

Private Gestures, Public Memory:

Translating Lived Iranian Experiences through Embodied Art Practice

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این پایان نامه پیشکش و بوسه ایست به دست هایی که سال ها نوشتند، ساختند، بافتند، نواختند، نوازش کردند، آغوش شدند، در بند شدند، نقش زدند، در هم گره خوردند، به خاک افتادند و باز و دوباره باز مشت شدند و بالا رفتند تا فریاد و بغض لب های خسته و بسته را صدا باشند.

به مردم ایران،

که شکوه ایستادگی، عشق و آزادگی را معنای دوباره بخشیدند.

به مادرم، به پدرم،

به خانواده، دوستان و اساتید عزیزم،

که جرات و فرصت صحبتم دادند. که چون دره ی اهباط پدیدار شد پرهایم را پرواز و چون زندگی ساز ناسازگار ابطالش اش را کوک کرد صدایم را آواز آموختند.

باشد که این دست ها، نگارنده ی نقشی باشند هر چند کوچک که این درد خاموش را فرصت صحبت باشد.

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This thesis is a dedication, a kiss upon the hands that for years wrote, built, wove, played, caressed, embraced, were bound, inscribed, intertwined, fell to the ground and again and again clenched into fists and rose high to give voice to the cry and the choked sorrow of weary, silenced lips.

To the people of Iran, who gave new meaning to the splendor of steadfastness, love, and nobility.

To my mother, my father, my family, friends and my dear professors, who gave me the courage and the opportunity to speak. Who when the valley of despair appeared, taught my wings to fly; and when life's discordant instrument broke its string, they tuned it and taught my voice to sing.

May these hands inscribe a role, however small, that gives this silent pain a chance to speak. May this thesis or "payan-nameh" in Persian, literarily translated to the end-letter coincide with the end of the letter of that vileness that sacrificed lives to the lust for power.

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Abstract

This MFA thesis is a practice-led attempt to retell lived experiences from post-Revolution Iran through embodied art. I observe, reflect, and give form using my own body and labor. I do not collect, interview, or quote personal stories from others. The material comes from my own memories of growing up in Iran, from publicly documented events since 1979, and from the quiet, shared atmosphere of Iranian life that I continue to ~~feel~~¹ and witness in diaspora.

The exhibition consists of interrelated works: paintings, sculptures, performances, installations, audio layers, and mixed-media objects. I take art practices and gestures that Iranians have long carried out indoors as ways of telling stories, seeking comfort, or simply making something beautiful, and I re-do them here with materials I can find in Canada. These indoor gestures include carpet weaving, embroidering, poetry, lullabies, calligraphy and etc. I try to bring those same rhythms, repetitions, touches, and quiet intentions into the gallery.

With the gestures, the colors, the patterns, the sounds, the language or symbols recognizable to many Iranian viewers, I aim to make sure they ~~feel~~ familiar and know that the work is ~~speaking~~ about them while the human, slow, repetitive, caring, and enduring quality invites my non-Iranian viewers to ~~feel~~ something too, even when they do not know the specific historical references or news titles. I aim for the emotion to arrive before the explanation, so they can relate to the stories beyond the headlines and numbers.

¹ In the printed version of this thesis, selected words such as “freedom,” “women,” and “joy” are sometimes physically scratched and damaged. In this digital version, they appear as struck-through text, marking the erasure, distortion, and violence imposed on language and meaning.

My body is the only performer and maker in every piece: wrapped and taped into life-size forms, bound with threads resembling a carpet, enclosed inside clear shipping boxes covered in my own handwritten poetry, enduring timed physical restriction before cutting myself free.

The central question running through the work is how to use the privilege of being able to speak freely and having access to the universal language of art to amplify rather than replace voices. I want to be present as a witness and a conduit, never as the voice that speaks for my people, but as someone who tries to hold space so their realities can be felt more clearly. The practice is deliberately ongoing: it began before this thesis, continues through it, and will keep going after.

I never ask anyone to participate. Yet during public presentations and exhibitions, some people chose to add something unprompted. Whenever these happened, I asked for and received explicit consent before including anything. For safety and ethical reasons, I deliberately altered and layered the voices so no individual could be recognized by sound.

This written text supports the first early exhibitions and the final exhibition.

It tries to think through what it means to observe and retell through one's own body, what happens when indoor gestures are moved into a public gallery, how unsolicited contributions can arrive and be handled with care, how audiences respond, and what this way of working has taught me about being a storyteller who wants to stay honest and protective at the same time.

Introduction and background

When I was little, whenever my stomach hurt or I refused to eat for any reasons, my grandmother would bring me a glass of hot tea with rock-sugars and fresh pieces of Sangak bread in it. As she would place the tea in front of me, the steam would rise and wrap around my face like a warm fog. For a few

seconds, the world would dissolve into soft spots of color and light floating in the vapor, the world would seem warm and colorful, as if nothing else existed,

Years later, when I had to wear glasses in high school, I discovered I could recreate that same fog simply by not wearing them. Some mornings, especially on the way to school, I would deliberately leave my glasses in my backpack. The faces that seemed heavy with sadness in the early morning light, through the blur of my near-blind eyes were not visible. I could hear the jokes and laughter on the way to school without seeing the grief behind them. Sometimes I would write these hidden forgotten sorrows as poems, but soon I learned that one can't ~~dance~~ with the judge of doctrine. I remember back then in one of my poems I asked their god:

«خدایا ما غلط بودیم؟ سیه مشق شبت بودیم؟»

اگر نه چیست این خط خوردگی بر واژه ی شادی؟»

“O God, were we a mistake you made? Were we merely your late night’s rough scribbles? If not, then why is the word ~~joy~~ crossed out?”²

Their god never answered, and I grew older and learned more complicated words; that were all crossed, erased and hidden under the messy handwritten lines that were spoused to be our destiny.

Tehran itself often felt like a city wrapped in fog. Pollution hung in the air like a gray veil. Sometimes I wondered if everyone’s vision had become clouded too. Otherwise, how were we all ~~laughing~~? The price of our lives and our dignity was less than a piece of bread and our country, our home, had fallen into unworthy hands and yet, we were still ~~laughing~~. How could our hearts be full of

² All translations from Persian are my own unless otherwise stated.

rage and sorrow, how was it that all our expressions or objections were silenced, and yet we could still find something to ~~laugh~~ about?

Some years later when I became a university student, another kind of fog appeared. Behind the architecture's department building in the University of Tehran, the smoke of Bahman cigarettes drifted through conversations about philosophy, politics, and art. Gasoline was as expensive as water but we ~~laughed~~ about Marx and Russian intellectuals. In Enghelab Street, as far as the eye could see, there were security and military forces watching us. We were afraid, but we ~~laughed~~ about the newest trending song on Instagram.

We ~~talked~~, oh, we talked a lot. One day, we ~~talked~~ so much that doors were broken down, raids began, and students were taken away. For a while, we stopped ~~laughing~~. But eventually the fog returned, and we ~~laughed~~ again, this time at the jokes we made about the security and military forces themselves, trying to forget the now empty seats of the others who used to laugh among us.

The largest fog of my ~~life~~ came as a gift from my parents. They helped me leave Iran. I started writing poems in English, I believed that maybe somewhere else I would finally be able to ~~speak~~ clearly.

Instead, I became quieter.

The fog here was different but still there. The language of pain I grew up with was not shared. Words like ~~faith~~, ~~hope~~, poverty, and sorrow were less complicated here. People did not understand why a

simple word like rainbow³ could bring tears to my eyes. They did not know that somewhere else someone was trembling every day, crossing out words and names from our books.

It sometimes feels as though we learn to speak only to realize that no one truly understands us. And when they do understand, they either sigh and pass by and then the silence returns in newer forms. So, we retreat again into the familiar fog, laughing at the scattered beads of a broken necklace beneath our feet, beads of a necklace that even if fixed might still choke us one day.

The fog I live in now is not entirely dark, but the cold of home still reaches me from thousands of kilometers away. Many people here are unaware of the winter I am speaking about. They do not know Akhavan poems to understand what the winter⁴ I mourn about really means (Akhavan-Sales 1955). I don't know what to call this feeling that has followed me my whole life, anger, hope, hatred, fear, guilt, shame, or something that doesn't have a name yet. I only know it felt like constant suffocation. My entire existence has been a search for a language strong enough to scream the pains I see beyond that fog in a way that others can hear and feel. Looking at other Iranians in art and creative fields here in Canada, I see the same thing: we don't seem able to draw a simple vase just to for example enjoy its shape. There is a desperation inside us to talk; there is a tightness in our chests that keeps building until it has to explode somewhere in our arts.

Once I asked someone: Sir, what happened to my identity?

The man with the white horse and the black beard answered:

³ This word was used by Kian Piraflak, a nine-year-old boy who was killed by The Islamic Republic during the women, life, freedom protests. This word is a reference to how he had started his video about his hand-made boat, "in the name of the God of rainbow."

⁴ Mehdi Akhavan-Sales's poem *Zemestan* ("Winter") is widely read as a metaphor for political repression, silence, and emotional coldness in modern Iran, making it a significant cultural reference.

They took it.

How do I explain that we are foreigners even in our own country?

Art to me is like the fog I mentioned, not always something that obscures vision. More like a strategy of survival. It can create spaces where pain becomes bearable, where stories are told indirectly through metaphor, image, sound, and gesture. It can cut through, revealing what has been normalized, ignored, or deliberately obscured.

I was born and raised in Iran, as I witnessed and learned within Iranian cultural history, art has many times been a source of hope during hard times for centuries. We have been using art in the forms of poetry, paintings, sculptures, music, etc., to express our pain and feelings, tell or preserve our stories, and create a myth or utopia we wish for our land, ourselves, or loved ones. With this mindset, I have always found art as a power beyond human comprehension, a world that can be created as a shelter or as a call for awareness or consolation. I am a diasporic Iranian artist now based in Canada. While geographically removed from Iran, my work remains deeply shaped by its social realities, cultural traditions, and collective memories, I am trying to navigating a delicate balance between two cultural worlds. In my art practice, I respond to ongoing events and lived experiences in Iran through interdisciplinary artworks that bridge Iranian and Western contexts. This MFA thesis is a practice-led inquiry (Sullivan 2010) into how personal, private gestures of Iranian life, such as lullabies, craftwork, or everyday rituals can be translated into public acts of memory and art. Drawing on the structural logics of Iranian crafts like weaving and embroidery, I create installations and performances using contemporary materials and gallery settings, yet resonant with Persian aesthetics and sensibilities. My

goal is for the work to have *dual legibility* (Silverman 2018)⁵ to ~~feel~~ familiar to Iranian audience, while remaining emotionally and intellectually accessible to non-Iranian audiences. This approach also aligns with what has been described in literary contexts as a refusal to “gloss,” a form of translation-resistance that does not prioritize full transparency for dominant audiences. Rather than smoothing over cultural specificity, this refusal allows for multiply coded readings, where certain elements remain intentionally opaque to some viewers while fully legible to others. Such opacity does not exclude, but instead invites a different mode of engagement, asking the viewer to recognize the limits of their understanding. In this sense, dual legibility becomes not only a strategy of accessibility, but also a subtle critique of hegemonic expectations that all meaning must be made immediately available to dominant cultural frameworks. In other words, the artworks ~~speak~~ in a “bilingual” visual language (Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1993) that Iranians recognize as their own, but that also invites outsiders into its narrative without requiring specialized knowledge.

This project emerges from a times of social upheaval and ~~hope~~ in my homeland. Yet rather than framing my work in overtly political terms, I focus on lived events and intimate stories, on how daily ~~life~~ and personal memory carry the imprints of larger historical currents. I situate myself as a witness and storyteller, not a spokesperson or activist figurehead. I do not claim to ~~speak~~ for all Iranians, but to ~~speak~~ with them. This “with” emerges not only conceptually but materially, through ongoing exchanges, responses, and voluntary contributions from Iranian women whose ~~voices~~ and gestures become embedded within the work. Throughout this thesis, I foreground questions of mediation, spectatorship, translation, memory, and ethics (Benjamin 1968; Venuti 1995; Rancière 2009), asking how an artist in diaspora can ~~faith~~fully “translate” her community’s pain. How can culturally specific experiences of

⁵ Silverman introduces the concept of dual legibility to describe works that operate simultaneously across different interpretive frameworks, allowing them to be read differently by distinct audiences without fully translating or resolving those differences.

pain, memory, and resilience be translated into artistic forms that communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries without losing their integrity?

The small exhibitions and the main exhibition are central components of this thesis project and consist of several interconnected artworks presented as an immersive environment. This written text functions alongside them as a reflective and analytical component of the overall thesis. Each piece functions independently while contributing to a larger spatial narrative.

Ultimately, this thesis proposes that artistic practice can function as a bridge between private experience and public understanding. By combining cultural translation, embodied craft processes, the project seeks to create spaces where Iranian lived realities can be encountered by broader audiences without losing their emotional truth.

From the bottom of my heart, I ~~hope~~ this is the last time I create against the filth called the I.R (Islamic Republic). I ~~hope~~ my works no longer scream, that those two extra words are removed from our thirsty country's name. I ~~hope~~ after this, art becomes a tool for registering our culture and ~~good~~-times, not a lament and struggle for being heard properly. In Persian, what I'm writing is called a "*payan-nameh*" (thesis/end-letter); I ~~hope~~ this thesis coincides with the end of the Islamic Republic of Iran

This thesis is not built on disinterested theory. It is built on a simple, ongoing question: how can I, as someone who can ~~speak~~ here, use the universal language of art to amplify rather than replace the ~~voices~~ of my people? How can I be a witness and a conduit, never the ~~voice~~ that ~~speak~~ *for* them, but someone who holds space so their realities can be felt more clearly, more humanly, across borders?

Methodology

- **Cultural Translation and Dual Legibility in Diasporic Art**

While this thesis is grounded in my own embodied experience and does not rely on formal interviews or structured data collection, it is not created in isolation. Throughout the development of this work, I have been in continuous dialogue with Iranians within my community, friends, collaborators, and participants across Iran and the diaspora. These exchanges often occurred informally, through conversations, shared memories, reactions to the works, and voluntary contributions to the artworks themselves.

Rather than presenting these voices as extracted testimonies or formal research material, I approach them as part of a shared atmosphere of witnessing. Their responses, gestures, and acts of participation exist alongside my own, shaping the work as a space of intersecting experiences rather than a singular narrative. In this way, the project remains rooted in personal practice while acknowledging the collective conditions of memory, displacement, and resilience that it emerges from.

The exhibition component of this research consists of interrelated and hybrid works, including paintings, sculptures, performances, installations, audio elements, and mixed-media objects and other related forms presented as a collective embodied encounter. Each piece stands on its own, yet together they create an immersive environment, some unintentionally inviting the audience's active participation. Viewers were not intended to, but voluntarily became not just spectators but participants and co-creators in many of the works. For example, one piece incorporates audio recordings of lullabies was contributed by Iranian women from different generations. All contributions are voluntary and unedited: participants' voices, or messages appear in the work, layered together but not altered. However, for their safety they are used with their consent and in a way that their identity is hidden and

protected. This ethic of the voluntarily and mostly unplanned participation ensures that those who choose to share their stories find them faithfully only preserved within the artwork's fabric. Such an approach aligns with an ethical commitment to amplify voices rather than appropriating them. It also enacts what scholar Ariella Azoulay calls a "*civil contract*" (Azoulay 2008) between image-maker, subject, and viewer, wherein each has a responsibility to the others. In my practice, this means I treat participants' contributions with care and transparency, as responsible witnesses rather than passive consumers of others' stories.

As mentioned earlier, at the core of this project is a question of translation: How can I translate private, culturally specific experiences into artworks that communicate across linguistic and cultural divides? Translation here is not merely linguistic; it is cultural, sensory, and emotional. I draw upon theories of translation (Benjamin 1968; Venuti 1995; Spivak 1993; Bhabha 1994), spectatorship (Sontag 2003; Rancière 2009; Azoulay 2008), craft (Adamson 2007; Sennett 2008), memory (Hirsch 2012), and practice-led research methodologies to build a conceptual framework for this endeavor. The following sections outline this framework and discuss how it informs the creation and reception of my work. I begin by examining the notion of cultural translation and dual legibility in art, then consider the role of the spectator and the ethical dimensions of witnessing trauma from afar. I then discuss the significance of craft principles and embodied making in my methodology, and how memory and post memory studies illuminate the transmission of personal and collective histories in my pieces. Throughout, I interweave descriptions of the artworks themselves as case studies showing theory in action. The thesis ultimately argues that through an ethics of care, a "*third space*" of translation, and a participatory approach, art can become a bridge between Iranian private realities and global publics, a conduit for empathy and understanding that honors the integrity of its sources.

In translation theory, scholar Lawrence Venuti (1995) distinguishes between *domestication* (making a text fit the target culture, often at the cost of losing the source's distinctiveness) and *foreignization* (retaining the foreign elements to honor the source culture, even if it challenges the target audience). Venuti argues that excessive domestication "*violently erases*" the cultural differences of the source, advocating instead for translations that "*send the reader abroad*" by signaling the foreignness (Venuti 1995, 20). I see my artistic approach as aligned with Venuti's ethical stance of foreignization, I strive to avoid diluting the Iranian character of my content. Rather than smoothing out every particular into a generic global art style, I purposefully include Persian text, traditional materials, and untranslated voices in my pieces. I do not translate these texts into English on the artwork's surface; they remain visually present as Persian script. To non-Persian viewers, they register as aesthetic patterns or indecipherable traces, evidence of another language. To Persian-literate viewers, they are legible words carrying layers of meaning. This approach follows what Venuti calls an "*ethics of difference*": it "*signals the differences of [the source] text*" rather than assimilating them (Venuti 1995, 20). It trusts the audience's intelligence to appreciate what they may not fully understand, and perhaps be motivated to learn more.

At the same time, I am mindful of Walter Benjamin's insight that a translation must do more than transmit information; it should convey the "*ineffable, poetic*" essence that lies beyond literal content. Benjamin, in *The Task of the Translator*, speaks of the "*afterlife*" of an original work living on in translation, and the deep kinship between languages that a true translation can reveal. In my context, the "original texts" are the lived experiences and expressions of Iranians, and the "translation" is my artistic re-expression of them. If there are any actual poems or texts used, I deliberately use and cite them in their original form to resist flattening their meanings through translation. Following Benjamin, I am not aiming for a one-to-one direct translation of, say, a specific story into a didactic artwork that simply tells that story to an uninformed viewer. Rather, I seek to carry over the affective aura and structural spirit of

those experiences. For instance, instead of narrating an individual ~~woman~~'s tale of protest, I create a performance that captures the ~~feeling~~ of constraint and struggle by literally binding my own body in ropes and threads (evoking the act of carpet weaving, where warp and weft threads cross tightly). The viewer does not receive a factual "statement" or political slogan; they encounter a poetic scene that, in Benjamin's terms, communicates *beyond* the inessential content (Benjamin 1968). The repetition of binding actions, the sound of thread pulled taut, and the eventual cutting of these bonds in the performance ~~speak~~ through metaphor and embodiment rather than explanation. This echoes Benjamin's claim that a translation oriented only toward transmitting information is "*the inaccurate transmission of an inessential content*", whereas a higher form of translation lets the essential truth of the original shine through. By designing artworks that operate on a sensory and symbolic level, I attempt to translate the *emotional truth* of Iranians experiences (the "ineffable, mysterious" element) in a way that any human viewer can ~~feel~~ even if they cannot ~~name~~ the specifics.

Gayatri Spivak reminds us that translation, especially of ~~voices~~ from the margins, is a profoundly ethical task. In *The Politics of Translation*, Spivak emphasizes that "*translation is the most intimate act of reading. I surrender to the text when I translate*" (Spivak 1993, 179). This notion of surrendering, of humility and attentiveness to the source has guided my process. When incorporating the words or ~~voices~~ of Iranians through publicly documented events, I resist any temptation to editorialize or "improve" their utterances to suit an artistic agenda. I layer them raw, in the original Persian, allowing pauses, emotion, and even unpolished phrases to remain. I, as the translator-artist, "*surrender to the text*" of their spoken memories, much as Spivak advises translators to do with literary texts.

Thus, through a combination of careful foreignization and poetic transmutation, I aim for a translational art practice that creates dual legibility. The Iranian audience finds familiarity and

recognition, so that they feel familiar and represented, and the non-Iranian audience finds accessibility and universality to empathize with the human story and emotion. This bridging is not always easy; it involves constant negotiation and self-critique. There is a risk of pleasing neither side fully, of being too opaque for one and too diluted for the other. However, I take solace in Bhabha's assertion that a productive "*split-space of enunciation*" can indeed form the basis of a new "*international culture... based on the inscription of culture's hybridity*" (Bhabha 1994). My hybrid works, I propose, are building blocks of such a culture, one that does not erase differences but stitches them together, like patches in a collective tapestry, to reveal patterns of shared meaning.

- **Spectatorship, Participation, and the Ethics of Witnessing**

If cultural translation forms the backbone of my artistic strategy, the ribs and muscles of this body of work are the modes of spectatorship and participation it activates. Although I originally never intended, planned or invited my audience to participate, I did not stop their participation when I witnessed their willingness to do so during my first mini exhibitions or online posting of the artworks even if it included them altering my artworks. I viewed these voluntary participations as an unplanned additional part to my project. I observed, carefully and respectfully collected the alterations and additions and preserved them in the fabric of the artworks with their consent. However, as many of the participants were Iranians, I kept their identities, or anything that could lead to their identities to be recognized hidden. For example, in one of my exhibitions held in Satellite gallery in London Ontario, I had a sculpture made from plastic trash, tape, shaped from my own body. On the surface of this figure, I had placed bandages that titles of the traumatic events done by the regime since the Islamic revolution in Iran was written on them with marker. On the second day of the exhibition many showed up with bandages with the titles of the events I had forgotten to add or the names of their loved ones they had lost because of the regime and placed

them on the sculpture as well. The reaction of the audience on my Instagram was no different; many shared stories of their experience or the ~~names~~ of their loved ones with me asking if I could add that bandage to the sculpture as well. In response, I followed their request and sent an image of the placed bandage back to them. On the third day I placed empty bandages and markers at the entrance with no instruction or acknowledging their ~~existence~~. By the fourth day, the sculpture's figure that was hollow inside started to collapse from within as the surface become heavier than what it could hold due to the number of the bandages. Visitors started placing the bandages, some with ~~names~~ and some empty on my other artworks or just on walls. By the sixth day, the floors of the exhibition space were filled with wrappers of the bandages and the walls and the artworks were covered with bandages, I eventually had to take down the original sculpture as it was no longer standing and it was about to become a safety hazard for the audience. After that exhibition I collected all the bandages carefully and kept them as I felt responsible for the private and public pains that were shared with me. What was interesting to me was that many of the empty bandages were placed by non-Iranian participants.

Unplanned voluntarily participations happened many other times in different shapes and forms on my other artworks as well. Another great example of this participation was an installation I made that included a sound component. It was my ~~voice~~ singing a specific lullaby representing how mothers have used lullabies as a private practice to calm their ~~children~~, give ~~hope~~ and in some cases preserve and tell the actual stories and events to their ~~child~~. As I was creating that piece, my own mother and grandmother's ~~voices~~ were added, layered on top of my ~~voice~~ as their motherly instinct encouraged them to be a part of that piece. During the exhibition and after posting the piece online, many other women, specifically mothers, approached either in person or online and asked if their ~~voices~~ could be included as well. So far, I am still receiving messages from mothers who come across that work and as I am writing this section of my support paper, I have more than five hundred ~~voice~~ recordings received

from Iranian mothers around the world, singing that lullaby without being asked to do so. Although I gradually added all of the voices only to that specific art pieces with their consent, I deliberately kept their identity hidden and layered the voices on top of each other so that they could not be recognized or traced back to the original owners of them for safety issues. As you may notice from my examples, I conceptualize the viewer not as a passive recipient of a message, but as an active participant and even a co-creator in the meaning-making process. Contemporary art theorist Jacques Rancière argues that the old hierarchical notion of the artist as master and viewer as pupil is obsolete; in *The Emancipated Spectator*, he insists that “every spectator is already active, already interpreting, already capable of making meaning”, and that the role of art is to give the spectator space to engage their intelligence and imagination. Taking this to heart, I design my exhibition as an open field of inquiry rather than a didactic storyboard. I rely on viewers to connect what they observe with their own knowledge or questions. Some may link the image to broad themes, whether in Iran or elsewhere; others might simply feel the tension and empathy on a visceral level, without needing to intellectualize it.

From an ethical perspective, such participation must be handled with care. I treat the bandage contributions as testimonies entrusted to me. Implied consent is given by the act of voluntary participation, but I also provide an option for people to remain anonymous or to later request removal of a personal story if needed. In this written component of my thesis, any specific personal stories or quotations gleaned from these contributions are anonymized unless I have explicit permission to identify someone. This aligns with research ethics protocols for working with human participants, ensuring respect for privacy while still learning from the qualitative insights offered. This is crucial because, as Susan Sontag observed in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, “Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers... If one feels there is nothing ‘we’ can do... then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic” (Sontag 2003, 101). Sontag’s warning underlines a key risk of

spectatorship in the global age: the deluge of images and stories can numb viewers if they are left feeling helpless. By structuring artworks that channel compassion into an expressive act, I attempt to mitigate apathy. The exhibition becomes a sort of participatory vigil or forum rather than a spectacle of tragedy. (no push, express however if you need to). Viewers move from feeling to doing. Even if the “doing” is small and symbolic, it is still a form of agency and solidarity, a way to “hold onto the gesture of looking” as Azoulay might say, rather than turning away (Azoulay 2008).

Another ethical dimension is the question of speaking for others versus enabling others to speak. As an Iranian woman in diaspora with the privilege of free expression, I often feel urgency to use my platform for those silenced back home. However, postcolonial scholars like Gayatri Spivak caution against the pitfalls of the privileged “ventriloquizing” the subaltern (her famous question: “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” (Spivak 1988) points out that often, when we think we are giving voice, we may actually be overriding those voices). I grapple with this by positioning myself as a mediator and storyteller, carefully relaying others’ voices rather than substituting my own. For instance, one of my key works that I mentioned earlier, features a soundscape of layered voices: my grandmother, my mother, myself. As mentioned, the piece started as a personal exploration of maternal lineage and mourning. When I first presented this audio installation, something remarkable happened: Iranian women from the community approached me, sending me recordings of themselves or their mothers or grandmothers singing the same lullaby, and asking me to include them. They recognized the tune, part of our collective cultural heritage, and they wanted to *join* the piece. I then created an updated version layering in some of these additional voices (with permission). The artwork thus evolved into a communal chorus across time and space, truly a “*collective embodied encounter.*” I preserved the authenticity of each contribution with their permission and without putting them in risk of being recognized. In effect, I ceded a measure of authorial control, becoming a curator of voices rather than a

solo performer. This answers Spivak's call for translators (in this case cultural translators) to "*surrender to the text*" (Spivak 1993) and let the others' voices shape the narrative. It also reflects Marianne Hirsch's caution in memory work: those of us in the "generation after" must "*acknowledge our distance from the traumatic events... and not appropriate them for ourselves.*" (Hirsch 2012). By literally embedding the voices of those with direct or inherited memories, I ensure I am not the only one speaking. I become a facilitator of a conversation among Iranian women rather than a single narrator.

The ethical stance of *witnessing* rather than *speaking for* also means I critically examine how I frame the narratives. I avoid sensational images or simplistic binaries of victimhood vs heroism. Instead, I embrace what Hirsch calls a "*multi-layered aesthetic*" to communicate the "*contradictory needs, desires... the proximity and distance*" in post memory and trauma experiences (Hirsch 2012). In practical terms, this means a single work might combine beauty and pain, opacity and clarity. The pieces don't shout the messages; they whisper them in multiple layers, requiring the audience to navigate emotional nuances, nostalgia, loss, resilience, all at once. This approach aligns with Rancière's idea that the power of the collective poetic image is in its ability to bind individuals together *while keeping them apart* in their own interpretive space. "*The collective power shared by spectators does not stem from being a mass that is addressed by one voice,*" Rancière suggests, "*but from the power of the equality of intelligence*" (Rancière 2009). each brings. In my exhibition settings, I've observed viewers sharing quiet moments, two strangers placing bandages next to each other, or an Iranian mother and her Canadian friend both tearing up listening to the lullaby piece. Some explaining the stories to one another, sitting, some talking about another event not related to Iran that a piece has reminded them of. They may interpret details differently, but a collective emotion forms in the space, a solidarity born of parallel and intersecting acts of witnessing.

In summary, my project treats spectators not as endpoints but as essential nodes in an ethical circuit of witnessing. By allowing open interpretation, and preserving the integrity of contributors' voices, the work embodies a model of spectatorship as active citizenship. The audience is empowered and allowed to *complete* the works if they ~~feel~~ like something is missing or they need to ~~sing~~ along with the message of the piece, to bear witness together, and to possibly carry the narrative forward beyond the gallery. One ~~hope~~ I have (which early reactions support) is that the experience will linger with people, someone completely unfamiliar with Iran will remember at least one of the emotions they felt seeing one of the works or the atmosphere created there by the audience, that someone would search and read about my country and my people as stories of humans, not some foreigners and numbers who live too far away for them to care about. If even a few viewers leave the show ~~feeling~~ a personal connection to stories of people in Iran, or ~~feeling~~ that they too have a role in the chain of memory and responsibility, then the spectators have truly become witnesses and the ethical circle is complete. As Azoulay writes, *“to look with responsibility is to admit that the event which gave rise to the photograph [or artwork] remains open and that our reading can shape its destiny”* (Azoulay 2008). In this project, the event that remains open is the ongoing struggle and resilience of Iranian people, an unfinished story that the artwork and its audience together help to carry forward, ensuring it is neither forgotten nor misrecognized.

- **Embodiment, Craft, and Memory: Practice-Led Methodologies**

My research is rooted in practice-led methodology, meaning that knowledge is generated through the creative process itself and is often articulated in the art before it is in words (Sullivan 2010). Practice-led research, as defined in creative arts scholarship, positions the act of making as central to inquiry and “leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice” (Sullivan 2010). In my case, the studio work, experimenting with materials, researching and learning traditional Iranian art and crafts

techniques from other Iranians, improvising performances, has been the primary engine driving my theoretical insight. I maintained a reflexive process journal throughout, recording conceptual developments, material trials, and personal reflections as I created each piece. This journal, along with photo/video/sketch documentation of the artworks' evolution and my observations, became a rich source of data for analysis for me. The methodology is iterative and cyclic: ideas from scholarly research or concepts in Persian literature, political and social events, hearing and reading the stories would influence my artistic experiment, and the outcomes of that experiment would then send me back to theory with new questions (e.g., how does multi-layering affect a viewer's sense of temporal connection?). This ongoing dialogue between theory and practice is characteristic of practice-led theses, where "the written and practical work represent different aspects of a complex whole" (Sullivan 2010).

A key aspect of my methodology is embodied knowledge, using my own body as a site of research. I approach the body as an archive of memory and a tool of communication that can sometimes convey truths more immediately than verbal language. This approach is inspired by the notion of "*haptic knowledge*" in craft, where understanding comes through the hands, through doing and touching, not just through the intellect. In one performance piece for more than 15 hours I keep tying and untying hundreds of small knots to my own nude body as the vulnerable representation of carpet on a loom created from a canvas. The action references the process of carpet knotting, traditionally often done on looms by women, knot by knot, often to create elaborate rugs. Here, instead of a decorative pattern, I simply tie continuous knots, the repetitive motion causes physical strain; my back aches, my fingers blister by the end. By pushing my body, I connect in a small way to the labor and pain of those I am commemorating. Spectators who watch the recorded video of the shadow of my existence and practice projected on the installed empty loom for a while may start to ~~feel~~ feel the monotony and weight of the task, almost *in* their own bodies through mirror neurons or imaginative identification. This is akin to what

Richard Sennett describes in *The Craftsman*: “*Craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing itself*” and entails a dedication to doing something well for its own sake (Sennett 2008). In my adaptation, the “thing itself” is the act of memorial tying, I focus on it fully, with craftsmanship-like devotion, not as acting but as sincere ritual. Sennett notes that craftsmanship is an “*enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake*” (Sennett 2008). Here the “job” is honoring the effort done by Iranian women for their stories to be heard and for them to be seen knot by knot, even though it produced no utilitarian object. By embodying craft, I was tapping into that legacy of resistance through making.

Materials carry memory as well, and my methodology paid close attention to material choices. I often sought materials that resonated with Iranian culture but were available in my Canadian context, effectively creating analogues that translate across environments. The choices I made when it came to the materials were not only symbolic but also aimed at triggering the sensory memory of Iranian viewers, the smell of burnt soot, the sight of familiar fabric textures. I wanted the familiarity of the aesthetics, colors, textures and in some cases sounds and smells to tell Iranians that this is a work from their home. Indeed, scent and sound became deliberate methodological tools. This multi-sensory approach recognizes that memory is often triggered and held in non-verbal ways, a concept supported by neuroscience and by cultural memory studies alike. Marianne Hirsch’s concept of *post memory* suggests that those of us who did not directly witness events can nonetheless “*remember*” them through the images, stories, and sensory impressions handed down. My practice leverages that idea: I myself, born after the 1979 Revolution, have *post memories* of it through family stories and media, and I extend this by creating new sensory archives for others. The lullaby piece is explicitly described by participants as an “*emotional archive*”, a way to hold feelings and history in a song. Academic research by Ehssan Hanif on Iranian women’s work songs and lullabies underscores this, noting that singing during

domestic work (like carpet weaving or childcare) functioned as a safe outlet for women's "innermost feelings" under repressive social conditions. Such songs are *archives of emotion*, preserving women's resistances and hopes in coded form. Inspired by this, I treat each craft or ritual I engage with as a vessel carrying emotional knowledge that might not surface in official histories or political discourse.

My methodology is also iterative and adaptive. Early in the project, I created some of these works and showed them in grad school critiques and open studios or smaller exhibitions to gauge reactions. I observed how people interacted with them. I noticed some hesitancy, like in some examples viewers were unsure if they could touch the art. Such observations led me to adjust the presentations. I also noted what elements resonated cross-culturally. For example, the bandages worked because everyone knew what a scar meant so they could understand the pain of many scars on one body. One of the things that didn't work at first was one of my large drawings, the ideal. The sexualization of the figure was mostly understood but I figured that the historical clothing of the figure was an over-explanation and a bit confusing. So, I recreated that drawing as a painting where there was no focus on the clothing of the figure, the conclusion of my observation on the reactions to the second painting suggested that it was working better. This kind of adjustment reflects a practice-led responsiveness: the work can evolve based on feedback and observation, aiming to better answer the research question of how to convey meaning across the cultural gap without oversimplifying or overexplaining. Each exhibition or test was effectively a *research exercise*, with audience responses (including non-verbal cues and emotions) as data. I treated anecdotes, like a Canadian visitor saying "I don't know much about Iran but this reminds me of when I lost my own mother," as valuable indicators that the dual legibility was working on an emotional level. Conversely, when an Iranian viewer said, "it smells like home" I learned how crucial those subtle familiar cues were. These qualitative insights support the claim that the works operate on multiple registers of legibility. In scholarly terms, this approach draws from autoethnography (mining

my personal/cultural experience as data) and participatory action research (viewers actively influencing the direction of the projects), although under the broad umbrella of practice-led art research.

Throughout, I have been mindful of ethical research guidelines, especially since my work involves what might be considered human subjects (people contributing voices, writings, or being recorded in participatory settings). My interactions fell under exceptions (artists gathering voluntary public contributions in an open setting is not the same as conducting interviews for a study), but I nonetheless followed best practices: informed consent (explicitly telling contributors how their input will be used), the right to withdraw contributions, and safeguarding their identities and/or the sensitive information. Fortunately, much of the audience “data” is symbolic and non-identifiable, as my proposal noted, e.g., a single name on a bandage, a knot tied on a thread, which doesn’t identify the person who added it and thus respects privacy while conveying meaning. The ethic of care in methodology mirrors the ethic in content: just as I aim to honor the voices in the art, I honor the people behind the voices in how I handle their contributions.

Finally, to situate my methodology in a scholarly lineage: I draw on the concept of research-creation (as known in Canadian academia) where creative practice is a form of research in itself. My process aligns with what Graeme Sullivan calls “arts practice as research”, a mode where studio practice produces “*insights that are not possible through other means*” (Sullivan 2010). The insights in this project are often tacit, embodied, or affective, yet they are valid forms of knowledge that this written thesis attempts to articulate. For example, the knowledge of how a communal lamentation can be facilitated through art is something I learned by doing. Now, in writing, I connect that to theory, e.g., recognizing it as an instantiation of what Hirsch et al. in *Women Mobilizing Memory* describe as using

intimate gestures (a lullaby, a dance) to invite the creation of alternative histories (Altınay et al. 2019). Thus, practice and theory inform each other continuously.

In summary, my methodology marries the tactile, the emotional, and the reflective. It is practice-led, meaning the studio work led the inquiry, supported by theoretical frameworks which were tested and bent in practice. It is embodied and craft-based, using my body and craft techniques as tools of investigation. It is participatory, involving others in both creation and evaluation. And it is reflexive and ethical, constantly evaluating the impact on participants and audiences, and adjusting to align with the guiding values of respect, authenticity, and empathy. Through this approach, the resulting body of work is not just an illustration of ideas, but itself a form of knowledge, a living thesis in material form, with this text as its companion and analyst.

Description of Some of the Artwork Series and Analysis

To concretize the discussion, this section provides an overview of some of the works featured in the exhibitions, grouping them thematically and analyzing how each embodies the thesis concepts. Below are several major components:

- **The Unbound**



Figure 1, *The Unbound* instalation

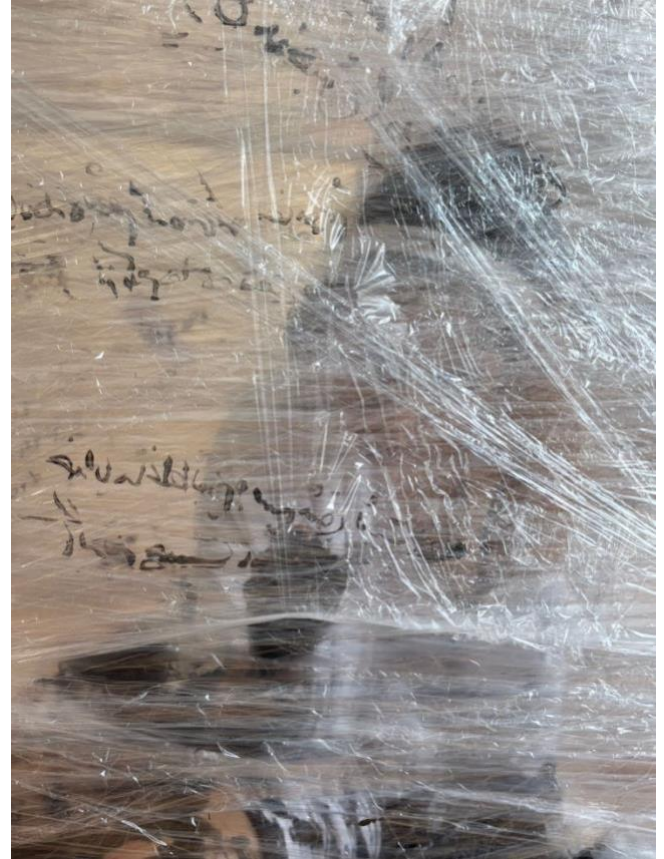
This art installation is a personal artwork that explores the relationship between my cultural identity and personal expression. As an Iranian art student who came to Canada for art studies, I was initially urged to embrace Western art styles and leave behind my culture. Parviz Tanavoli's experiences and words resonated deeply with me, reinforcing my resolve to keep on expressing my cultural narrative through my art even if it was not accepted (Tanavoli 2018)..

At the heart of this installation lies a canvas, transformed into a piece of Iranian calligraphy made from strings, precisely 1006 meters in length. This length is significant, it is the abjad numerical value of a line from a poem by Hafez: “هوای منزل یار، آب زندگانی ماست” which means “The air of the beloved's abode is the water of our life.” or in other words, that seeking and wishing for friend's home (my ~~land~~ and culture) is my reason of living. This verse ~~speaks~~ volumes about the importance of seeking and cherishing connections, much like the threads of my own heritage that weave through my ~~life~~ and work. A chair is positioned in front of this canvas, marked by the telltale stains of an artist's labour. It symbolizes my presence, my decision to stay true to my origins in the face of conformist pressures. The chair's relationship with the canvas, connected yet not bound by the strings, represents my voluntary attachment to my Iranian roots. It's a reminder that while I am ~~free~~ to explore, my cultural heritage remains an integral part of my identity. Without this connection, symbolized by the chair's proximity to the strings, the art would lose its unique essence, becoming just another chair detached from its story.

- **The product**

31x31 inches, exhibited in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2025–2026.
Mixed-media installation and performance.





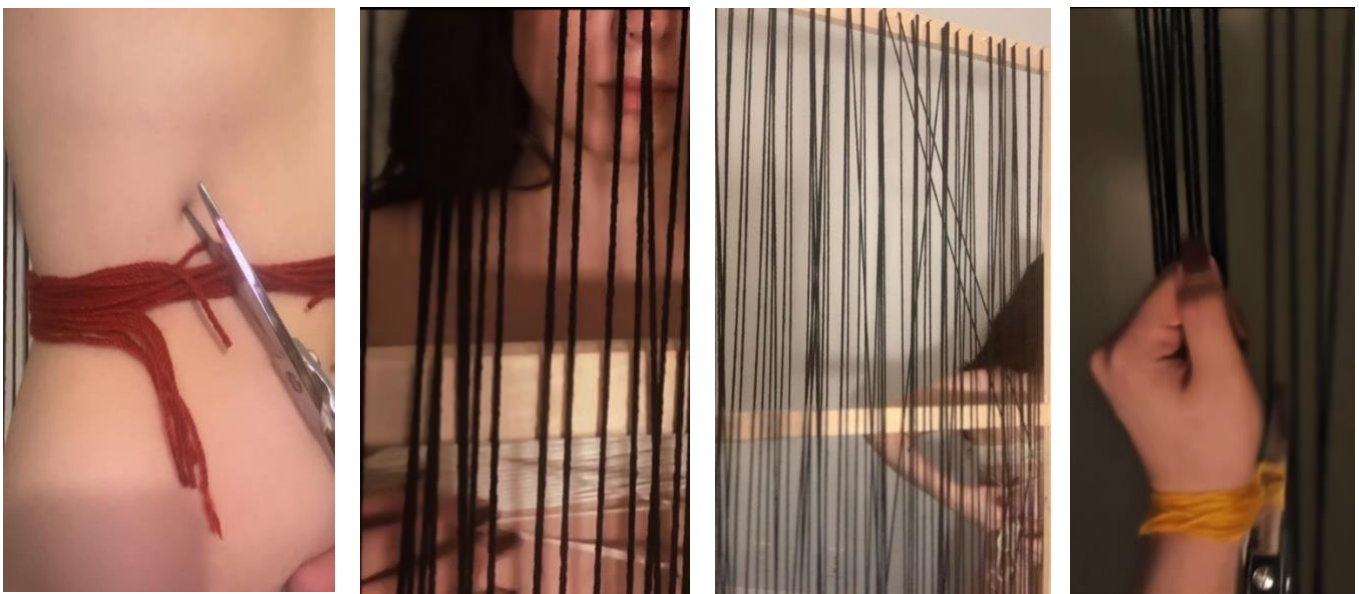
In this installation/performance, I sit inside a 31-inch clear shipping box that is wrapped in stretch film, stamped security checked, covered with postal codes from my home in Tehran to my university in Toronto. On the label, the product name is The Student. Ink pools at my feet. Dressed in white, I handwrite my own poetry in Farsi across the film, telling the stories I carry from home with me from grief and resistance.

This is the space I've been given as an international student: permitted, visible, limited. I have been trying to use the "universal" language of art to translate what is happening in my country, but the translation is never whole. The calligraphy is legible to some, unreadable to many; meaning leaks between languages and borders.

Packaged like cargo, the work arrives as something “authentic” to look at, its labels and foreign script promising access while keeping the message contained. Viewers can circle the box, admire it, and move on. The poems remain sealed inside: witnessed, archived, and largely untouched. Many of the words will be gone by the time there is a second visit, if there is any. The piece records an impossible translation, a body in transit, a testimony that keeps arriving yet is never fully received. I write for as long as I can.

This small, permitted space reflects my attempt as an international student to translate my country’s pain into the “universal” language of art with this given limited space and privilege to speak, yet the translation is never whole, the meaning leaking between languages, the work admired as authentic but remaining sealed, a testimony in transit that never fully arrives.

- **The Carpet**



Life-size dimensions, based on the artist’s body, exhibited online, 2025–2026. Mixed-media installation and performance.

This work uses the act of carpet weaving to explore how women struggle to present themselves fully within social, political, and cultural constraints. The structure, made from wooden canvas frame and yarns references a carpet loom, but the work is not about producing a carpet. Instead, the carpet becomes the ~~woman~~ herself. Threads stretch across the frame and around my body as I tie myself into the structure. To continue the process, I must repeatedly cut myself ~~free~~ and tie another part of my body in its place. If I want to weave a part of my body, another must be released for me to be able to do so. The performance becomes a continuous negotiation between movement and restriction.

Knots are central to the work for two reasons. In carpet weaving, every point of the pattern is created through a knot, making the surface of the carpet the accumulation of thousands of tied moments. At the same time, in Persian literature the knot carries a dual meaning: it can signify both a bond and a trouble. Some knots represent attachments we choose and value; others represent constraints we cannot easily escape. This duality reflects the ways women are simultaneously connected to, and confined by, the systems surrounding them.

When a carpet is finished, it is cut from the loom and presented as a complete work. In this piece, however, the carpet, the ~~woman~~, can never be fully cut ~~free~~ as the carpet never gets to be fully weaved. The work remains unfinished, reflecting the reality that ~~women~~ are rarely able to present themselves entirely as they are, without the interruptions of expectation, politics, religion, and social norms.

The performance therefore does not produce a finished object. Instead, it reveals the ongoing labor of negotiating visibility, autonomy, and self-definition. I performed this project with my nude body in the most vulnerable but honest way I could imagine and recorded the process from different angles around the loom. I recorded the entire performance from different angles and distances with cameras positioned around me in the loom. The performance took about 15 hours, the final installation was the loom on its

own with all the evidence and tracks of the process remained on it installed on the wall while the fade shadow of my body doing the performance was projected on it as if a hint of someone's existence and labour was provided.

- **The Offering**



50x25 inches, exhibited in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2025–2026. Oil on Wood panel

"The Offering" is an exploration of bodily subjectivity, power, and consumption, drawing from Merleau-Ponty's analysis in , *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 1962). He argues that the body is not merely a biological entity but one shaped, disciplined, and consumed within structures of power and desire. The body is both a subject-one that acts, desires, and expresses, and an object, one that is seen, categorized, and consumed by others (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

As I engaged with these ideas, I found an unsettling parallel in a mundane act: cooking fish for a friend. In preparing the fish, I treated it with care-cleaning, seasoning, and presenting it as an offering. But once served, my focus shifted. I observed which parts were consumed, which were rejected, and

what was left untouched on the plate. In that moment, I recognized a reflection of my own experience-of being shaped, adorned, and offered for consumption, only to see parts of my identity accepted while others were discarded.

This painting presents my own body as a served dish-pampered, prepared, and dissected. Some parts have already been consumed, while the head, like the uneaten remnants of a meal, remains. It is an unwanted offering, rejected and left behind.

This visualization resonates with Foucault's dialectic of the subject-object: we ~~exist~~ both as the giver and the given, the ones who offer and the ones being consumed.

Through The Offering, I question the ways in which in political activities and participations presented, and ultimately used, seen and judged through structures of power for participations or propagandas. What parts of ourselves are deemed desirable? What is left untouched? And what does it mean to ~~exist~~ as both the server and the served?

- O(e)syan (Rebellion)



Life- size Instalation, exhibited in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2025. Mixed-media installation, oil on canvas.

"این دخترها به جای عطر باروت را انتخاب کرده اند!"

"These girls have chosen wearing bullets instead of perfumes,"

This mixed-media installation uses a painted canvas not as a surface but as a standing female body, life-sized, the canvas is cut open at one edge to reveal a dense accumulation of VHS tapes packed like organs; loose tape ribbons cascade to the floor. A pair of black high-heeled shoes anchors the piece, their interiors spattered with blood to suggest both violence and the long endurance of standing. A black

veil drapes the upper portion of the canvas, partially obscuring the body and some of the tapes. Across the surface, you see a Farsi slogan that reads “*These girls have chosen wearing bullets instead of perfumes.*” I later learned this line came from a newspaper printed in pre-revolution Iran, celebrating ~~women~~’s militarization. Drips and blood stains mark sites where the body has been “shot,” underscoring the violence inherent in the regime’s expectations of ~~women~~.

Inside the sculpture, a looped sound piece plays a lullaby sung by my grandmother, my mother, and myself. In Iranian culture throughout history, mothers have used lullabies and tales to transmit values, history, and even social and political perspectives. The themes and messages in lullabies reflect the wider culture and may also serve as a way for the mother to express her own aspirations, ~~feelings~~, and intellectual or spiritual ideas. Such songs are considered a primitive form of poetry and part of the nation’s intangible cultural heritage. The lullaby I chose, translated as “Lullaby, go to sleep, your dreams are beautiful; the moonflower of the night changes into a thousand colors. Don’t wake from the dream of stories; don’t step into the city of sorrow” carries both tenderness and an undercurrent of warning, referencing monsters behind the wall and kites whose strings have been cut.

The seconds of recording on the tapes correspond, roughly, to the number of ~~women~~ documented as murdered by or under the laws of the Islamic Republic. This correlation is necessarily imprecise; reported cases of femicide in Iran represent only a fraction of actual killings, as there are no accurate statistics because so many cases ... go unreported or are falsely reported. The work’s excess of tape spilling from the body underscores this incompleteness, the memory exceeds what can be counted.

When the installation was shown in person and online, hundreds of Iranian ~~women~~ from inside Iran and across the diaspora spontaneously sent recordings of lullabies sung by themselves or their mothers. With permission, I layered these ~~voices~~ into the soundtrack in a way that protects anonymity. This

unanticipated contribution transforms the piece into a communal archive: what began as a personal intergenerational lullaby becomes a chorus of mothers, a quiet act of solidarity and resistance. This accumulation of voices transforms the work from an individual expression into a collective act of witnessing, where each contribution extends the emotional and cultural memory embedded in the piece. Positioned between visibility and concealment, documentation and absence, this installation asks how violence is recorded and remembered when official histories fail, and how intimate cultural practices like lullabies, poetry, and craft become vessels for collective memory and rebellion.

- **The Disposed Ones**



Life-size dimensions, based on the artist's body, exhibited in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2025. Mixed-media installation and performance.

"Garbage, "worthless", "Dust and shavings", "less than animals".... , these are some of the words used by those in power in Iran since the revolution to describe and dehumanize protesters, especially ~~women~~, while stripping us of our freedom and basic human rights. With every rule, every restriction, it feels as if they see us as disposable-nothing more than trash.

In response, I become what they call us. Wrapped in garbage bags, bound by tape, I restrict my circulation, enduring 20.77 seconds before cutting each section off, a number reflecting the abjad value of Hafez's verse: "In our way, to suffer is the crime of infidelity"

I then pieced together the sections and made the figure from my body, garbage and tape in a sitting position with a tape roll in hand, as if the figure is herself taping her pieces back together. She is not



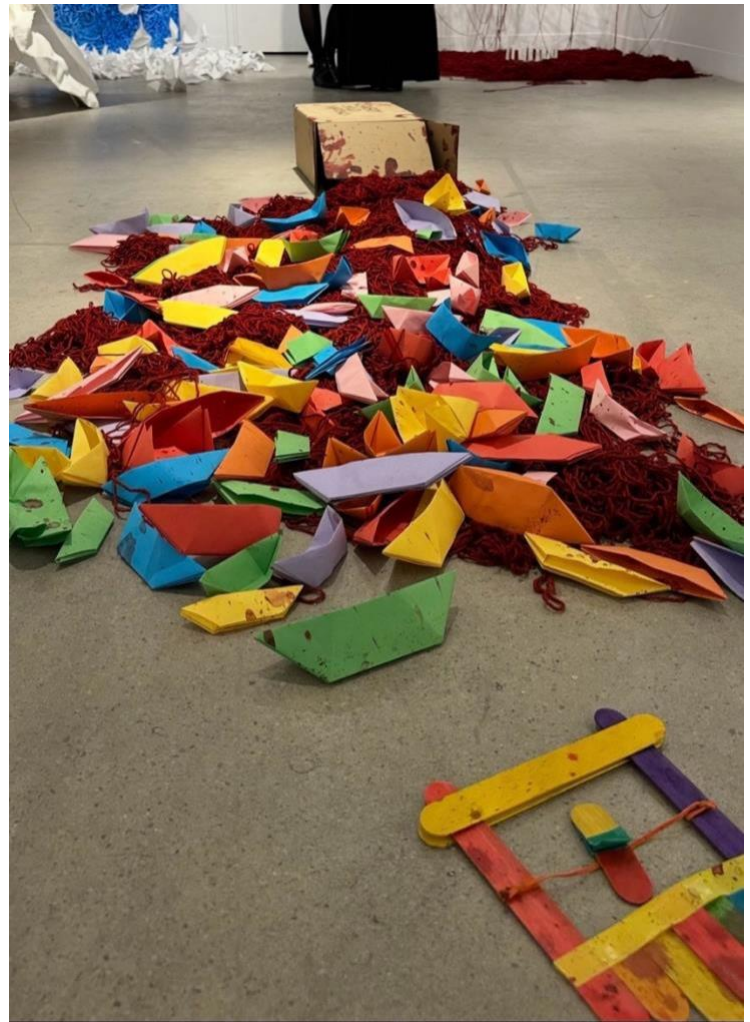
Figure 11, *The Disposed Ones, The performance*

standing, she is not shouting, she is just quietly, surrounded by torn newspaper fragments-evidence of past and ongoing resistance sitting and taking a time to fix her broken self before standing up again.

During the exhibition, I was present as well as a performer, wearing only a garbage bag, but with full make up, ear rings and high heels. I was adding tape to my body every 20.77 seconds (the same abjad value) while acting like a normal guest in the exhibition and holding normal conversations as if nothing was happening. Each layer tightened, echoing oppression. My movements were being limited slowly and ironically, I did end up with skin irritation from an allergic reaction to the garbage bag; however, I kept the performance going as it did add to my aim of keeping it together and acting normal while somethings were definitely wrong and limiting. The same act that most Iranians inside and outside of Iran have to put together to be presentable and live the parallel ~~life~~ life aside from the social and political events affecting them.

With this work I wanted to reclaim our fight stating that although after every protest that is silenced by the Islamic republic regime the world thinks the protests have faded, nothing has truly ended. We are never done until we are truly ~~free~~ free. We are healing, mending, taping our broken pieces back together. And then, as always, we will rise again.

- **The God of The Rainbow**

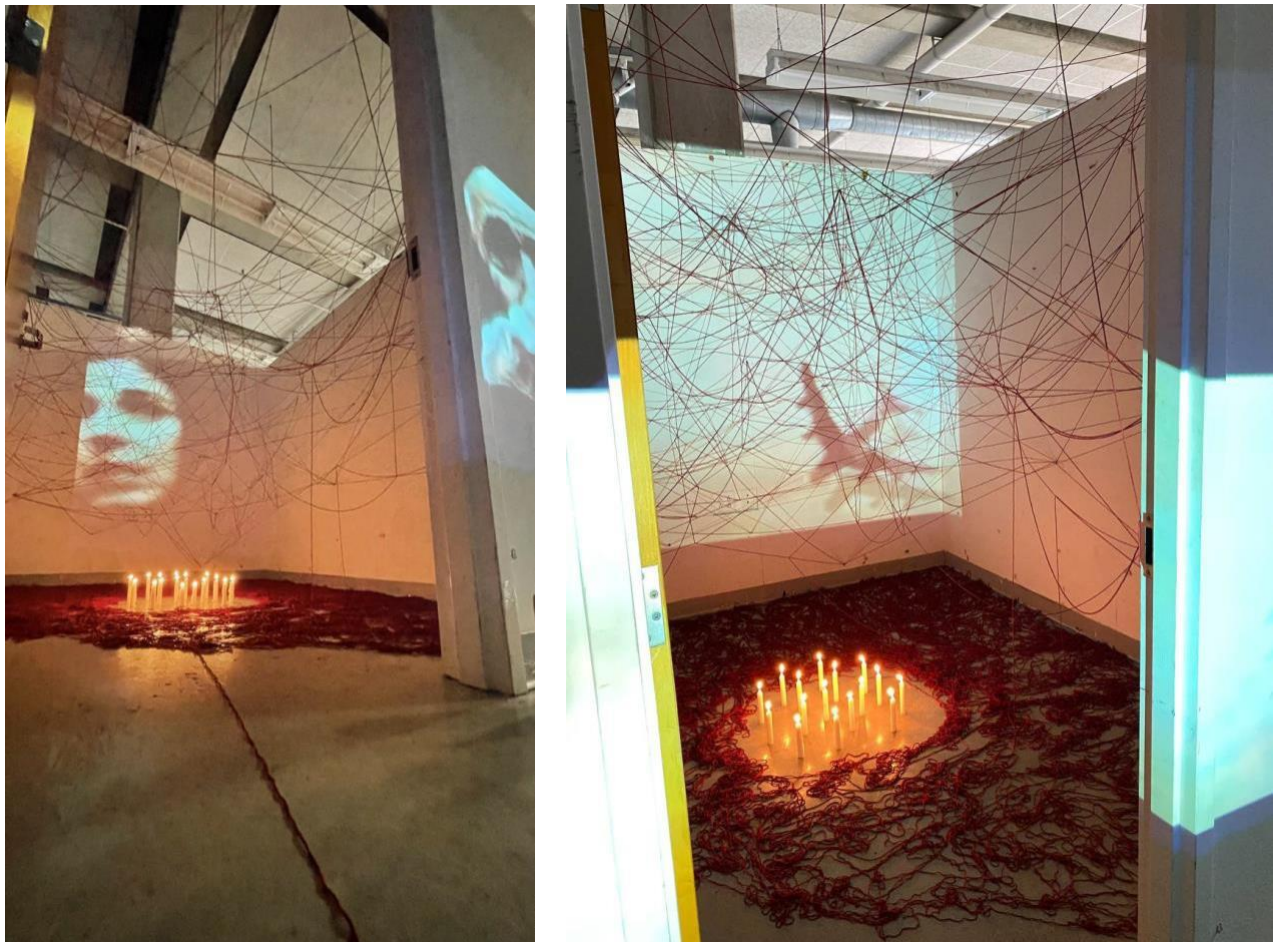


Exhibited in London, Ontario and Toronto, Canada, 2024–2026. Mixed-media installation. Variable dimensions. Installation adapted to site

This installation was a memorial for Kian Piraflak, a 10-year-old robotics enthusiast who dreamed of becoming an inventor but was killed by the bullet of Iran’s regime during the ~~woman~~, ~~life~~, ~~freedom~~ movement in Iran. The family kept his body at home with ice for a whole night, as they knew his body could be stolen by the regime if sent to a morgue. This installation was also an objection to the UNICEF organization. Although they claim “every ~~child~~ matter,” they were not taking any actions to protect the

children who were used as human shields by the government forces, killed, or arrested in Iran by the government. The number of paper boats matches the number of children whose deaths and arrests during the protest were proven to that specific day during that movement. The boat on the front is a recreation of Kian's own handmade boat. The theme is rainbow, as its colours link to children, and also, it links to how Kian starts his invention introduction video about his boat by saying, "in the name of the god of the rainbow."

- 752



Exhibited in London, Ontario and Toronto, Canada, 2024–2026. Mixed-media installation. Variable dimensions. Installation adapted to site

This annual installation, titled is my solemn tribute to the victims of Flight #752, whose lives were tragically cut short in 2020, an event that has yet to receive its due justice. With each passing year, the length of string is added on the floor by 175m representing the 175 victims of the flight, symbolizing the growing weight of memory and the passage of time since the catastrophe.

Floating in air, 175 meters of string represent the silent echoes of the victims, while those resting on the ground signify the presence of their stories and spirits in the fabric of our lives. Each of the 16 candles is a bearer of the innocence lost, they were each lit for the same number of seconds as the age of each ~~child~~ taken by this tragedy (2 seconds for a two-year-old ~~child~~).



The shifting images projected on the wall, sourced from social media tributes and documentations of this tragedy, serve as a haunting backdrop to this reflective space. They are a chronicle of grief and a testament to the collective mourning of a community. The slow descent of the plane's silhouette with every frame change is a somber reminder of the lives that descended with it.

The strings that stretch across the room and out the door and are forcing the door to stay open are a metaphor for the ongoing impact of this event, reaching beyond the confines of a single space, urging us not to close the door on remembering and seeking accountability.

- **The Fallen Butterflies**



Exhibited online, Toronto, Canada, 2026. Mixed-media installation and performance. Life-size dimensions, based on the artist's body

This work was created during the twelve-day war in Iran, a moment marked not only by violence on the ground but by a profound sense of disconnection. A nationwide internet shutdown severed

communication, leaving many inside Iran unable to share their realities, while those in the diaspora were left watching from a distance, unable to intervene, yet unwilling to remain passive.

The piece began as a paper sculpture of a seated figure holding a cut-out map of Iran in its hands. The gesture is intimate: not possession, but embrace. The figure does not stand in defiance; instead, it holds the ~~land~~ land closely, as one would hold something fragile, wounded, and inseparable from the self. As I shared the process on Instagram, an unexpected response emerged. Iranians across the diaspora reached out, asking to participate. I created a voluntary and anonymized method of participation as a response, for individuals to submit short videos of their hands tearing cardboard. No personal information was collected, and contributors were informed of the purpose of the work, the exact statement, and how their material would be used. All identifying details in their videos were intentionally excluded or removed to ensure privacy and safety.

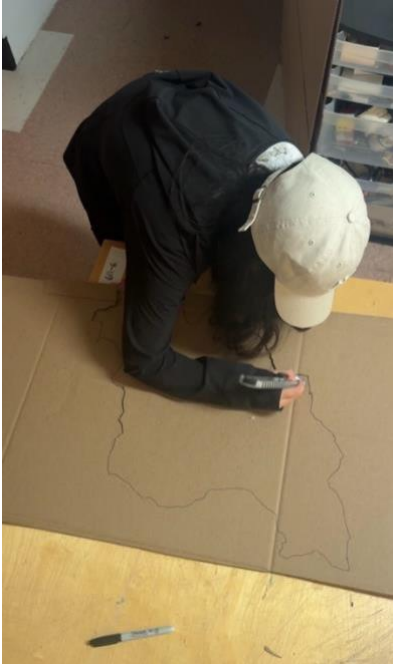


Figure 17, *The Fallen Butterflies*, Iran map cut out



Figure 16, *The Fallen Butterflies*, The received videos of cardboard tearing

Within less than two days, I received over 700 videos.

Each act of tearing, performed in isolation, was incorporated into the sculpture. For every submission, a fragment of torn cardboard was added to its surface, transforming the figure into a collective body. What began as an individual gesture became materially constructed by many hands, dispersed yet connected. The final sculpture is not authored by a single person; it is assembled through a shared act of rupture.

The choice of cardboard is rooted in displacement. As members of the diaspora, we often carry our lives in boxes, packing, moving, reconstructing identity across borders. Cardboard becomes both a material of fragility and survival: temporary, transportable, and marked by handling.

In its final stage, the sculpture was set on fire.

This moment draws from a well-known allegory in *The Conference of the Birds* by Attar of Nishapur, in which a group of butterflies approach a flame. Each one comes closer, but only the last fully enters the fire, becoming one with it. In Attar's telling, true understanding is not achieved by observing or approaching, but through complete immersion and annihilation of the self in the flame of love and truth.

The burning of the sculpture echoes this final gesture. It is not only destruction, but union. The work reflects a collective condition of distance, fragmentation, and attachment. Even as the ~~land~~ burns, the figure does not let go. Even as the body collapses, the gesture remains.

- **Through Our Wounds⁶**

Ongoing, process-based installation. Presented across physical exhibitions and online platforms, 2022–present. Life-size elements with variable installation dimensions.

This work began in 2022 during the *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement in Iran as an attempt to confront a central question in my practice: how can experiences rooted in a specific political and cultural context be translated to audiences who may have no prior knowledge of them?

I realized that recounting events alone even with translating and explaining them fully does not necessarily translate across distance. Instead, as I had briefly explained this work earlier, I turned to shared human experiences: pain, rage, grief, scar, and endurance. The installation presents a life-sized, headless figure constructed from tape, plastic, and discarded materials, cast from my own body. While the form originates from my physical presence, the absence of the head removes fixed identity, allowing the figure to be inhabited by anyone.

The material choice responds directly to the language of power. Iranian authorities have repeatedly dismissed protesters as “worthless” or “disposable.” By constructing the body from garbage and synthetic debris, I reclaim this imposed identity and reconfigure it as a site of resistance. The figure is covered in bandages, symbols of injury, care, and survival. On many of them, I wrote the ~~names~~ names of traumatic events following the 1979 revolution in Farsi, addressing an Iranian audience directly while leaving non-Persian viewers with fragments, visual cues that invite further inquiry.

As the work was exhibited and shared online, it began to transform beyond my initial intention.

⁶ These works are ongoing and evolve in direct response to current events, including the ongoing war and the actions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Through Our Wounds* accumulates names and testimonies related to state violence, while *The*

Unclaimed documents the conditions and impact of the conflict. As process-based works, they are structured in relation to these unfolding realities and therefore do not arrive at a fixed or final state within the timeframe of this thesis. Their completion is conceptually tied to the resolution of the events they engage with. For this reason, they are not represented through a single final image in this document; instead, their most current state will be presented at the time of the defence.

Viewers, both inside Iran and across the diaspora, started sending me stories of their own losses: loved ones killed, disappeared, or irreversibly marked by political violence. In response, I added bandages to the sculpture for each story, without writing ~~names~~, preserving privacy while acknowledging presence. I would document each addition and return an image of the bandage to the sender, creating a quiet, reciprocal exchange.

During the exhibition, this act extended into the physical space. Without instruction, visitors began writing ~~names~~ of their own loved ones onto the sculpture. In response, I made additional bandages and markers available, without directing their use or even pointing at their ~~existence~~, allowing participation to emerge organically if they felt like they need to rather than as a prescribed interaction.

Over time, the entire exhibition shifted into a collective site of mourning.

Bandages spread beyond the figure, onto my other artworks in the exhibition, onto the walls and surrounding surfaces. Wrappers accumulated on the floor, forming a chaotic residue of care and urgency. By the fourth day, the sculpture collapsed under the weight of the added bandages. Its new form, kneeling, bent inward, somehow resembled a body overwhelmed by internal pain. What began as a constructed representation became an unplanned embodiment of collapse.

I chose not to intervene.

The transformation of the work, the place or the other works in my exhibition was not an interruption but a continuation, an extension of the very conditions it sought to address. The installation and the entire exhibition became a living archive, shaped by those who carried grief into the space.

After the exhibition, I collected all the bandages and kept them safe. Messages continued to arrive, and I responded by sending blank bandages back, an offering and a representation, allowing others to inscribe their own memory outside the work.

Following the January 2026 massacres, I began a new phase of the project. Documented ~~names~~ were now transferred onto a large-scale sculptural hand composed of these accumulated bandages. The hand, formed from collective loss, was installed lifting a turban, a symbol of the Islamic Republic, suggesting the possibility of removing the very structure that has produced all these wounds all these years.

This work ~~exists~~ across time, bodies, and spaces. It resists closure. It grows through participation, grief, and repetition, insisting that what is broken is not only endured, but carried, shared, and, eventually, transformed.

- **The Unclaimed**⁷

Ongoing work. Presented in evolving forms online and across studio development and exhibition contexts, 2025–present

This large oil painting stages a crime scene. At the center lies a severed hand. From it, blood flows outward, spreading across the floor to form the map of Iran. The hand represents the Iranian people, not as a fixed identity, but as a collective of actions: hands that wrote, resisted, built, protested, held signs, and reached toward freedom. The blood is the only representation of Iran itself. In this work, Iran is not the state. Iran is what is bleeding. The act has already happened. The viewer arrives too late to witness it. What remains is evidence, arrangement, and implication.

⁷ These works are ongoing and evolve in direct response to current events, including the ongoing war and the actions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Through Our Wounds* accumulates names and testimonies related to state violence, while *The Unclaimed* documents the conditions and impact of the conflict. As process-based works, they remain tied to these unfolding realities and do not arrive at a fixed or final state within the timeframe of this thesis. Their completion is inseparable from the

conditions they respond to. For this reason, they are not represented through a single final image in this document; instead, their most current state will be presented at the time of the defence.

Surrounding the hand, chairs are placed in a circle. Each chair represents a nation or political body whose actions, decisions, or silences have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the conditions in which this violence occurs. The circular formation does not suggest equality, but entanglement. No one stands outside the system that produced the body at the center.

The chair representing the Islamic Republic of Iran is turned away from the hand and faces the viewer. A turban rests upon it, its base dipped in the blood. This is not Iran. This is the state that claims to represent it. Its position is deliberate: it does not look at the body. It does not acknowledge the hand. It does not witness the consequences of its actions. The turned back is not accidental, it reflects a system that, despite its rhetoric of care and protection, has consistently refused to see its own people. The distance here is not physical, but ideological. The state faces outward, toward power, toward narrative, toward survival, while the people remain behind it, bleeding.

Each of the surrounding chairs carries objects that trace different forms of involvement:

Israel's chair is marked by a red armband. A microphone is positioned in front of it, and documents bearing the emblem of the Islamic Republic rest on the seat. These elements suggest not only narrative framing, but also access to, use of, and influence over the structures it publicly opposes. The presence is both visible and mediated, operating through information, exposure, and control.

Turkey's chair bears an Ottoman medal. In front of it, the chalk line that outlines the circle is partially erased. The border is not fixed. It is being altered. The gesture reflects the opportunistic reshaping of influence, where instability becomes a condition through which power can be extended.

Russia's chair is accompanied by a weapon fitted with a silencer. Its role is not loud. It does not require visibility. The silenced weapon points toward forms of intervention that operate through

concealment, where impact is real, but attribution remains obscured. Power here functions through quiet continuation rather than declaration.

China's chair remains composed. Its weapon is holstered and hangs from the back. The blood closest to it transforms into oil. Engagement here is not driven by ideology or spectacle, but by continuity of resources. The transformation suggests a shift in value: what is ~~life~~ for one becomes commodity for another.

A chair representing Arab states holds the sword of Imam Ali (*Zulfiqar*). The hand bears visible scars from it. These marks do not signify the final act, but they record a different kind of violence—one that emerges through justification, hesitation, or alignment under the name of religion. These wounds did not kill the body, but they weakened it. They made resistance heavier. They forced the hand to carry more.

Two additional chairs, representing the United Nations and NATO, remain within the circle but are set slightly back, as if present but not fully engaged. Between them, a dove of ~~peace~~ is bound and suspended in a cruciform form. Its left wing is tied to the United Nations. Its right wing is tied to NATO. The symbol of ~~peace~~ is immobilized, held in place between institutions that claim to uphold it. The binding is not neutral. It suggests that what is presented as ~~peace~~ is often constrained by political interest, selective action, and strategic limitation. The dove cannot fly. It cannot intervene. It ~~exists~~ only as an image.

Outside the circle, positioned at a distance, sits the United States. Its chair faces all others. Documents rest upon it, evidence, records, knowledge. Threads extend from each chair in the circle toward this position, as if they could be pulled at any moment. The system is not disconnected. It is

coordinated. Among these threads, those connected to the Islamic Republic and Israel are most visibly tense, suggesting immediacy, volatility, and the constant potential for escalation.

The entire scene unfolds within a basement-like space. The walls are lined with empty, broken frames, remnants of collapsed authority, failed representations, and abandoned narratives. A poster bearing the lion and sun symbol lies fallen near the hand. It was once held. It is no longer.

The painting does not attempt to identify a single perpetrator. The final act, the “last shot”, cannot be assigned. This is not because responsibility does not exist, but because it is distributed. The violence emerges not from one hand, but from a system in which multiple forces act, react, enable, justify, intervene, or withdraw. Each position within the circle contributes to the condition that produces the body at the center.

This work does not argue that all actors are equal. It argues that none are innocent.

It also refuses the assumption that any of the chairs involved act for the Iranian people. Whether through direct intervention, strategic silence, economic interest, ideological positioning, or internal governance, the result remains the same: the people are the ones who are wounded, who are killed, who continue to suffer, regardless of the direction from which power is exercised. The last two works (Through our Wounds and The Unclaimed) remain deliberately open and ongoing, functioning as a living archive that continues to grow.

Discussion

- **Dual Legibility Achieved? Reflections and Implications**

Reflecting on the creation and initial reception of these works, I find that the concept of dual legibility has not only been a guiding theory but has borne out in practice. Iranian audiences who have encountered these works (through previews or online documentation) frequently comment on a sense of recognition and gratitude. That feeling of cultural familiarity (seeing their aesthetics, hearing their language, smelling their memories) validates the approach of consciously preserving Iranian references in the art. Meanwhile, feedback from non-Iranian viewers often centers on emotional resonance and a newfound understanding: many have expressed that the works made distant issues feel personal. This speaks to the success of privileging lived experiences and sensory storytelling over overt political messaging. I sidestepped polarization and allowed people to connect through basic human feelings, love, pain, grief, hope. In a sense, the works act as what scholar Michael Rothberg calls “*multidirectional memory*” (Rothberg 2009), opening a space where memories of one group communicate with others’ frames of reference, creating empathy without zero-sum attention. One visitor related the carpet sculpture to the practice of tying prayer ribbons in her home country of Mexico, illustrating how a culturally specific piece can still evoke parallel traditions and feelings elsewhere. Such responses support the idea that art can translate through affect and metaphor what might be lost or misunderstood in literal translation.

The principle of voluntary, unplanned and unedited participation also proved key to the project’s depth. The works gained a layer of authenticity and unpredictability that I alone could not have manufactured. True, it meant ceding some control, an uncomfortable step at times. (I recall feeling anxious that someone might write something inappropriate on a bandage. In practice, participants

respected the tone; even if a bit off-key, it only added to the raw genuineness.) This process affirmed what Grant Kester advocates in dialogical art practices (Kester 2004): that allowing for genuine dialogue and contribution in art can generate trust and collective meaning that top-down art cannot. It also raises important ethical considerations moving forward: as the works live on, I have a responsibility to those who contributed. For instance, I plan to keep contributors informed through my website and social media of where the works travel or are published, ensuring they ~~feel~~ continued ownership. In academic terms, this touches on questions of authorship and intellectual property in practice-led research, where does authorship lie when the “text” of the art includes lines written by others? My stance is to treat the situation analogously to oral history or ethnography: I, as researcher-artist, curate and interpret, but the words themselves are attributed and belong to those who spoke them. This is why in my written explication I have not quoted verbatim any specific contributed story without permission, instead describing them in aggregate or concept.

The positioning of myself as witness and storyteller rather than spokesperson has been solidified through this project. Initially, as seen in my early proposal, I carried an aspiration to be a ~~voice~~ for my people. While well-intentioned, that phrasing risked casting me as a representative or even savior figure, which is problematic. Through critical reflection and reading (especially Spivak 1993; Hirsch 2012), I reframed my role. I now see myself akin to a “naqqāli” (*traditional Persian storyteller*) who retells and weaves together stories heard, whose power comes from artful assembly and emotional delivery rather than from personal authority. This has been liberating, I no longer ~~feel~~ the burden to ~~speak~~ everything or cover every facet of Iranian struggles (which would be impossible and presumptuous). Instead, I focus on what I have witnessed or experienced, directly or vicariously, and translate that sincerely. Paradoxically, by narrowing to personal specifics, the work gains universality. As the saying goes, the more personal, the more universal, an Iranian lullaby sung by my mother may touch someone else’s

sense of maternal connection. Susan Sontag's reflections in *Regarding the Pain of Others* linger in my mind here: she emphasized that understanding suffering is not automatic, that images alone don't teach context (Sontag 2003). True enough, my artworks do not teach context in a journalistic sense; but they ~~hope~~ hopefully motivate a will to learn. They are gateways that stir emotions and encourage questions. In conversation events accompanying my exhibition, I found audiences asking informed questions after experiencing the art: "Why do ~~women~~ sing to themselves while weaving?" or "What happened in November 2019 in Iran?" These questions open the door for contextual information. Thus, the art doesn't hand over a packaged message, but primes the spectator to be curious and receptive, a model aligned with Rancière's emancipated spectatorship (Rancière 2009).

From a craft theory perspective, the project validates the idea that craft offers a potent language for contemporary art, especially in conveying social narratives. Glenn Adamson posits that craft is "*a means of connecting to things that actually matter*" in a world of ephemera (Adamson 2007). I found that using craft forms (weaving, braiding, writing by hand) and materials with cultural resonance did root the work in "things that matter", family, home, touch, community. In an age of slick digital imagery, the tactile and labor-intensive nature of these works stood out. People notice the care invested: the painstaking embroidery, the hours of knotting, the archival sourcing of letters. This communicates a level of respect for the content; it's as if the medium reinforces the message that these stories are worth laboring over. Richard Sennett's notion that "*craftsmanship... focuses on objective standards, on the thing itself*" (Sennett 2008) rings true, by committing to high-quality making (be it a neat braid or a well-mixed ink), I was also disciplining myself to focus on the subject matter deeply. It's a form of reverence.

In terms of memory studies, the thesis contributes an example of how art can function as a vehicle for post memory and collective memory transmission in real time. Hirsch writes that post memory works are often “*mediated by public images and stories*” and manifest in “*multi-layered aesthetic*” forms. My exhibitions can be seen as a multi-sensory, multi-layered memory object, that mobilize memory for what Hirsch calls “*affiliative*” audiences (not just familial or ethnic, but anyone who affiliates with the memory). The concept of embodied memory came alive: for example, during the lullaby audio, I observed second-generation Iranian-Canadians hugging their parents as they listened, the art spurred an embodied act of remembrance and solidarity across generations. The final communal walk-through of one of the exhibitions (on opening night I guided a group through) felt almost like a procession through a memory-scape. People added bandages, touched the hair rope, touched the concrete, listened in silence; it had the atmosphere of both an art show and a memorial ceremony. This blurring of art and memorial has been explored by scholars like James Young (on Holocaust memorials; Young 1993) and in *Women Mobilizing Memory* (where art is seen as an activism of memory; Altinay et al. 2019). I realize my work sits in that nexus, not a memorial per se (as events are ongoing and there is no single event being commemorated), but a *memory-activating assemblage*. It invites what Azoulay might term a “*potential history*” approach (Azoulay 2019), treating the images and artifacts not as closed past but as ongoing present, where viewers can enter the narrative and perhaps change its trajectory by how they carry it forward.

One can ask: did I truly avoid overt political framing? I believe so. Nowhere in the art or its immediate presentation did I display slogans like “Down with ...” or images of politicians or explicit gore. Yet the political is present in subtler ways, in whose voices are heard, in what absences are highlighted (censorship, oppression signified through blacked-out letters, cut hair). It’s a politics of everyday life and memory rather than of manifestos. This was deliberate to keep the space inclusive and

contemplative, rather than polarizing or agitational. Notably, even those who might not share my political perspective (for example, one older viewer was not sympathetic to the protests initially) found themselves moved by the human stories and rethinking their stance. This indicates the strategy of focusing on lived experience and ethical questions (rather than rhetoric) can create openings where direct argument might fail. It also aligns with an ethics of care and spectatorship, inviting people in rather than calling them out.

Looking ahead, the outcomes of this research-creation suggest practical and scholarly implications. Practically, I intend to extend the project. This project started before this thesis and will continue after it. I will consider how to maintain the authenticity as it scales, ensuring the voluntary nature remains, and that any new contributions are integrated respectfully.

Scholarly, this thesis offers a case study in how translation theories can be applied beyond text, into visual and performative art, to achieve cross-cultural communication. It also contributes to discussions on decolonizing art practices: by insisting on retaining Iranian elements and not fully “domesticating” the work for Western audiences, I exercised a form of resistance to the hegemony of Western art norms akin to Venuti’s “*foreignization*” in literary translation. The positive reception indicates that audiences are more capable of dealing with foreignness than gatekeepers sometimes assume. In other words, one need not water down cultural specificity to be understood; one must simply provide multiple entry points. The project also adds to the body of practice-led research methodology examples, illustrating how creative outcomes and academic research can integrate. It demonstrates how the process (including early methods, journaling, sketching, iterative prototyping and multiple early online and in person exhibitions) can be documented and analyzed to produce scholarly insights about art’s role in social memory and cultural exchange.

Conclusion

This thesis journey began with a personal impulse, a desire to honor Iranian resilience and share their stories with the world. Along the way, that impulse was refined by theory, collaboration, and self-critique into a multifaceted exploration of translation, memory, and the ethics of spectatorship. The resulting exhibitions, and their accompanying written analysis stand as a testament to the power of art as a bridge between worlds: the private and the public, Iran and the West, past and present, self and other. Through translating the structural logics of Iranian crafts into contemporary art, I found a language of form that could hold complex narratives gently yet powerfully. By foregrounding dual legibility, I ensured that this language had two scripts, one that read as home to my community, and one that read as humanity to those unfamiliar with our specifics.

In avoiding overt political rhetoric, I learned that silence and subtlety can sometimes ~~speak~~ speak louder, a lullaby might stir more hearts than a slogan, a braid of hair invoke more solidarity than an essay. Yet, importantly, the project never neutralized the issues at hand; it simply reframed them in lived, human terms. The act of mediation became itself the message: showing how stories survive by being retold in new tongues, how trauma can be tended to by acts of creation, and how spectators can become participants in forging collective memory. In a time when images of conflict and suffering flash past us daily, often failing to effect change, this work suggests another model: slow, tactile, participatory encounters that foster empathy and understanding through embodiment and shared ritual.

My position as artist, witness, storyteller, has also been clarified and solidified. I embrace the role of facilitator of ~~voices~~ voices, compiler of fragments, and weaver of contexts. I stand alongside my fellow Iranians, not as their ~~voice~~ voice but as an amplifier, taking care never to drown out the original tones. This humility in stance ironically strengthened the impact of the work audiences sense the authenticity and

care, and thus trust it. The stories and contributions entrusted to me were treated with the reverence a master craftsman would give to precious materials, each ~~voice~~ a thread of gold, each memory a delicate glass bead to be handled with caution and respect.

In terms of research contributions, this thesis underscores that practice-led research in art is capable of generating new knowledge about cross-cultural communication, memorialization, and unplanned voluntary audience engagement that traditional research might not reach. It provides evidence that integrating concepts from translation studies, memory studies, and visual culture can yield innovative art strategies for global storytelling. It also models ethical practices for working with communities and sensitive historical material in an art context, a balance of expression and responsibility.

Ultimately, the success of this project will not be measured solely in academic terms but in the human connections it nurtures. Already I have witnessed in microcosm what I ~~hoped~~ for, seeds of empathy and knowledge that art can help to plant. If the exhibition is able to travel, or even if just through documentation, online presentations and word-of-mouth, these seeds can scatter wider. As a living, open-ended project, my project will continue to evolve. In fact, I conceive of it as intentionally unfinished. There are always more ~~voices~~ to include, more threads to tie. This mirrors the continuing struggle for ~~rights~~ and dignity in Iran, an unfinished story that must be kept alive in public consciousness.

In closing, I circle back to the idea of translation as *afterlife* from Walter Benjamin (Benjamin 1968). The stories and experiences that sparked this project have an ~~afterlife~~ in the artworks I have made; those artworks, in turn, will have their own ~~afterlife~~ in the minds and hearts of those who experience them. If I have done my job well, that ~~afterlife~~ will be a fertile one, spurring further dialogue, memory, and maybe even action. The threads I tied are now in the hands of the audience who will decide how to weave them

into their own understanding of the world. In a modest but meaningful way, this thesis is trying to understand how an artist in diaspora can serve as both translator and witness, converting private grief into public memory, and in doing so, fostering the “conversation among strangers” that is vital for any hope of global solidarity and ethical seeing.

It stands as an argument that art, when crafted with cultural insight and open-hearted ethics, can indeed translate the untranslatable, carrying the essence of one people’s struggles into the understanding of another, knot by knot.

As mentioned, this trajectory extends beyond the scope of the present thesis. Moving forward, I intend to continue this project as both an artistic and research-based practice. The next stage of this work will focus on developing ethical and methodological frameworks for working with participatory, sensitive, and evolving materials, particularly within diasporic contexts where distance, risk, and representation are constantly in tension. This includes examining how trust is formed, how contributions are carried forward without appropriation, and how translation can occur without erasure.

As I move toward doctoral research, this practice will remain open, ongoing, and accountable. It will continue to grow through contributions, while also questioning the structures through which those contributions are held and transformed. The aim is not only to expand the body of work, but to better understand the position of the artist as both witness and mediator, someone who does not speak for others, but who is nonetheless responsible for how their voices are carried.

My practice is deliberately ongoing. It started long before this thesis, in Persian poetry and then English poems, and it continues now through embodied re-enactments of indoor gestures. It will not stop when this degree is finished. It is a lifelong search for how to hold space ethically, how to translate without erasing, how to amplify without replacing. This framework is simply a way to think through that

search, how indoor gestures can become public memory without losing their privacy, their comfort, their truth.

As someone who has dedicated every art practice, academic major and minor selections, public participations, jobs, and etc. to advocating the censored, forgotten and mistranslated stories of my people from the bottom of my heart, I ~~hope~~ this is the last time I create or write anything against the filth called the Islamic Republic. I ~~hope~~ my works no longer scream; I ~~hope~~ that those two extra words are removed from my beautiful country's name. I ~~hope~~ after this, art becomes a tool for me for registering our culture and ~~good~~ times, not a lament and struggle for being heard properly. In Persian, what I'm writing is called a "payan-nameh"; literarily translated to the end-letter. I ~~hope~~ this thesis, this end-letter, coincides with the end of the Islamic Republic and ~~freedom~~ of Iran.

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