our own; *The story of plastic surgery and the Iranian nose job*

Dr. Roshini Kempadoo: Imagining Her(story): contemporary art as critical interventions

Campbell X: Bringing Sexy Back

Dr. MARIA WALSH : Respondent

Dr. William 'Lez' Henry (Keynote speaker) : So who told you that you were black and ugly? Overstanding "All things white and beautiful!"

Order of the day

10.00-10.15 Reception

10.15 -10.25 **Maria Kheirkhah** – Welcome & intro to order of events

10.25 – 11.20 Presentation of papers:

10.25-10.45 Dr. Mo Throp

10.50-11.10 Campbell Ex

11.15 – 11.30 Break- Tea and Coffee

11.30 - 1.00 Presentation of papers:

11.30- 11.50 Nana Adusei-Poku

11.55 -12.15 Roshini Kempadoo

12.20- 12.40 Maria Kheirkhah

12.45 – 1.00 Respondent: Dr Maria Walsh

1.05-2.00 Lunch

2.00-2.45 Keynote speaker Dr. Lez Henry

2.45-3.15 Panel discussion- Open Q&A, Chair (Maria Kheirkhah)

3.15- 3.45 Drinks reception

Dr. William 'Lez' Henry

Keynote speaker

So who told you that you were black and ugly? Overstanding "All things white and beautiful!"

Is a Social Anthropologist, born in Lewisham of Jamaican Parents and is the British Deejay Lezlee Lyrix. He is a Researcher, consultant and staff trainer for Nu-Beyond Ltd: Learning By Choice! and delivers various educational/training programmes, specialising in race, ethnicity, diversity, equality, education and black history. Dr Henry is renowned as a first class public speaker and has lectured on behalf of various public and private institutions both nationally and internationally. He has featured on numerous documentaries and current affairs TV and radio programmes in the UK and beyond. He is a founder member of the National Independent Education Coalition and The Lewisham Black Fathers Support Group and has led study tours to Egypt.

Dr. MARIA WALSH

Respondent

Is Senior Lecturer in Art History and Theory at Chelsea College of Art & Design, London. She is also an art critic and has published a number of essays on screen subjectivity and spectatorship in relation to artists' film and video. Her book Art and Psychoanalysis was published by I.B. Tauris earlier this year. She is currently co-editing an anthology of essays from the Women's Art Library/MAKE archive at Goldsmiths.

Campbell X
Bringing Sexy Back

Campbell is an award-winning filmmaker/curator who has written/produced and directed the queer urban romcom feature film Stud Life (2012) which was awarded the Screen Nations Independent Spirit Award (2013) and the Hotter Than July best Black LGBT Feature Film (2013). Campbell's body of work was honoured by the Queer Black Cinema festival in New York in March 2009. Image, Memory and Representation was also a retrospective of work which was programmed at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival 2007.
In 2013 Campbell was selected to be on the jury for Short films for Outfest LGBT film Festival in Los Angeles.
Campbell has written and published short stories and articles on film, sexuality and gender.

Nana Adusei-Poku
A matter of perspective?

Is Applied Research Professor in Cultural Diversity at Rotterdam University/Willem de Kooning Academy&PietZwart Institute and Lecturer in Media Arts at the University of the Arts, Zurich. She was a scholarship doctoral student at Humboldt University, Berlin, working on the curatorial concept of the post-black in relation to contemporary Black artists from the US and Germany, following degrees in African studies and gender studies at Humboldt University, and in media and communications at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She has been a visiting scholar at the University of Ghana, Legon; the London School of Economics; and Columbia University, New York. Among other international publications in French, English and German, she published "The Challenge to Conceptualise the Multiplicity of Multiplicities—Post-Black Art and Its Intricacies" in Post-racial Imaginaries, a special issue of DarkMatter and an article on Mark Bradford's work in "Enter and Exit the New Negro-visible invisibilities" in the peer-review Journal Feministische Studien.

Dr. Roshini Kempadoo

Imagining Her(story): contemporary art as critical interventions

Is a London based Photographer, Media Artist, and Reader in Media Practice at the School of Arts and Digital Industries, University of East London. She researches, creates and writes on postcolonialism, memory and archives, the Caribbean (Trinidad and Guyana), digital media, and black visual culture as it relates to the United Kingdom, Caribbean and United States. She has degrees in Visual Communications, Photographic Studies and was awarded her PhD from Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2008.

Exhibitions include: 28 Days: Reimagining Black History Month, (2012) Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto; Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions (2011) Washington DC; Liminal: A question of position (2009) Rivington Place, London; and Roshini Kempadoo work: 1990 – 2004, (2004) Pitzhanger Manor and Gallery, London.

Writing includes: 'Interpolating screen bytes: Critical commentary in multimedia artworks', Journal of Media Practice, 11(1) (2011); 'Back Routes: historical articulation in multimedia production' in Alan Grossman and Áine O'Brien (eds.) (2007) Projecting Migration: Transcultural Documentary Practice, Wallflower Press: London.

Current research includes: 1st Stuart Hall Library Animateur (2012-13), Iniva, Rivington Place; Domino Effects (2013) a photographic and video artwork; 'New' Europeans (2014) a screen-based artwork on European citizenship; and a chapter in Thornham, H. & Weissmann, E. (eds.) Renewing Feminism: Radical Narratives, Fantasies and Futures in Media Studies (2013).

Maria Kheirkhah

He who tells the best story holds the most power; so why aren't we telling our own: *The story of plastic surgery and the Iranian nose job*

Video presentation -Writing My Profile (2013), video link https://vimeo.com/529049641

Is an Iranian British artist, curator and academic who work with installation and performance to investigate systems of knowledge, power and culture.

She is currently an assistant professor at Richmond University. Among her numerous exhibitions and presentations are: Conversation Pieces, 1001 questions, Tate Britain

2009; The Psychology of Fear, 198 Gallery 2008; The Anatomy Of Ignorance, Current thinking, Tate Modern 2007.
kheirkhah lives and works in London.

Dr. Mo Throp

Feminism as a contestory practice'

Is an artist, writer curator and teacher. She is currently an Associate Researcher with the CCW Graduate School where she is a supervisor for PhD students and also co-convener of the Subjectivity & Feminisms Research Group.
Mo studied Sculpture at Saint Martin's, London before completing an MA and then a PhD at Chelsea College of Art & Design. She has taught on the MA Fine Art at Goldsmith's College and was until recently the Course Director of the BA Fine Art at Chelsea.
She has co-convened as series of events with Dr Maria Walsh for the Subjectivity and Feminisms Research Group at CCW; these have included: five 'Performance Dinners'; a DVD of group members' work: 'Conversing'; a conference at Tate Britain entitled' Close Encounters of the Animal Kind' with Professor Rosi Braidotti in 2008; 'Peep Show' Project Space, Plymouth; as well as two co-curated exhibitions at the Danielle Arnaud Gallery, London: 'Transmogrifications' in 2006 and "Machinic Alliances' in 2008.
Mo is currently working on a co-edited book with Maria Walsh on the MAKE archive (at the Women's Art Library) which will be published by I.B.Tauris next year.

This event is supported by the CCW Graduate School, TrAIN Research Centre, The 198 contemporary arts and Learning and the Arts Council of England

DAY TWO: Saturday 12th October. 198 Gallery Contemporary Arts and Learning

Exploring the exhibition of work by Ope Lori: ***I Want Me Some Brown Sugar***, Lori will lead a discussion of her work which will be followed by a 'Long Table' discussion by invited artists and academics who will respond to Lori's work by considering the intersections of race, class, gender and sexual difference as intertwined pathologies.

I Want Me Some Brown Sugar (September 19th – November 2nd 2013). The exhibition of new works by Ope Lori addresses the representational politics of women, race and gender identities. The exhibition focuses on the certain ways that women's bodies are made to conform, look, dress in relation to ideal models of beauty, mainly fashioned from a white male aesthetic.

The work seeks to negotiate issues of gender through race and question how black female bodies are often left outside dominant narratives of beauty in visual representations where white women continue to remain overly objectified, leaving black women un-represented. Lori's works exploits explicit use of stereotypes, focusing on taboo subjects, inter-racial mixing, gender role-playing and sexuality, all of which stem from the feminist mantra: 'the personal is political'.

This body of newly commissioned video installations and photographic works, create oppositional gazes which challenge the usual the hetero-normative framework of the gaze; in her works, looking and being seen, recognition and misrecognition now take place through homoerotic images 'of', 'between' and 'through' women with women.

10-30- 11.00 Welcome and introduction: Maria Khierkhah
11-00 – 11.45 Room one tour by the artist Ope Lori
11.45-12.00 noon Break
12.00- 12.45 Room two tour by the artist Ope Lori
12.45 – 1.30pm Lunch
1.30- 3.00pm Long table discussion:
'*How might artistic practice address issues of race, class, gender which don't place us back in old contested spaces'* ?
3.15 – 3.30 Break
3.30 to 4.30 Plenary. Chaired by Dr Mo Throp

Long table participants:

Ope Lori; Maria Khierkhah; Mo Throp; Maria Walsh; Oluwatoyin Odunsi

Long Table Etiquette: Central table with surrounding circle of chairs for audience. Initial invited speakers/guests who have agreed to address a particular question (as above) are seated around the table. The first to speak takes the microphone and speaks initially for a few minutes addressing the question. Other speakers around the table raise their hand when they want to contribute; the speaker then hands over the mic

when they wish. So the conversation continues. Speakers can keep raising their hand to contribute (and receive the mic) as many times as they wish. They also can choose to leave the table and so create a space for anyone in the audience to take her place at the table and contribute to the discussion.

Symposium: Said Adrus Without an Empire

Exploring themes of commemoration, mourning, the absence of ruins and ghosting the archive, Said Adrus's *Lost Pavilion* project forms the basis for his exhibition *Without An Empire - Ghosts Within* at the 198 CAL in Hern Hill, curated by Maria M. Kheirkhah. Adrus' video installation and photographic series comes amidst a backdrop of activities commemorating the first world war and highlights the contributions and presence of Indian Muslim, Sikh and Hindu soldiers and officers, reflecting on ideas relating to Diaspora, especially South Asian Diaspora, in its broader context.

This symposium gathers renowned artists, curators and cultural critics to discuss this important project within the wider context of the artist's practice which encompasses a wide range of media and materials as well as important engagements with some of the most radical and critical art practices of recent times.

"In Lost Pavilion the collective impulse of the Black Arts movement of the 1980s continues in his attention to the collective contribution of Indian soldiers of diverse ethnic and religious constituencies, marked by the presence of these graves of Muslim soldiers that implies the absence of others who fought alongside them."
Excerpt from Sites- Sights of memory and mourning By Amna Malik

Speakers include:

Dr. Amna Malik, art historian and senior lecturer, Slade School of Fine Art, University College London; Ashwani Sharma, Principal Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies, University of East London and co-editor of darkmatter Journal; Keith Piper, artist and Associate Professor in Fine Art and Digital Media, Middlesex University London, Said Adrus, artist and Maria M. Kheirkhah artist and curator (TrAIN Research Centre, University of Arts London). This event is chaired by Professor Paul Goodwin, TrAIN research centre, UAL.

Date/Time:

December 3rd 2014/ 13.30 – 17.30

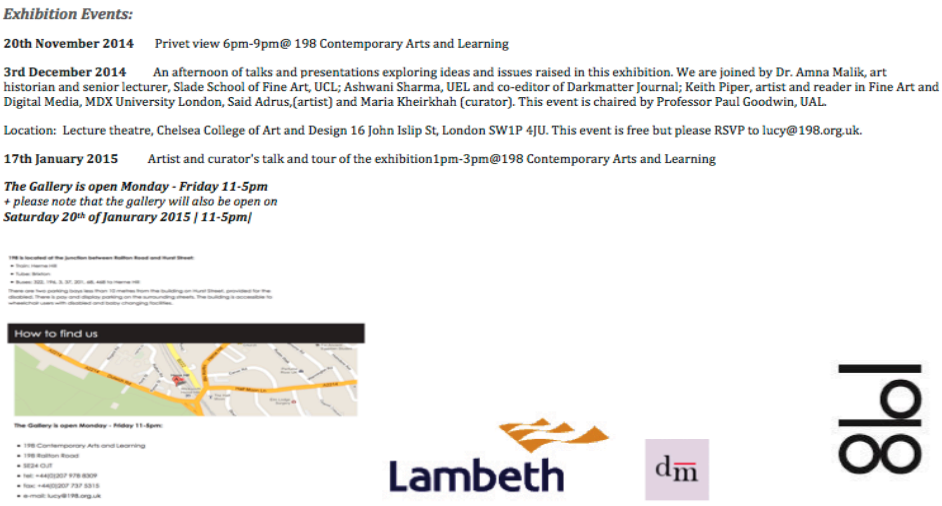
Location:

Lecture Theatre

Chelsea College of Arts

16 John Islip St

London SW1P 4JU.



Exhibition Events:

20th November 2014 Privet view 6pm-9pm@ 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning

3rd December 2014 An afternoon of talks and presentations exploring ideas and issues raised in this exhibition. We are joined by Dr. Amna Malik, art historian and senior lecturer, Slade School of Fine Art, UCL; Ashwani Sharma, UEL and co-editor of Darkmatter Journal; Keith Piper, artist and reader in Fine Art and Digital Media, MDX University London, Said Adrus,(artist) and Maria Kheirkhah (curator). This event is chaired by Professor Paul Goodwin, UAL.

Location: Lecture theatre, Chelsea College of Art and Design 16 John Islip St, London SW1P 4JU. This event is free but please RSVP to lucy@198.org.uk.

17th January 2015 Artist and curator's talk and tour of the exhibition1pm-3pm@198 Contemporary Arts and Learning

The Gallery is open Monday - Friday 11-5pm
+ please note that the gallery will also be open on
Saturday 20th of Janurary 2015 | 11-5pm|

How to find us

PUKIJAM Jennifer Allen aka **Quilla Constance**

Deconstructing Identities | An afternoon symposium at Chelsea College of Arts

Monday 20th April 2015 13.00 - 17.30

Bringing artists and academics together and creating a critical platform in response to the current exhibition held at the 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning, PUKIJAM, showcasing the work of Jennifer Allen aka Quilla Constance. Speakers include Dr Mo Throp, Dr Ope Lori, Kirsten Cooke, Jennifer Allen and Maria Kheirkhah, chaired by Professor Toshio Watanabe. This event has been kindly supported by TrAIN, Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation, CCW, UAL.

Date: Monday 20 April 2015, 13:00 to 17:30

Location: The Banqueting Hall, Chelsea College of Arts, 16 John Islip Street, London SW1P 4JU