Bodies Out of Place:

Performance, Space, Gender and Transgression in Contemporary Iran

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Saba Zavarei, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

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Date: 30.04.2022

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This work has changed me from a taboo-breaking art student, to an active feminist artist

and scholar who raises her voice and helps others to be heard. The years of conducting this research have been the most challenging of my life. I could not have come out of any of these difficulties, without my parents' gracious support. They not only supported me financially and mentally, but stood next to me and believed in me and what I am fighting for even in the harshest days of my life when I doubted everything. My parents Akram Hassanpour and Ghasem Zavarei, and my sister Sara Zavarei have always been a huge support and have helped me overcome my fears, encouraging me to critique, and create transgressive and provocative work, as they believed in my cause. My greatest gratitude then goes to my family, who provided me with an alternative space all the years of my life in Iran, to be able to break taboos and ask questions. This research is an outcome of the critical views that they helped me shape.

Abstract

Over the past eight years my Practice Research has focused on examining the relationship between space and gender through the lens of performance studies. In several performance intervention pieces, as well as via reflective texts, I have analysed how women in Iran, through the transgressive performance of everyday life, create alternative spaces, in ways that challenge the hegemonic religious and patriarchal norms and regulations.

I have written a book called *Ravayat-ha-ye Khiaban* (Farsi-language publication, *Stories of the Street*); edited two essay collections, namely a special issue of *Field* (a journal of socially-engaged art criticism) on art and activism in Iran, and a special issue of the Farsi academic journal *Spectrum* on gender and public spaces; written many articles in Farsi and English including three peer-reviewed papers, given many invited talks and interviews; held many workshops on the topic of transgressive performance in gender-normative space; and have a produced a podcast of twelve half-hour episodes which I have curated into an online series, *Radio Khiaban.*

In bringing this considerable body of work together, my PhD reflective thesis argues that the importance and impact of my, and other artists' transgressive performance contribute to the production of lived space through their integration of the virtual into the real. Transgression here means 'crossing a line', which takes place when someone is judged to be or acts 'out-of-place', behaving in a way that is not considered appropriate or expected according to the norms (Cresswell, 2004: 103). My transgressive performances and those of other female artists in Iran, whether they involve lying down and resting in public places in a country where women's bodies are relegated to indoor, private, hidden seclusion; or singing or dancing, again in public, under a regime that bans women from such public displays… constitute more than merely the ephemerality of performance. Rather, they have the capacity to become more sustainable instances of contestation, by intervening in the everyday lives of both the performers, and the audience members who pass by. Through these acts of resistance and transgression, women in Iran create spaces to practise their equal share of society and exercise their equal rights to their bodies.

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Introduction

I packed up all my belongings and arranged with a friend to leave them in the attic of their family house in London. The newspaper in Tehran that I had contacted, had accepted my proposal. I was going to travel overland from London to Tehran, and had a commission in one of the most read newspapers in Iran, to write a daily column about my trip. I was going to explore the relationship between my two homes: London and Tehran, questioning how one gradually changes into the other. When, after almost a month, I arrived in Tehran, I wrote in my last report that standing in the coach station, among men staring and calling on to me, 'I yet again became a woman'. I explained how gradually I became more and more aware of being gendered in certain ways during my trip, and arriving in Tehran pushed me back into the body I used to embody.

In this dissertation I weave a tissue of threads between the multiple outputs I have produced over the best part of a decade on questions of gender, performance, activism and Iranian culture and society, areas in which I have become a leading expert. The dissertation provides a literature review contextualising my works; an extensive methodology for both my theory and practice which explains how I have employed performance intervention as my main approach; and a detailed reflective analysis on my own Practice Research, which brings together my different outputs – a radio podcast series; a book; two sole-edited issues of peer-reviewed journals; and many articles and invited keynote presentations – and demonstrates how they constitute a coherent whole.

It was the summer of 2013 and I stayed in Iran for the whole summer. Back then, my performance practice explored site-specificity. One day I took my bedding out into the streets, and tried to sleep in different corners of the city. I began in the northern part of downtown Tehran and moved towards the north of the city. A photographer friend followed me to document the performance. It was the first extended period I had spent in Tehran since I had left Iran in 2010, and that performance was an act of trying to make intimacy and peace with the city I loved and hated the most. It was home and the most familiar place, at the same time my body was the site of layers and layers of brutal memories. From the violence it bore during protests of the Green Movement in 2009, to the daily dose of sexual harassment, to police violence and persecution for

the forced wearing of the hijab and coded clothing, to the constant fear and anxiety of having done something out of place and being in trouble for it. The performance project was published a couple of years later as an article in *Performance Research* journal (Zavarei 2016). The article took the form of my analysis of the experience, reactions to it on social media, and my autobiographical reflection on how the female body is always expected to feel apologetic for taking up space.

That performance and that piece of writing were perhaps my first attempts to make sense of the story of my body, out-of-place. For despite the high level of policing over spaces, the ideologies, and other means by which female bodies in Iran were controlled and suppressed during my upbringing, I somehow always found or rather created those spaces of emancipation to perform the forbidden, the taboo, the unpredictable, transgression.

Figure 1. *Sleeping with Tehran*, 2013.

I went back to Iran in 2014 in order to further explore the politics of gendered spaces through feminist interventions. It was in a famous mosque in Isfahan that I decided to sing and film myself. No one was there at that moment and it only took thirty something seconds. I then posted it on social media and the number of reactions I received shocked and overwhelmed me: mostly encouraging and supportive, some threatening.

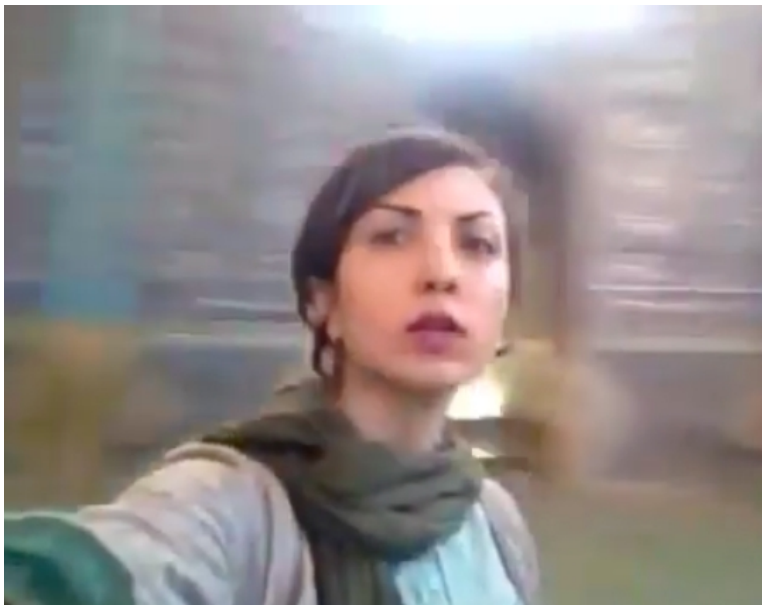

Figure 2. Screenshot of singing in the mosque, 2014.

It was in spring 2016 that I went back to Iran. By this time I had further studied feminist geography and performance studies and was starting to conceptualise my field of research. I went back to the same mosque in Isfahan, and sang again. During my couple of months' stay during two trips that spring and summer, I taught a course called Liminal on performance and architecture together with architect Farshad Mehdizadeh, at the Contemporary Architects Association. I was also invited by Kaarnamaa to give a talk at the Charsoo Art Institution on the element of shock and collage in art intervention, and how they can rupture the social fabric of public space when the body acts out of place and breaks the norms. During this talk attendees were asked to make collages with the random photos of my body and different spaces with which I had provided them. I gave another workshop and talk at Contemporary Architects Association on *andaruni* – the outer quarters of a house; and *biruni*, the internal quarters, the former recognised as area where men can socialize and interact with one another, whereas the latter is the private place where women are hidden from the public. I distributed forms for the attendees to fill out, which asked them about their experience of fear in public spaces in daylight and at night in their everyday lives, and the questions were designed to gain as much detail as possible, without giving away the participant's gender in as many words, on where and when and in what situation they felt fear in public spaces.

Then with two assistants, the forms filled by men were redistributed among the women, and vice versa. I invited everyone to watch a video that a photographer friend had helped me to produce, in which I showed empty spaces in Tehran: pavements, footbridges, random corners, at dusk and dawn, at any of the day hour. I asked everyone to embody their new bodies, reading their forms, leaving who they were behind while watching the video. They were to decide whether they felt less comfortable in that place or more comfortable, now that they had taken on the body of another gender. When finished, I asked those who were more fearful in their new bodies to stand up. Mostly men stood up, suggesting that becoming a woman in the very same places was tantamount to having more fear and anxiety of being in public spaces. The workshop was followed by a heated conversation and many felt encouraged to share their experience and thoughts.

In another project I searched for books that had feminist topics and that had been published with official permission, and bought them. I became a mobile library and took the books to the streets. I went to random people and asked them if I could read out loud from them. The idea was that there are many books with feminist content, challenging the patriarchal norms, that gain permission to be published, which is a very difficult process, controlled by the Ministry of Culture and Guidance. However, most of these books are not easy to access in the public sphere. The content is banned from any state-run media, it will often be harshly censored in journals and magazines, and with many ruses it is stopped from becoming part of public debates. Of course social media has changed and challenged all those restrictions massively as the monopoly of media has been destroyed and more democratised. Notwithstanding, outside social media it is very difficult to see these topics and perspectives discussed in the public realm. My idea was to take these books and read them aloud to people, in order to reintegrate them into the social sphere.

Figure 3. ***Books are Public Spaces*****, 2016.**

Figure 4. ***Books are Public Spaces*****, 2016.**

In 2017 I was invited to participate in the Lagos Art Biennial and the curator asked me to expand the video piece on singing in the mosque. In reaction to that mosque video and my other performance interventions, I had received videos, messages and photographs from women from

all over Iran, who shared their moments of transgression with me. I therefore decided to gather these acts together and after a few years my individual intervention was scaled up into a group action. I put out an open call on Instagram in 2017. In the video I invited women to join in singing in public spaces in Iran. My open call was very well received and more than a thousand women wrote to me expressing their interest. It took me a year to develop this into a participatory podcast project where I could interview a small sample of these people that I chose mainly based on their engagement in the first few questions, as many of them did not want to engage with a project that could potentially be controversial for them. Eventually I published the stories of those I interviewed, along with their singing.

Radio Khiaban (www.radiokhiaban.com), one of the main submissions for this PhD by publication, was a project that I launched in 2018 after which I produced twelve thirty-minute episodes, the last one being published in February 2022. Over this period, I interviewed more than 50 women about their experience of spatial discrimination in Iran. Each episode also featured a singer talking about the experience of the ban on women's voices and public spaces, as well as singing in pubic and reflecting on it. I also turned the whole project into a book and *Stories of Street* (Zavarei 2022c) was published in Farsi as a 100-page volume in March 2022. In addition, I wrote an article for *Performance Research* on the interdiction of women's voices in public and the transgressive acts of singers. This was published in March 2022 and entitled "Song of Disobedience" (Zavarei 2022b). Together, these outputs represent part of my PhD by publication submission.

My other publication that is included as part of my submission is a paper I wrote on female dancers dancing in public spaces of Iran, called "Dancing into Alternative Realities: Gender, Dance, and Public Space in Contemporary Iran" (Zavarei 2022a). In 2020 I was invited to edit a special issue on art and activism in Iran for *Field* journal. The issue, published in spring 2022, includes an article by myself on dance, gender and the politics of space in Iran. For this paper, entitled "Dancing into Alternative Realities" (Zavarei 2022a), I interviewed four female practitioners who worked with dance in public spaces in Iran. I argue that because of the very high levels of controversy, artists decide to not publish or present works that engage with gendered space in a critical way, rather, keeping it hidden away from view in their archives; or else they showcase it

outside Iran. I see women who dance in public spaces in Iran as prisoners of a new reality, an alternative way of life, that exists away from the eyes of the watchful authorities who ban it and persecute women for dancing.

In 2020 I was also invited to edit an issue of a Farsi academic journal of *Spectrum* on gender and public space. I wrote the introduction to the issue, made a video on the feminist city, wrote a paper on the *flâneuse* in Iran reflecting on my own experience as a stroller, and conducted an interview with Nazanin Shahrokni on her book *Women in Place*. This collection of essays remains one of the few texts written in Farsi exploring the relationship of gender and space in Iran. My invitation to sole-edit these two special issues testifies to the fact that I am now recognised both in Iran, the UK and internationally, as one of the leading specialists on questions of gender and space in Iran.

As I demonstrate here, for almost eight years I have been working on the topic of performance, gender and space in Iran and have produced a body of work – one book, two sole-edited essay collections, many articles in Farsi and English including three peer reviewed papers, many talks and many workshops on the topic, and twelve thirty-minute podcast episodes. Together, these outputs testify to my prolific academic output in the field of gender, performance, activism and Iranian culture and society.

In this text I provide the literature review that is needed to contextualise my works next to one another. I also have produced an extensive discussion of methodology and practice further to explain how I have employed performance intervention as my main method. The analysis chapter also brings together all my works and give a coherent reading of them all.

There is a rich body of literature exploring the relationship between art and activism with a focus on participatory, socially-engaged, and community modes of artistic production (Kester 2004, Lacy 2010, Bishop 2012). Drawing on the ideas of art scholar Lucy Lippard and art critic Boris Groys, Paula Serafini explains that art activism is process-oriented, is not limited to any particular style, and 'differs from political or critical art in that it is not just criticising social and political structures; it is involved in trying to effect change' (2018: 2). In his seminal work *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004), art historian Grant Kester describes the art projects that have been based around communication and exchange, using the term

‘dialogical’. He writes that the concept is inspired by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, who ‘argued that the work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation – a locus of differing meanings, interpretations, and points of view’ (Kester 2004: 10). On dialogical art Kester writes:

> It is clearly not sufficient to say that any collaborative or conversational encounter constitutes a work of art. What is at stake in these projects is not dialogue per se but the extent to which the artist is able to catalyse emancipatory insights *through* dialogue. This requires an acute understanding of many ways in which these insights can be constrained and compromised. (2004: 69)

There is also an extensive body of work on site-specificity that explores the politics of art and performance and space (Kaye 2000, Kwon 2002, Widrich 2014). In another example, Serfaini looks at the use of artistic and creative tactics by activist groups ‘Shell Out Sounds uses music as a channel for political communication and action, building on a long tradition of music as a site of resistance’ (2018: 33).

This research benefits from existing literature, but at the same time finds itself in a unique position somewhere on the margins of both art and activism. The extreme levels of surveillance and scrutiny in Iran leave very little space for manoeuvre for artists or activists in Iran who play with boundaries and unsettle the restrictions, to reframe what they do as art or activism, simply as everyday activity, in order to remain under the radar. As a consequence, we have more and more curated art and performance practices that go unnoticed as *art*, and we have organised political interventions blending with everyday acts of resistance. As I explain in “Dancing into alternative realities”, in many ways, ‘by shunning formal art spaces, [artists] they have in fact embraced the realness of the streets and performed genuine acts of subversion which impact life outside official gallery spaces. By not making any explicit statements, they seek refuge in the ambiguous space between art and the quotidian’ (Zavarei, 2022).

This research, thus, employs theories of socially-engaged art, dialogical aesthetics, art activism, performance action and other genres, sub-genres and arts practices that elude genre categorisation, to elucidate the complexities of site-specific performances discussed here. However, by engaging with the specific characteristics of Iran’s political atmosphere, its original contribution takes place where there is a gap: where art activism as it is often represented in texts, is simply impossible in Iran. By bringing these studies and those of everyday life together, I try to explain the forms of artistic and performative transgression and resistance happening in Iran today.

Chapter One: Gendered Space

To understand how disobedient bodies redefine everyday spaces, I conduct an examination of extant literature from two different disciplines – human geography and performance studies in parallel, in order eventually to create bridges between them. In addition, I situate my research within the sociopolitical contexts of gender and space in Iran. My literature review is therefore interdisciplinary, in order to serve the hybrid nature of my work. Section 1.1 outlines the theoretical framework that defines space as a social construct subject to human activities, and thus eventful, performed, layered and multiple. Section 1.2 explores the interaction between body and space, and specifically how performance contributes to the social production of space. The intersection of gender and space is at the core of Section 1.3. Here, I look at the feminist understanding of space and how it reveals this eventful, multiple social product to be exclusive and discriminatory. I discuss the patriarchal norms that govern space, manifested in the segmented and segregated spaces of everyday life, which discriminate against women by preventing them from having equal access to space and hindering their mobility. I then discuss the challenges in relation to space and elaborate on how the meaning of space is not fixed, but rather contested. Section 1.4 elaborates on space and gender in Iran, giving a brief recent historical reading of the topic, to provide a better understanding of the current spatial discrimination against women, both through the regulations of spaces, and the policing of bodies. In this section I also introduce theoretical approaches that try to shed light on how women are fighting back to reclaim their share of public space, and redefine this space in an equal way.

1.1 Social Space: Lived, Multiple and Eventful

Although space has always been an inseparable part of the social experience, as we are always already somehow in it, to include human interactions and activities in the study of its production is a relatively new approach. Geographer Tim Cresswell writes that up until the 1970s studies of place were mostly ‘mere description’ and people were removed from such studies to make room for ‘scientific-like generalisations’ such as geometry (2004: 19). In fact, considering human life in

the formation and social construction of space, has led to conceptual and terminological differentiations that distinguish between different categories, as I explain.

The dichotomy of place/space was for a while the dominant approach, distinguishing geometrical space from the human interactions that transform space into place. These new conceptions of place, Cresswell explains, were 'every bit as universal and theoretically ambitious as approaches to space had been' (2004: 19). Yi Fu Tuan, a pioneer in this field of what one might call the study of place, compares the approach of a spatial analyst and a humanist geographer. He writes that the latter, rather than simplifying the interaction of humans and space, 'begins with a deep commitment to the understanding of human nature in all its intricacy' (Tuan 1974: 246). Canadian geographer Edward Relph is another theorist to distinguish space from place – the first being abstract and the second associated with human experience (Relph 1976: 8).

French cultural theorist, Michel de Certeau distinguishes space and place by their mode of production, although he reverses these terms. He uses the term space for a 'practiced place', writing, 'in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualisation, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions' (de Certeau 1984: 117). In his famous example of walking in the city, he suggests that 'the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers' (1984: 117). Thus the walker has the agency of practising places in various ways and producing different spaces. To these scholars, where humans interact with space, place becomes alive, diverse, multiple, and complex. In one way or another, they acknowledge the difference between the space of lived experiences and space as an empty backdrop to events.

Moving beyond this dichotomy, one of the major contributions to the study of space, is the work of French philosopher Henry Lefebvre. In the *Production of Space* he called his project a new science, the 'science of space' (1991: 8). He suggests that this science 'interprets the political', 'implies an ideology designed to conceal that use', and 'embodies at best a technological utopia' (1991: 9). Within this science he distinguishes 'social space' from the 'mental', the latter being 'defined by the philosophers and mathematicians' (1991: 27). Lefebvre explains in his own words how social space is produced through three interconnected modes, a 'conceptual triad' consisting of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces:

> 1. Spatial practice, which embraces production and reproduction [of space], and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion.
> 2. Representations of space, which is associated with the relations of production and the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations.
> 3. Representational spaces, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of the social life, as also to art. (Lefebvre 1991: 33)

The third mode is the space 'as directly lived through associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users"' (1991: 39). If the first two modes are where hegemonic power exercises its authority, the third mode is the 'dominated' space, but that which 'the imagination seeks to change and appropriate' (1991: 39). Lefebvre considers those artists, writers and philosophers who only want to describe, also to be passively experiencing this mode of space production. The perceived-conceived-lived triad model, which has subsequently been adopted by 'many cultural geographers, as well as art and architectural historians […] as a theoretical framework within which to critique spatial and visual culture' (Rendell 2006: 17), challenges the binary models of understanding space such as 'objective/subjective, material/mental, real/imagined' (Cresswell 2004: 38).

Building on Lefebvre's ideas, postmodern political geographer Edward Soja writes about Thirdspace, which is lived and practised, rather than being either material or mental. The focus on 'the lived world' appears to 'provide theoretical groundwork for thinking about a politics of place based on place as lived, practiced and inhabited' (Cresswell 2004: 38). It is particularly the third mode of production, the 'lived' layer that many scholars find useful in theories of space and everyday life. Returning to Lefebvre, he opens up the possibility of change to space by ordinary people through their everyday performances. Space thus becomes more eventful and changeable by those who had previously been deemed to be passive 'users'. Where before, the ideology and materiality of space were assumed to determine the performance of the user, now that lived space is considered as a factor, the relation between users and spaces becomes reciprocal. Soja describes this reciprocity as 'the socio-spatial dialectic: that social and spatial relations are dialectically inter-reactive, interdependent; […] social relations of production are both space-forming and space contingent' (Soja 1989: 81). Thus Lefebvre's interrelated modes, developed further by Soja, introduce a reciprocity between the social and spatial.

The theories outlined in this section point out how space becomes 'an event rather than a secure ontological thing' that has an essence and is 'rooted in notions of the authentic', and lived space as an event 'is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence' (Cresswell 2004: 39). If space is a product of social relations, and at the same time produces those social relations, then conflicts between ideologies and agents as to how space should be ordered, occupied, practised, and who has control over these acts, are inevitable. Spatial performances and practices are therefore multiple, eventful and consequently contested, as the title of my thesis suggests. In this research I focus on the lived space as a social product, and have chosen not to capitalise on the place/space dichotomy. Therefore, I use the terms place and space interchangeably.

1.2 Performance and Space

Performance as an ephemeral medium has a contradictory relation with space. On the one hand it can be seen as 'uniquely rooted to place because it happens in shared time and space with its audience', but on the other hand 'it can also be said to be placeless in that it is non-object oriented and non-commodity based' (Hill and Paris 2006: 6). In other words, performance happens in and in interaction with space, but when it ends, it disappears from that space. Studies of space introduced briefly in the previous section, open up new possibilities for understanding the relation between space and performance. Building on Lefebvre's theories, theatre studies scholar Marvin Carlson suggests that in its lack of material dependency, 'the physical surroundings of performance never act as a totally neutral filter or frame', and 'they are themselves always culturally encoded, and have always, sometimes blatantly, sometimes subtly, contributed to the reception of the performance' (1989: 206). Performance studies scholar Joanne Tompkins, also draws on the ideas of Lefebvre as well as David Harvey in order to discuss the importance of spatiality in the study of performance and theatricality:

> Most importantly, as Henri Lefebvre argues […], '[e]very space is already in place before the appearance in it of actors […]. This pre-existence of space conditions the subject's presence, action and discourse, his [sic] competence and performance' (1991, p. 57). Later he notes that 'every social space has a history, one invariably grounded in nature' (1991, p. 110). David Harvey develops Lefebvre's arguments to insist that '[h]ow we represent space

and time in theory matters, because it affects how we and others interpret and then act with respect to the world' (1989, p. 205). […] space structures theatre since there can be no performance if there is nowhere for it to take place. (Tompkins 2014: 7)

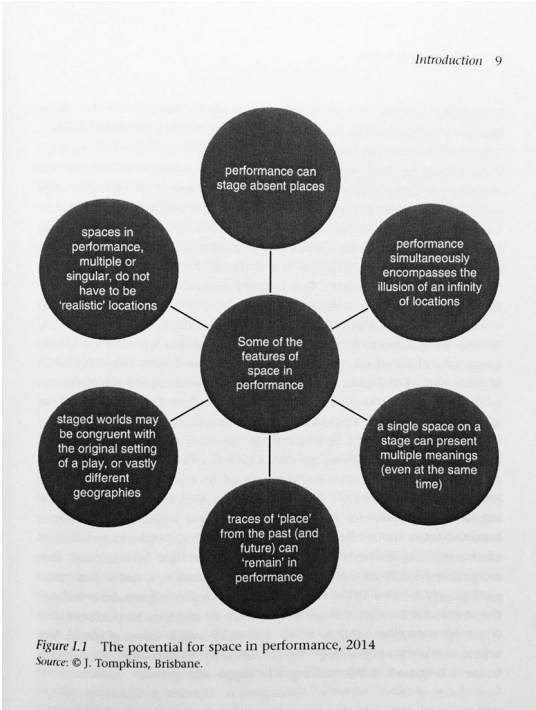

Figure 5. The potential for space in performance, Tompkins (2014: 9).

In this diagram Tompkins outlines six features of space in performance. She suggests that 'traces of the "place" from the past and future can remain in performance', performance can 'stage absent places', and that 'performance simultaneously encompasses the illusion of an infinity of locations', among other features. Her diagram sheds light on how performance contributes to the multiplicity of space, helps to configure the future of the space, and redefines meanings over space; while traces of these places also remain in performance.

Performance studies scholar Gay McAuley also goes back to Lefebvre to address the reciprocity of space and performance:

> The space is, of course, not an empty container but an active agent; it shapes what goes on within it, emits signals about it to the community at large, and is itself affected. The frame constituted by a particular building or venue is not something fixed and immutable but a dynamic and continually evolving social entity. As Henri Lefebvre puts it so pertinently: "Vis-à-vis lived experience, space is neither a mere "frame," after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a frame or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it. Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure." (1991, 93-93) (McAuley 1999: 41)

If performance affects the social production of space, then in what way can it contribute to changing it? Heterotopia, a concept developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault (1986), has been widely used in performance studies to define how space is transformed by performance, and a heterotopic space is created. In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault writes that 'heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault 1986: 25). Philosopher Ludger Schwarte (2013) summarises six principles of Foucault's heterotopia:

> 1. Heterotopias exist everywhere, in all cultures and at all times, yet they are never universal
> 2. When a society changes, the function of a heterotopia necessarily also changes
> 3. Heterotopias place different types of spaces side by side (theatre, cinema, garden)
> 4. Heterotopias mark a rupture with traditional time (cemetery, library)
> 5. Heterotopias are based on a system of inclusion and exclusion (prison, sauna)
> 6. Heterotopias' primary function is to construct either a space of illusion that makes real spaces look even more illusory (brothels), or a real space next to which all remaining space appears disorderly and incomplete (Puritan or Jesuit colonies in the Americas). (Schwarte 2013: 130)

Distinguishing heterotopia from utopia, Schwarte writes, 'according to Foucault, utopias are unreal analogies of societies', whereas 'such real spaces are heterotopias' (2013: 130). He explains that these two concepts are not opposed, rather, heterotopia 'represent[s] a tendency or a version of' utopia. Heterotopian spaces are mirrors that establish boundaries within the social space and at the same time, by reflecting unreal space, draw them out to infinity' (2013: 130). Tompkins elaborates on how heterotopic places are different from reality, but still stem from it:

> Heterotopias are alternative spaces that are distinguished from that actual world, but that resonate with it. Heterotopias have the capacity to reveal structures of power and knowledge: a potential outcome of a study of heterotopia is, then, a more detailed examination of locations in which cultural and political meanings can be produced spatially. (2014: 1)

The question I should like to pose, inspired by Tompkins' proposition of the heterotopic alternative space is, if performance can create alternative ephemeral spaces and reveal the hegemonic order that governs space, can it actually disrupt the social construct of space?

Theatre studies scholar Jill Dolan looks for the 'utopian performative' in performance, which 'lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense' (2005: 5). Tompkins argues that by producing a heterotopia, performance

cannot ‘intervene literally in the actual world’. What it does is create 'glimpses of what might be’:

> A staged heterotopia enables audiences to discern some hint or inkling of another world, even one that is otherwise invisible. Heterotopia provides the potential for spatialising in performance both visible locations and, paradoxically, invisible locations (those which we know and those which we imagine). (2014: 6)

She argues that the potential to reveal the invisible layers of space to the audience, or new ways of spatialising, can take us to alternative ways of ordering real space. To her, performance may not change the world on its own, but can help us experience the transformed reality, and find ways to contribute to those transformations:

> […] a heterotopia does not exist on its own: it operates between the two poles that structure utopics, what I call ‘constructed space’ and ‘abstracted space’. When it is apparent, a heterotopia resides between – or somehow in relation to – these two locations. This tripartite configuration affords an alternate ordering of the real world, a way to engage with other ways of thinking, other ways of structuring space in performance. Once we see how these alternate orderings might work for performance, it is possible to conceive of them operating beyond a performance location as well. (Tompkins 2014: 42)

If temporal limits mean that heterotopic spaces are ephemeral, then perhaps through repetition and the integration of documentation into the meaning of space, the occupation of space and, consequently, change in real world, can take place. ‘As Lefebvre argues “space is a means of control and hence of domination, of power” (1991: 26), and one of the major forms of control is determining who shall have access to what space’ (McAuley 1999: 71). The study of the interaction of space and performance, thus, illuminates how performances of everyday life challenge the hegemonic power over space, forming ruptures in the dominant order, to create spaces of freedom.

The widely discussed concepts of tactics and strategies can be very insightful here. Cultural theorist Michel de Certeau introduced strategies and tactics to explain the ways in which people who do not benefit from hegemonic power create spaces for themselves and operate alternatively within the ordered space, through their everyday performances:

> I call a “strategy” the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an “environment.” […] I call a “tactic,” on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional localisation), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalise on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. (de Certeau 1984: xix)

In his study of de Certeau, cultural theorist Ian Buchanan explains that tactics and strategies 'offer an alternative to power as an organising model for understanding society' (2000: 86) and 'their relation should be thought of [as] contradiction rather than negation' (*ibid.*: 100). He writes, 'for de Certeau strategy is the force at work in the production of what Foucault called discipline' (2000: 101) whereas:

> [t]actics refers to the set of practices that strategy has not been able to domesticate. They are not in themselves subversive, but they have a symbolic value which is not to be underestimated: they offer daily proof of the partiality of strategic control and in doing so they hold out the token hope that however bad things get, they are not necessarily so. In other words, tactics operate primarily on the plane of belief. (Buchanan 2000: 89)

Thus the partiality of the hegemonic order over space can be challenged through ephemeral tactics in everyday life. The performer or 'the agent of change', 'uses an art of the local, techniques already learned that do not cohere to the imposed order of the space through which they move; rather they are 'indeterminate trajectories' that trace a new topography over the imposed terrain (Parry et al. 2011: 32). In this way, space becomes the locus of everyday struggle over power, by strategy and tactic, the former the tool of the hegemonic and powerful, and the latter, the art of the powerless.

1.3 Lived Space: Gendered, Segregated and Discriminated

Since the advent of women's rights movements, space has always been one of the main areas of feminist analysis and critique. Gender, itself a social construct that conditions bodies and forces them into categories, creates groups of people with different social relations, thus different spatial experiences. Feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey, Gillian Rose and Linda McDowell in fact worked extensively on these relations, arguing for 'attention to gender as well as class in the production of space' throughout the 1990s (Rendell 2006: 17). Massey, Rose and Rosalyn Deutsche emphasise gender not only as one category like any other, but rather, they stress that 'gender difference' is a 'specific kind of difference and, as such, produces and is produced by very particular kinds of space', a difference that should not be considered natural (*ibid.: 17*). Rose explains how the 'notion of the body as natural is seen as a cultural construction' and thus bodies are gendered within the social context. 'The construction of different kinds of

bodies – male and female […] – naturalises social difference, with profound consequences' (Rose 1993: 29-30). These consequences are arguably in favour of men in patriarchal societies where women are assumed to be 'less rational than men' and thus excluded from the public sphere and the realm of decision-making (*ibid.*). She argues that 'the cultural meanings of bodies legitimate certain power relations' and eventually produce unequal spaces (*ibid.*). 'Far from being natural, then, bodies are 'maps of power and identity'; or, rather, maps of the relation between power and identity' (*ibid.: 32*).

The hegemonic order embedded in space forces bodies to perform in certain ways and obliges them to become gendered. As feminist sociologist Nirmal Puwar explains in *Space Invaders* (2004), 'first, over time specific bodies are associated with specific spaces (these could be institutional positions, organisations, neighbourhoods, cities, nations) and, secondly, spaces become marked as territories belonging to particular bodies' (2004: 141). It is important here to remember the reciprocity of social relations and space and the interconnected modes of production. If gender is influential in the construction of social space, it is also the subject of manipulation. As feminist geographer Doreen Massey explains, '[g]eography matters to the construction of gender, and the fact of geographical variation in gender relations, for instance, is a significant element in the production and reproduction of both imaginative geographies and uneven development' (Massey 1994: 2).

The ways in which everyday space and human-made environments have been influenced by patriarchal power relations and order, have been subject to wide scrutiny and critique. In 1984, a group of architects and cultural practitioners in London started a group called Matrix to address the effects of men's spatial design and governance on women's lives. In their book *Making Space* (1984), they argue that different expectations of bodies divide people into opposite categories. The exclusion against women in space happens through lack of mobility and access to certain public spaces at certain times, pushing them back to the domestic realm. The binary division of gender roles and its manifestation in space, has been widely viewed as the origin of spatial segregation. Historically, women's roles have been associated with reproduction, and hence they have been confined to the domestic sphere, while men have been in charge of power and production, the

public space. Doreen Massey in *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) writes, '[w]oman stands as metaphor for nature, […] for what has been lost (left behind), and that place called home is frequently personified by, and partakes of the same characteristics as those assigned to, Woman/Mother/lover' (Massey 1994: 10). Quoting feminist philosopher Genevieve Lloyd, she describes how, in contrast, this association has provided men with spaces of comfort, in which women serve them: 'Woman's task is to preserve the sphere of the intermingling of mind and body, to which the Men of Reason will repair for solace, warmth and relaxation' (1994: 10). Thus, the domestic sphere, excluded from the public domain, becomes the place where men take refuge to prepare themselves for their return to the realm of power and politics. 'If he is to exercise the most exalted form of Reason, he must leave soft emotions and sensuousness behind; woman will keep them intact for him' (*ibid.*: 10). Home, as a place where women are doomed to stay, to take care of the rest of the family members, especially men, is also discussed in the work of the Matrix group. They write about how in the cliché of 'behind every woman is the image of the "ideal home"', the 'ideology of domesticity' is embedded (Matrix 1984: 1).

In Iran, too, the segregation of roles has led to the separation of public and private spheres, where women have been in charge of childbirth and domestic care and men have traditionally been breadwinners and decision-makers. This has led to the spatial segregation of the public and private zones. As gender studies scholar Jane Khatib-Chahidi explains, kinship and 'social interaction between the sexes' are at the core of Islamic social order, and they too play a crucial role in the spatial structure of society (1981: 112). Currently there are many discriminatory written laws and unwritten norms in place against women's equal rights to space. To name only a few, before the age 40, single women need their guardian's (in most cases their father's) permission to leave the country:

> [a] married woman may not obtain a passport or travel outside the country without the written permission of her husband. Under the civil code, a husband is accorded the right to choose the place of living and can prevent his wife from having certain occupations if he deems them against 'family values'. (Human Rights Watch, 2017)

In parallel with these legal discriminations that control a woman's social life, gender segregation and social norms such as being banned from entering stadiums to watch men's football matches, limit her social presence.

On occasions, a group of the so-called reformist MPs or other officials, pushed by the efforts of civil society and feminist activists, try to change the law in favour of women, but the conservative extremist and clerics who seem to have the ultimate power and influence, often disagree with any improvement and put obstacles in the way of any progress. In one of the most recent events, the bill to protect women against violence was prevented for seven years from going into parliament for ratification. The judicial system of Iran, which is under the control of the conservatives, has stopped the bill and in several controversial cases officials have expressed that the bill will weaken 'the position of men in families', and that the bill is 'in protection of prostitutes and not women' (BBC Persian, 14/09/2019). Their argument is that women will abandon their main duties which to them are reproduction, raising children and creating a comfortable home for men. They often express their fear that independent women who are active in public life would not go back to the domestic realm where they are obliged to be 'docile wives' and 'good mothers'.

The dichotomy of public/private lies at the heart of the feminist critique of everyday life. As Carole Pateman discusses, 'the dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about' (1989: 118). If this duality is created through certain gender performances, the subversion of these acts could arguably lead to an interruption in this hegemonic order, and consequently create alternative spaces. This is precisely the contested space in which I locate both my activist performance practice, and my theorization of this practice.

1.4 Gender and Space in Iran

Since this research aims at providing better understanding about how social change by women is taking place in contemporary Iran, providing historical context is crucial. In order to contextualise the acts that protest against spatial discrimination, it was not sufficient simply to examine published narratives. The official history distributed by the Islamic Republic via state media, and throughout the entire education system, very much manipulates stories in favour of a certain narrative that not only ignores decades of women's fight for equality and justice, but also reclaims their achievements in its own name wherever beneficial. Clear examples of this attitude are when female athletes win international matches and shine on the world scene. The Islamic Republic glorifies these as the success of women under its patronage and under the true guidance

of Islamic society. In reality, at every step these women take to become international champions, the state not only does not facilitate anything, but also it hinders their path to protect the *purity and modesty* of women. In these circumstances, I decided to include the official media, but only whenever it states the authorities' opinions and actions, or when I can provide a comprehensive context to assist with an interpretation of their words.

Thus, I needed another source of news and historical content in order to explain the events. Because I am treating a very recent history, social media and other online platforms have been an important source of information. The question, however, is how to verify reliability. Here I decided to refer to the news outlets that are often more trusted and provide a different perspective. These media are often based outside Iran and not influenced by the regime's restrictive censorship. BBC Persian, Radio Farda, and some other websites are such relatively reliable sources. In addition to these, there has been an invaluable attempt in academia (especially outside Iran), another major historical source for my work, to shape a narrative that is truthful and reliable.

But something is always missing from these journalistic or academic discourses. Seemingly lacking *political importance*, women's lived experiences and stories over the past hundred years have not been documented and archived as *news*, as systematically as many other topics. To include these important and informative histories, I have relied on oral history, my family's recollections, talking to family members, the participants of my research, and their family members. Because history tends to be written from the perspective of the dominant, who in Iran are male and Shia, it was necessary for me to gain access to unheard and unwritten perspectives. The sources are scattered and part of my job here is to make sense of them and to gather them into a coherent history.

The relationships and interactions between genders have been a fundamental shaping factor of social space in modern Iran. To regulate and control these interactions, substantive pressure has been imposed on female bodies and their performances through 'appropriate behaviour' norms. Furthermore, space has been gendered and segregated to minimise these interactions by controlling and limiting the access and mobility of women in public. Thus on the one hand spaces have been designed and constructed in a way to control the access and presence of female bodies, and on the other hand, through social norms as well as legislations, the movements and performances of female bodies have been subject to scrutiny and control.

Gendered space and architecture have a long history in Iran. The first evidence of gendered urban culture goes back to the Sassanid Empire (224–651 C.E.), where the built environment 'reinforced sexual differences, articulated assumptions about gender, and

symbolically embodied gendered identities' (Karimi 2006). In the Safavid era (1501-1736), as Rizvi (2000) argues, royal women exercised power and authority in society through their patronage of urban institutions and shrines, and marked their authority and visibility in the public sphere. Nevertheless, for the rest of women, public spaces remained increasingly exclusive and their physical presence remained restricted.

During the Safavid and Qajar eras (sixteenth to early twentieth century), women were mainly excluded from public spaces. Their mobility was restricted to such a point that in bigger cities to use the pavements they had to use the opposite side of the street to men. This is despite the active social life of the 'women affiliated to the royal family and elite classes in social arenas' (Arjmand 2017: 23). Karimi argues that this seclusion during the Qajar dynasty was 'a sign of honour', hence it was stringent in 'wealthy neighbourhoods where houses were surrounded by tall walls with no window opening to the streets' (2006).

One of the places in which this segregation is very visible today, is in residential architecture. Traditional houses in most regions in Iran illustrate that the binary segregation of genders has taken on material form for centuries. These houses had strictly separate zones for women (*andaruni*) and for men (*biruni*). In *andaruni*, or the women's quarter, women and children and the men who were *mahram* (familiar) to them could freely socialise. The *biruni*, however, was the extension of the public realm. It belonged to men and their social interactions. While *biruni* was a place for business, men's ceremonies and parties and socialising, *andaruni* was considered the family space, the intimate private enclosure with high walls and no windows. *Biruni* was less decorated than *andaruni* and it was separated by a narrow hallway called the *dalan*. The *dalan*, screened on the *andaruni* side with a curtain, was the connection of these two worlds, where male strangers, known as or *nāmahram*, had to stop and could go no further.

The separation of the sexes began from outside the house, though. There were usually two door knockers on the entrance door which made two different sounds. Using each would announce whether the person behind the door was *mahram* or *nā-mahram* (known to the female members of the household, or a stranger). These door knockers can still be found in rural areas or in historical neighbourhoods of towns and cities. Iranian studies scholar Reza Arjmand writes:

> The division of space into private and public with two separate entrances that conceptually divide people into those who are entitled (*khodi*) and those who are not has reached a much wider context than Iranian homes. The *andaruni*/*biruni* division created two parallel worlds that co-existed alongside each other. (2017: 24)

The 'woman's place' (*jaygāh-e zan*) in both metaphorical and literal senses, has been a pivotal part of shaping the social relations and material construction of modern Iranian society. 'Appropriate' social roles for women on the one hand, and their physical presence in the actual places on the other, have turned the 'woman's place' into a contested debate discussed and addressed by different ideologies and political strategies, and posing as a subject of discord and conflict over the past century.

During the Constitutional Revolution, women became more visible in society. But it was mainly during the Pahlavi reign that a gender-neutral public space was introduced as part of the modernisation of the country. Although the intention of Reza Shah Pahlavi, the self-imposed ruler of Iran from 1925 to 1941, was to liberate women from the 'backward traditional norms' with regard to female bodies by decreeing mandatory unveiling, and to implement Western norms in Iranian society, the intervention engaged female bodies in a new battle. Under the unveiling decree (1936-1941), space remained extremely gendered for women as they could not freely choose what to wear and how to appear in public. So female bodies remained over sexualised and consequently, yet again, embattled.

It was mainly after this period that women started to have more equal access to public places. Although this was backed and supported by the state and the law, the traditional fractions of society resisted it. Many women were deprived of their right to space by *urf* (Islamic social norms) and the traditional settings of society exercised by their family relations. Hence, they were not legally banned, rather, the restrictions were exercised on them through social norms and customs. Women were encouraged to obtain jobs and became more and more visible and active in all spaces. They had in fact started using all places that had previously been male-dominated, and 'despite everything, the Pahlavis' efforts contributed greatly to the visibility of women in the social arena in modern Iran' (Arjmand, 2017: 23).

With the Islamists taking control over the country in 1979, the question of 'women's place' once again became prevalent and a whole new identity and place defined by the authorities was

imposed on women and their role in society. The imposition of the hijab, or headscarf, was an act to emphasise 'the difference from the Western world' (Göle 1996) as well as from life and values under the Pahlavi Shahs. Although many women protested in the same year as the Revolution, 1979, against the imposition of the hijab, five years after the Revolution it became the law. Compulsory hijab was certainly not just a dress code for women. It was a radical act further to politicise female bodies, and an attempt to eliminate them altogether from the public realm, since they were considered to be the source of social ills. The hijab became a precondition for social existence. In the context of this lack of free choice, it functioned as the walls of *andaruni*, wrapped around female bodies, to exclude them from normative space. The Islamic Republic very soon established its ideology about body and gender for reviving religious values, by revealing its segregation policies: women could be active in society, as long as they were covered, apologetic and limited to the places assigned to them. Hence, a project of ghettoisation began, an ever-expanding ideology, gendering all spaces and creating seclusion and exclusion almost everywhere.

Although the spatial organisation of everyday life in Iran has changed drastically over the past century, not enough scholarly attention has been paid to it. Uneven modernisation, Islamic revolution, fast growing urbanisation and rapid social changes have complicated the study of social space in recent and contemporary Iran. Iran is a Muslim majority country with a religious regime in power. Not to take into account the role of religion in governing social relations would make such a study impossible. Feminist scholar Khatib-Chahidi explains that 'social interaction between the sexes' is at the core of Islamic social order:

> Those men and women whose kinship, as defined by the jurists, represents an impediment to marriage are permitted to be on familiar terms with each other and share the same physical space; those not related in this way, should avoid each other's company. The impediment of kinship to marriage in Islam provides the rules upon which restrictions of marriage partner and social interaction between the sexes are based. Taken in conjunction with additional categories of excluded persons, moreover, the forbidden categories in their entirety represent a comprehensive attempt to avoid all extramarital sexuality which, in Islam, is strictly prohibited. […] Veiling and confining women to the home have served in practice to ensure that as far as possible the only men and women permitted social interaction are those between whom marriage is forbidden: they are said to be *mahram* to each other. *Mahram* is the legal term denoting a relationship by blood, marriage or sexual union which makes marriage between persons so related forbidden. (1981: 112)

For these rules to be observed and the interactions to be controlled, women were mostly confined

to the domestic area, especially since the Safavid era (1501-1736), and obliged to cover their bodies in public, and to avoid certain performances in specific spaces. This spatial order created spaces of seclusion and isolation for women within households, segregating the spaces of social interaction into *andaruni* and *biruni*. As the sociologist Masserat Amir-Ebrahimi explains:

> public and private spaces were two completely separate and gendered arenas. Public or exterior places—biruni: streets, squares, the bazaar—were all considered masculine spaces. Meanwhile, private space—andaruni: the interior spaces of the home, the neighbourhood, and any other spaces that could be closed and controlled—were considered to be the feminine domain, the spaces where women should socially and physically stay, to avoid the gaze of strangers. (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2006:1)

However, restrictions on the interaction of people of the opposite sex has changed dramatically in the past century, but not necessarily in a linear way.

During the Qajar dynasty (1789-1925), Iran had a strictly 'hierarchical social order', with a 'clearly defined class, ethnic, and religious structure and an entrenched pattern of family obligations' (Afary 2009: 6). The basis for shared values was provided by religious thoughts (ibid.). Houses were traditionally divided into *andaruni* and *biruni*, and the public space was dominated by men. Women from the upper classes could enjoy some social activities whereas the rest of the women – except in some rural settings where women were active in the economy and, for example, had to work in the fields – were mainly secluded from the public. According to some historical texts, even pavements in some parts of big cities were segregated for women and men in order to minimise their random encounter.

Towards the end of Qajar and around the time of the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), which resulted in the establishment of parliament and delimitation the Shah's powers, women's rights and 'place' in society became part of the public debate for the first time. The first women's rights organisations were established around this period and women started becoming active in society, many of them participating in the Constitutional Revolution. Women's publication of newspapers and magazines was perceived as a revolutionary act, considering the 'extreme cultural taboo attached to the written work of women', since:

> some women were permitted by their families to learn to read, but were strictly prohibited from writing. It was believed that if women knew how to write they would send love letters to men and disgrace the family. (Sanasarian 1985: 89)

Eventually, women were deprived of many rights, including suffrage, in the Iranian Constitution of 1906. However, it was during this period that, for the first time, intellectuals and political activists criticised the hijab, preparing the context for the forced unveiling of 1936 by Reza Shah. This hijab was different from what is understood by hijab today. It covered the whole body of a woman with a black veil and her face with a white niqab. See Figure 6 (Ahmadi Khorasani, 2011).

Figure 6. Hijab in late Qajar in Iran.

When Reza Shah took over the country via a military coup in 1925, he brought with him another whole set of ideologies and strategies in order to rule the country. These were backed, and in many cases initiated by the intellectuals and political activists of the late Qajar period who were involved in the Constitutional Revolution. Although Reza Shah later oppressed the independent intellectuals and political opposition brutally, part of his mission was in line with the dreams of those revolutionaries, including some changes to women's situations.

Reza Shah's greatest dream was to modernise Iran and shape the nation state. As the historian and gender theorist Afsaneh Najmabadi explains:

> The role of women in Reza Shah's vision can be situated within this larger project of state-building. Like men, women were expected to contribute to the building of the new society through hard work and participation in state-building. (Najmabadi 1991: 53-54)

With this intention, he encouraged women to participate in society. However, in order to speed up the changes in a rather traditional and backward society, he used his power. Historian Janet Afary explains that in the late 1930s, modernisation in Iran involved the 'use of the police to enforce new

disciplinary practices on women's and men's bodies, a process that accelerated after women were unveiled by state decree' (2009: 9). Thus, *kashf-e hijab* or the forced unveiling that was implemented from 1936 to 1941, put the female bodies as the site of social, political, and cultural struggle, 'complicated further by the subjection of unveiled women to an intense public gaze and sexual harassment'(*ibid.*).

This period of modernisation, with its diverse dimensions, had different effects on gender relations in Iranian society. Encouragement by the state for women to have greater public participation, along with these reforms, led to the weakening of the justification for gender segregation in society as well as a decline in faith in rigid social hierarchies. These changes also had repercussions on law and legislation. As Mahnaz Afkhami, the second woman minister in the Pahlavi era explains, the Family Protection Laws of 1967 and 1975 raised the minimum age of marriage for girls to 15 and then 18; and gave courts the right to divorce, which had previously been the monopoly of the husband, so that both men and women could file for divorce. The 1975 Family Protection Law also changed the right to polygamy for men, since before, they could marry four wives and have many temporary marriages at the same time. The new law changed this and a man could marry a second wife 'solely with the permission of the first wife and by the order of the court, and under specific and limited conditions' (Afkhami, 2008). As women's participation in social life was encouraged, the new Civil Code 'further eroded the hierarchies that had enforced gender segregation, Iranian women began to assert themselves through schools, clubs, and other institutions of civil society' (Afary 2009: 9).

After 1941, Iran enjoyed relative political freedom from the monarchy as Reza Shah was replaced by the Allies, by his son Mohammad Reza Shah. This was the situation until 1953, when Mosaddeq –the then democratically elected Prime Minister who led the country towards the nationalisation of the oil industry – and his party, the National Front, were overthrown by an Anglo-American coup, and the democratic movement of the people was sabotaged. Following the coup the Shah relied heavily on the United States' support, and formed a government under General Zahedi in order to regain power as monarch. Women's issues in this period were not the priority of the male-dominated political parties, however women's right to vote became part of the political debate.

Despite the Shah's attempt to oppress democratic parties and oppositions, he supported the modernisation of society. In the 1950s and 1960s, 'a rising generation of educated women, among them university professors, lawyers, Members of Parliament, and the leader of the state-sponsored Women's Organisation of Iran (WOI), began to cautiously campaign for new laws granting women substantially greater marital rights' (Afary 2009: 10). Another important shift to take place at the same time was the advent of Islamic politics as a new ideological paradigm. As Najmabadi explains, this was twofold: 'the politicization of an important sector of the Islamic clergy under Khomeni's leadership, and the Islamization of previously secular politics, as seen in the emergence of such organizations as the Liberation Movement of Iran (*Nehzat-e azadi*, led by Bazargan), and the popularity and prominence of such intellectuals as Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati' (1991: 60).

The new wave of Islamic thoughts on the one hand, and the anti-Shah approaches of the leftists who were also a substantial part of the opposition on the other hand, led to the 1979 Revolution. The radical Islamists established the Islamic Republic and reinforced a new sociopolitical order by brutally oppressing the rest of the opposition including the leftist groups. The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) provided them with an excellent excuse to oppress the opposition inside the country, where all the world's attention was on the war. The Islamic Republic's constitution gave the power to the Shia clergy, handing most of the ruling and executive power to the Supreme Leader. By the end of the war in 1988, the Islamic Republic was an established and powerful conservative Islamist state, having killed thousands of the political opposition from all sides.

The state followed a patriarchal hard line in most issues that were related to gender. Their doctrine with regard to the place of women very soon became clear, since they made the hijab compulsory and moved backwards in legislation and laws to take women's rights away from them. This time, sharia (the Islamic law based on the Qoran and the prophet Mohamed's traditions) was integrated into laws in order to reinforce it into the everyday spaces (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008); an attempt to undo the changes that took place in Iran during the Pahlavi era, which had desegregated spaces based on gender. Consequently, since 1979 the state's interference in private spaces, which turned them into zones under the scrutiny of the authorities, has been increasing, turning society to a panopticon where the watchers check every aspect of everyday life

to regulate the amount and ways in which opposite sexes mingle and interact, and to reinstate women's place as interior, private and hidden.

Najmabadi argues that the Islamic Republic went through two phases with regard to women's presence in society. At first, they encouraged women to have an 'active and effective' participation in the shaping of the Islamic state. But of course, this should not happen at the cost of neglecting their main duties as mothers and wives or endangering the 'purity' of the public space. It is in this light that the imposition of the hijab and segregation in spaces can be understood. The Islamic state needed women to be active and supportive, both as protesters for the revolution to assist its establishment, and also as active labour during and after the war with Iraq, which resulted in a huge number of male casualties and deaths. So it was the authorities' responsibility to 'prepare the grounds for women's participation in society' (1991: 68).

The second phase was then concerned with 'how to resolve the tensions between women's domestic role and their social responsibilities in an Islamic order' (*ibid.*: p.69). Eventually, the societal needs in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war, with its extensive toll on male lives, determined outcomes: 'Women became mobilised in a whole series of activities: they staffed the mass laundries and kitchens servicing the war front, they served as nurses in the military hospitals. They were also given a more pronounced civilian profile in many government offices. Contrary to the initial assault against day-care, for instance, as an imperialist plot to separate mothers from children, good child-care centres were now projected as a social necessity so that the mother could perform her services with peace of mind' (Najmabadi 1991: 69).

With the increasing participation of women in social tasks, the authorities had to invent solutions to minimise the 'corrupting' interactions between male strangers (*nāmahram*) and women. This was because 'faithful and committed women should expand their abilities in order to be prepared to carry out important social tasks and responsibilities that the Islamic Revolution has placed on their shoulders' (Najmabadi 1991: 68-69). They began to impose the wearing of the hijab and other normative behaviours on the body on the one hand, and segregation into spaces on the other.

Moving against everything that women had achieved in the past fifty years, it seemed as if the new governing regime 'wanted women pushed back to the domestic sphere, as exemplified by

the role assigned to women in the construction of the new order in the Islamic Constitution passed in December 1979' (Najmabadi 1991: 69). Although the argument of the Islamic Republic was that they wanted to liberate women from the morally corrupt and degrading attitudes of the Pahlavis, namely the Shah dynasty, they did not try to take the country back to before the Constitutional Revolution in the early twentieth century. Rather, the traditions implemented by the state, were to some extent invented, with no coherent continuity prior to the Revolution. The imposition of the Islamic hijab and dress code was one such attempt:

> At the turn of the twentieth century, social custom, religion, class, and ethnicity determined a woman's outer clothing. Lower-class and many non-Muslim women wore looser veils, while upper-class urban women were fully veiled. Veiling was thus a class and social marker that more respectable women and their families observed as a way of setting themselves apart from the lower orders. For a short period between 1936 and 1941, the state imposed unveiling. The police ordered all urban women to take off their veils and encouraged [them] to wear modern dresses and hats. But Iranian society had never experienced what it has endured since 1979 – morality squads dragging respectable women to police stations and flogging them for sporting nail polish or makeup, wearing their hijab too loosely, or showing strands of hair. (Afary 2009: 13)

Women's bodies had never been more politicised in Iran and the site of this politicisation was public space.

In the same sense, the segregation of public spaces by the Islamic regime was an exaggerated version, on a new scale, of a past tradition. As Middle Eastern studies scholar Reza Arjmand argues, the new ideology, rooted in past beliefs, was introduced as a series of gentrification processes in order to restructure space and to delimit and control women's mobility and presence in that space:

> The Iranian Revolution of 1979, […] advocated a homosocial culture in which women and men are expected to socialise separately. For many, this marked the beginning of an era of institutionalised gender segregation. The Iranian post-revolutionary government's policies demonstrated serious commitment to the separation of the sexes in the public domain. The ratification and implementation of a gender-segregation law (*siyasat-i tafkik-i jinsiayti*) in public space, from schools and universities to taxis, buses and sports centres, was an intriguing component in Iran's Islamisation project. Gendered spaces were built or reconstructed around idealised roles of women and men in an Islamic society. (Arjmand 2017: 7)

Forty three years after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, with an increasing number of women in higher education and the workforce, notably propelled by the Iran-Iraq war, as I have already stated, regulations on the hijab and other gender-related issues concerning women have not been relaxed. On the contrary, 'the more women have become involved in social life, the

more necessary it has become to reinforce the moral codes to ensure that such increased contact between men and women does not unwittingly undermine the moral fabric of the Islamic community and open it up to alien penetration' (Najmabadi 1991: 69-70). The regime's argument is still that women's main roles are being mothers and wives and their social presence must not damage that. Gender segregation has thus been the main spatial strategy to police women's social presence and prevent moral corruption in society.

1.4.1 Gender Segregation in Iran

Although the more traditional and religious parts of society backed the ideologies implemented by the Islamic Republic in the beginning, for a big segment of people who were used to relative social freedom, these newly imposed policies caused shock and reactions. Islamists and Revolutionaries –as they would call themselves – began to Islamise all places. In the following years, there were almost no places left that were not either segregated, or where the state had tried, but failed to segregate. This segregation has happened either in the material and architectural sense through raising walls and partitions, or temporal sense, by assigning different time schedules to different genders for using the same spaces. Exploring all aspects of spatial discrimination is beyond the scope of this research. Here, for each of these categories listed below, I give some examples:

A. Enclosed Women-only Places within Public Spaces:

Women-only places have been a common solution imposed by the Islamic Republic to resolve the issue of the mingling of genders. Although they advertise these measures as a bonus for women, in reality they confine certain activities to very limited enclosed sites, depriving women of an equal share of real public spaces. The story of the seaside in post-revolutionary Iran is one such example.

The controversy over beaches started in the first summer after the Revolution in 1979. A high-ranking military officer in Anzali Port (Pahlavi port before the Revolution and later Khomeini Port in North Iran) who was interviewed at the time about the ways in which beaches must work under the Islamic rules, said 'the seaside must be used separately by our brothers and sisters' (Fararu,

22/06/2017). This caused shock and reaction among residents of Anzali, whose economy was based essentially on their beach tourism. The tension rose to the extent where newspapers warned against civil unrest in the region. The military officer explained at the end of the interview that the Islamic regime was not going to concede and that people had to adapt to the new situation since the Islamic Revolution was now in charge (*ibid.*). This example illustrates amply the approach by the authorities and how strict they have been about their policies, for more than four decades.

This scheme is still strictly in place and in 2018, 5000 police officers were appointed to implement the scheme of 'purifying the seas', which refers to the segregation of beaches based on gender (Bartarinha, 22/05/2018). They install very high fabric walls around the women's section of the beach, whereas men can freely use the sea, as their bodies are considered to be the norm. Women are strictly searched for phones and cameras and are not allowed to take any electronic devices with them inside the 'purified zones' whereas there is no restriction on men using cameras or phones.

Public transport is another example which illustrates comprehensively the strict segregation of space, which is delimited as male and which excludes female bodies, since buses and metro wagons are separated into men's and women's sections. Many women find the segregation on public transport reassuring because the mixed carriages and other public spaces lay them open to harassment or abuse. The reality is that there is no intention for the part of the authorities to criminalise the sexual harassment of women, and no such effort to make public spaces safe for them. Men readily harass women on public transport with inappropriate touching or verbal abuse, and although by law these actions are a criminal offence, men do not face any consequence for this in reality. Instead, the authorities create mobile ghettos for women, which are the only option for feeling safe and comfortable on a journey. So here, too, female bodies are again criminalised and the pressure is on them to them be in the right 'place', otherwise if they are harassed or abused, it is assumed to be their fault due to being in the wrong 'place' at the wrong time and having inappropriate clothing. What, in millennial parlance is called 'slut-shaming', is actually legislated for in Iran by segregation laws, where victims of sexual harassment and abuse are blamed for the treatment perpetrated against them in spaces that are deemed to be beyond limits.

In the past few years, the state has started building women-only parks. These are places with very high walls (six meters) with a thorough security check at the entrance. Women are allowed in only without any phone or camera and only with boys under five years old. Access and use of other public parks is allowed for women but men are excluded from women-only parks. Hiking and mountain climbing are popular sports and leisure activities for people in Iran. Women as well as men are very active in this respect. In 2019 the police in Mashhad – one of the largest cities in Iran, and a very religious area – announced that women must have permission from their husbands or fathers in order to go hiking in the mountains. The absurdity of this rule meant that it went viral on social media and caused much reaction and outrage. In twenty-four hours the officials denied having proposed it and said it had been a misunderstanding – a humiliating defeat. Studies (Shahrokni 2019, Arjmand 2017) show that women often re-appropriate these women-only places to their own favour and use them in such transgressive ways that they are still able to exercise their right to space beyond the confinements determined by the authorities. In *Public Urban Space, Gender and Segregation*, Arjmand explains how in a society that defines heterosexuality as the norm and heterosexual marriage as the only legitimate form of relationship, women-only parks provide space for homosexual dating. Thus, despite delimiting women in many ways, the segregation policy creates opportunities in other forms, as '[t]hey re-appropriate the space, which is created to maintain Islamic rulings, to achieve the complete opposite effect and usage to the one originally intended' (2017: 119).

B. Places that are Totally Banned for Women

The best example of such places is the stadium. Based on an unwritten law, since the Revolution women have not been allowed to enter stadiums to watch men's football matches. This ban sometimes includes other sports like wrestling and volleyball, but mainly the taboo is around football, as it has also become a very popular sport among Iranian women since the rise of so-called reformists in 1998 when in a relatively more open political sphere, the needs of civil society and especially of women entered public debate. Following the presidential election of 1998 and the victory of Mohammad Khatami, the so-called reform era began in Iran, which arguably lasted until 2005 and the election of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad. The reformists, who were a fraction of the

Islamic Republic, believed in a relatively more open social and political atmosphere, better relationships with the West, as well as fewer restrictions and a more relaxed attitude towards people's everyday life, including gender norms. In the longer term their project was not successful as they could not deliver their promises and power seized by the extremist hardliner, Ahmedinejad. Since the controversial election of 2009, which Ahmedinejad claimed to win by 62 % but where irregularities were said to be widespread, sparking huge demonstrations which according to some presaged the Arab Spring of 2011, they fragmented into different groups, some turning against the Islamic Republic.

On many occasions there have been protests against the ban of women from entering stadiums. In the years ensuing the 2000s, after 'security services had beaten several women attempting to enter the stadium, breaking the leg of one, they were finally persuaded to invite a handful through the turnstiles' (Guardian, 21/11/2018). Cross-dressing has become a common tactic for young girls to get into stadiums. In *Off-Side*, a film made in 2006 by the acclaimed director Jafar Panahi, the attempts of young girls to get inside a stadium by trying to pass as boys is depicted with great accuracy.

Figure 7. Still image from *Off-Side* (2006) by Jafar Panahi.

It was around this period that the White Scarves movement started campaigning with the message 'half of Azadi [the name of the stadium also meaning freedom] is our share' (Nasseri, 2019). The efforts of the activists in Iran over the years have turned this chant into a public demand. In addition, the pressure by international organisations such as FIFA, although inconsistent, have helped the cause. On one occasion a group of 500 selected women were

granted permission to enter stadiums (Taylor, 2018) and in October 2019 for the first time after 40 years 3500 women were allowed to watch a national match in a stadium, in a section segregated with metal fences and guarded by female police officers. While the authorities refer to the lack of 'appropriate infrastructure' for hosting women inside the stadiums, the same buildings were open to men and women before the Revolution. The extremists argue that men are half naked in the matches and it is *harām*, or forbidden, for women to stare at naked men. Their other excuse is that men curse and use bad language in stadiums which is not appropriate for women to hear. When Fatemeh Alia, an MP from Tehran was asked about her opinion on women going to stadiums in 2014 (to watch volleyball on that occasion), she said, 'a woman's duty is to give birth and raise children and be a housewife, not going to watch a volleyball match' (DW Persian, 23/06/2014). She was criticised widely on social media for not doing what she thought was the main task of a woman, and instead working as an MP. Reciprocally, men can almost never attend women's matches and there is not even a debate around men being allowed into sports centres to watch women's games. It is not even possible to imagine it becoming a debate in a country where women's bodies are so highly sexualised and excluded.

Figure 8. Iranian women at Azadi Stadium on 10/10/2019 (source: Atlantic Council)

C. Entirely Segregated Spaces

For the Islamic Republic, a prevalent solution to segregating genders is either to dedicate two separate buildings to the same activity, or to share the same facilities and spaces, but at different times to avoid contact and exposure. Swimming pools are either separate buildings for men and women, or more often are used on different days of the week by the two groups in order to avoid any exposure of nakedness between the sexes.

Schools are other examples. Since the Revolution, all schools have been gender-segregated. Men are not allowed to teach at girls' schools, unless under special circumstances where there are not enough eligible women teachers. The hijab is compulsory at girls' schools even though they are women-only places. Women were initially banned from teaching at boys' schools, but due to a shortage of trained teachers, they were then allowed to teach at primary level. Occasionally, they are permitted to teach at other levels too (SAMT, 12/08/2014). In 2011 a new law was passed to ban mixed genders in kindergartens, however in practice it failed and there is currently very little restriction (DW Persian, 08/09/2011).

Throughout the past century, society has never reacted to these major changes with the submission and compliance that the state intended; resistance and transgression have become a new force for the production of alternative spaces. Architecture historian Pamela Karimi (2013) discusses how in reaction to pressure from the authorities (either westernisation by the Pahlavis, or Islamisation by the Islamic Republic), private space has become the site of angry rebellion and subversion:

> For over a century, private spaces went through multiple transformations that were not necessarily linear: certain spaces, at some point overtly Westernised, were at other times modified again to serve their original, traditional purposes. At any given moment, tradition and modernity often "took turns" alternately, defining public and private spaces. When public space became Westernised and secular, the private became more conservative, and vice versa. […] As the post-revolutionary regime made public spaces more religious, people made the private domain more secular. There, men and women would freely mingle, away from the watchful eyes of the state's police. (2013: 163-164)

In her work, Karimi shows how the domestic realm has not been just the space of suppression and exclusion, but also how, through their use of space, women have actively struggled to open up

spaces for participation in society, as well as fighting for emancipation from the confining norms imposed on them.

Amir-Ebrahimi takes into account another dimension of space in her study of more recent changes in Iranian society. She focuses on the internet era, and how virtual space is intertwined with the physical realm to create a new public sphere. In several articles (2006, 2008a, 2008b) she examines the role of women's blogs in relation to the creation of new spaces. In a society where a woman belongs to the realm of *andaruni* behind walls and veils, Amir-Ebrahimi argues that to expose her personal thoughts and life is tantamount to breaking taboos. It is in this context that she considers writing about her life and exposing her intimacy to strangers on the internet to be an act of transgression. Following the famous feminist slogan that the 'personal is political', Iranian women use the internet to express their private feelings and thoughts and challenge the dichotomy that confines them to the enclosed spaces of the private realm. Amir-Ebrahimi explains:

> Web log writing is absolutely contrary to these traditional cultural attitudes. In fact, Web log writing is more about the "self," about "ME," about disclosing hidden and unknown selves, even if this self is still hidden under a pseudonym or a fake identity or is absent in face-to-face relationships. We live in an era in which "self-advertisement" on the Internet via blogging and YouTube ("Broadcast Yourself") is one of the most important aims of Internet users. Talking about one's self and one's personal life and sharing a sense of intimacy that until now belonged, in almost all societies, to the private sphere and among some close friends have become the practice of millions of people, regardless of traditional cultures. (Amir-Ebrahimi 2008a: 239-240)

Amir-Ebrahimi sees this as an act that creates a new public sphere that challenges the segregation and exclusion forced on women in the physical spaces of everyday life. Internet and blogging thus become ways for women to circumvent the restrictions forced on them in real space.

Although since the Revolution the Islamist state has implanted many divisive regulations to prevent and control male and female social interaction in public space, these norms have long been criticised and challenged through the everyday performances of people, especially women. My own practice, as I have already mentioned, and as I shall explain further, situates itself within this genealogy of resistance, notably resistance via social media and the web-based platforms described by Amir-Ebrahimi.

1.4.2 Bodies Contested

The presence of women in public has long been a moral issue. For centuries public bodily

performance and the physical presence of women has been associated by patriarchal society with a lack of morality and with prostitution. Historian Willem Floor quotes Jean Chardin (a French traveller to Iran in the sixteenth century) on how female dancers used to make more money from prostitution, and he suggests that this determines how 'public entertainment for women has not been considered a respectable job' (Floor 2005: 42-43). He explains that the reason why there is little written about female entertainers in general is that 'polite society' and hence 'literary sources' did not pay attention to them (*ibid.*: 23). Women did not feature among entertainers, either. Before the Safavid era, '[a]ll roles, male and female, were played by boys and men. The specialty of the adept dancers in the troupe was playing female roles. They imitated female voices in song and speech in falsetto' (*ibid.*: 24).

The situation changed for female musicians and dancers during and after the Safavid era (1301-1736). In this period, it was quite normal for female musicians and dancers to perform in public spaces, and especially at official ceremonies. It was also common for them to perform in private and inside harems (Floor 2005: 24). This changed in the ensuing Qajar era, during which it was less prevalent to see female performers in public, and only the women of gypsy groups still performed in public (2005: 24). But these changes were not quite linear, and the history of women singing or providing other forms of entertainment in public was more complicated. Iranian studies scholar Ida Meftahi, drawing on the ground-breaking work of ethnomusicologist Sasan Fatemi, provides a more detailed picture:

> In the Safavid era, female dancers accompanied the *mutribs* for public performances, while in the Qajar era, mainly transvestite male adolescent dancers (*bachcheh-raqqas*) performed dance publicly. Regardless of their sex, the public dancing bodies performing for male audiences were commonly associated with overt sexuality and prostitution. (Meftahi 2016: 8)

As women were not welcomed in public, either as performers or as audience members, there are reports in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of them having their own exclusive theatres and forms of entertainment inside the *andaruni*:

> Thalasso was the first who drew attention to the existence of exclusive female theatre, which he considered proof of the total exclusion of Iranian women from society. Galunov, some 25 years later, was the second person to discuss this form of theatre, which he called theatre of the Iranian women's quarters (*anderun*). He noted that that was rapidly disappearing from the everyday life. (Floor 2005: 60)

This restriction on women's presence was not applicable to all women and in fact in the late Qajar period, one of the solutions for including women in performances was to bring women of other backgrounds. 'The problem of casting women was partially resolved in the 1920s by the recruitment of non-Iranian or non-Muslim (mostly Armenian) women to the Iranian stage, since this was generally not considered controversial' (Meftahi 2016: 20).

The Pahlavis encouraged women to participate and contribute to society, helping to open up the art scene for female performers and entertainers, as Karimi explains:

> The Pahlavis invited women to participate in architectural practice and public discourse as designers, consumers, and users, but these endeavours were mere images of reform and modernity. The traditional gendered spaces lingered well into the late 1970s within the context of less-privileged families–especially those who emigrated from rural areas to cities. Despite all the aforementioned changes, and forty years after Reza Shah's 1936 ban on women's veiling, many Iranian men and women still felt uncomfortable socialising together. (Karimi 2013: 152-154)

The Phalavis' attempt, as Karimi notes, led to an uneven development in gender equality, since it was not a comprehensive plan to include all socio-geographical groups.

After Reza Shah's abdication in August 1941, a relatively open political space existed in which 'secularising policies' were criticised. Meftahi argues that the forced unveiling (*kashf-e hijab*) introduced in 1936 led to a new understanding of the threat of women's presence in public spaces, shaped by Islamists:

> Concerned with the social consequence of unveiling, religiously oriented authors' anxieties over the presence and sexual effects of the unveiled female bodies in public led to the emergence of a new meaning for "prostitution" (*fahsha*) that linked venereal diseases to unveiled public female bodies. […] The public practices, spaces, and media that presumably sexually affected the participants, leading to unbridled interaction with the opposite sex, as well as those acts that resembled the performance or exhibition of *fahsha* and "sinful actions" (*munkir*), were also perceived as *fahsha*. (Meftahi 2016: 136)

This Islamist ideology, politicised in the 1940s, was to form the foundations of the Islamic Revolution's gender segregation laws forty years later.

With the introduction of the Revolutionaries after 1979, the situation developed exponentially and the Islamist agenda took control over both public space and private lives. As the new regime developed, 'its leaders and ideologues reacted strongly against Western-based Pahlavi reforms and global influences. Whether focused on women or buildings, their ideas were often based on dichotomies of "public" and "private", "foreign" and "local"' (Karimi 2013: 156). This approach put the binary back in place. They implemented not just the gender segregation I

elaborated in the previous section, but in addition, the norms that kept the sexes separate, which were imposed on female bodies. As Karimi explains:

> Women were often blamed for not covering themselves properly. If rules regarding the separation of public and private life were broken–such as walking hand-in-hand with *nā-mahram* men; or those regarding gendered spaces–for example, using the "wrong-sex" university stairwell, women were the ones subject to accusation rather than their male counterparts. Women were constantly harassed by the *basīj*–the paramilitary volunteer militia established in 1979–for improper behaviour or incorrect wearing of the hijab. (Karimi 2013: 160)

As I have already explained, the Islamic Republic doctrines 'advocated the concealment of women's bodies as a way to protect the larger society from the manipulation of capitalism and imperialism' (Karimi 2013: 156).

The obligations of the dress code and to behave demurely, reinforced through norms and by the law, play an affective role in women's lives and create serious obstacles for them. While acknowledging the creative tactics they use to circumvent the severe limitations to all aspects of women's lives in Iran, it is important to understand the toll that these limitations and restrictions take on their bodies and wellbeing. Since the early days after the Revolution when there were rumours about the compulsory hijab, there have been protests and resistance against it. Although the compulsory hijab only refers to the parts of the body that must be covered, the whole female body apart from the face and palms, notably the body's perceived curvaceousness, must be concealed. Many places, such as universities, government buildings, mosques and sacred places stop women without a *chador* (head-to-floor black veil) from entering. In a controversial case, some hospitals have even refused to let women enter with other outfits, or if they are wearing makeup (ISNA, 12/01/2018). It appears that the *chador* is also the unwritten dress code to enter high-ranking politics. Among politicians and officials there is a consensus that the president's consultants and MPs never appear without the *chador*, even if they did not wear it before they began their official job.

In addition to the cultural implications of the forced hijab, there are also other impacts on women's lives. Research suggests that covering the body results in vitamin D deficiency in Iranian women, which inevitably affects their health (Maghzi et al, 2013). In addition, the culture of

covering the body and acting demurely has, for decades, excluded women from playing an active role in public space. Although this has changed somewhat, and more and more women and girls are being seen active in public, women's bodily activities are still problematic in public space. In 2017, a marathon was held in Tehran. Two days before, the route for women was changed and separated from the main route. Men could run 42 kilometres in the city, whereas women were moved to a park in the suburbs and their route was only 10 kilometres. According to reports, women were also given *maghna'e* and *manto*, a formal outfit that is used in official places, which is not in any way comfortable for sports (Jamali, 21/03/2017). In 2018, in response to the lack of sufficient physical activities for schoolgirls, the Minister of Sports and Health said that 'high-rise buildings stop school girls from physical exercises in schoolyards.' Because *nāmahram* men (strangers) can look into these school playgrounds and are able to see the girls when they are doing sports and exercises, physical activity for girls has been stopped in many schools (Borna News, 12/06/2018).

As different performing arts were banned by the Islamic regime, dance and singing also came under heavy censorship with the establishment of the Islamic Republic. In "Dancing into Alternative Realities" (2022), I explain extensively the historical as well as contemporary situation for female dancers in Iran. Women's voices are another aspect of their bodily existence and expression that has undergone huge suppression and censorship throughout the centuries. Although never passed as a law, singing solo for women has been banned since the Revolution. This is the topic of my other article, "Song of Disobedience" (2022), where I elaborate in detail the ban on women's voices, illustrating this restriction with many examples of singers who have been persecuted and harassed by the authorities. In order to avoid repetition, in this dissertation I merely mention dance and singing, which are discussed in detail in my two articles.

These laws and restrictions, which I have described at length, just show the tip of the iceberg. As the restrictions and red lines remain prominent, transgressions become inevitable. Despite these limitations imposed on women's bodies, on their performances and through limiting or totally banning their access to certain spaces, they have been creating tactics and applying them to their daily lives to reclaim spaces and their agency over their bodies. A growing part of

society supports equal access and rights, thus women are not alone in their battle against the Islamist patriarchy. The opponents of gender discrimination and segregation are gaining a louder voice among cultural public figures, academics and even in the body of the government. Said Moidfar, a sociologist based in Iran, argues that gender segregation leads to domestic violence because the restriction on interaction means different genders do not have enough chance to form a deep understanding of each other. 'One of the consequences of gender segregation is the increase in domestic violence. The less the two genders know about each other, the less they interact and this can lead to the increase in domestic violence' (Iran Society of Sociologists, 2016). Shahla Ezazi, another Iranian sociologist, believes that women and young people have a more progressive and practical understanding of the private and public, rendering the regime's policies futile. She argues:

> Despite the very traditional approach of the government to the private realm, women and young people have a modern and alternative understanding of it. This has led the state policies of the public and private to fail. The state's new strategy is to keep women away from the public realm. The state tries to manipulate the public sphere, in order to reinforce patriarchal order within private space. For this, they put obstacles in women's way to keep them away from the job market or keep them out of the important finance zones as well as keeping them in inferior financial and social roles. (Iran Society of Sociologists, 01/03/2016)

On a similar note, in an interview in 2016, an MP from Tehran, Tayebeh Siavooshi, stated that 'women in Iran are way ahead of their representation in the national media, and there is no compatibility between them and the image broadcasted, which is very unpleasant' (ILNA, 23/07/2017).

This incompatibility between state-sanctioned image and women's everyday life means that women are living different realities from the ideologies imposed on them. Transgression has become a prevalent act for Iranian women as they are trapped in a triad of *urf* – implicit norms – sharia and law, where boundaries blur, overlap and ultimately contradict themselves. Contradiction and vagueness in many parts of the law, *urf* and sharia have rendered disobedience somehow inevitable. Singing, as an example, has never been banned by the law. As far as sharia goes, some clerics have declared singing totally *haram* for women, whereas others have condoned singing under special conditions. According to *urf*, for some fragments of society singing is completely acceptable, and for other parts, it is taboo. This contradictory and confusing situation applies to many other aspects of everyday life, and women are constantly trapped in different sets

of norms and interpretations that can turn what they do into transgression.

Chapter Two. Methodology and Practice

I began working on the projects discussed in this thesis when I was a student living in the UK. I moved to London in the aftermath of the controversial 2009 presidential election followed by the widespread pro-democracy Green Movement protests in Iran. Living abroad as an Iranian student in times of uncertainty, I witnessed how so many Iranians were forced to make the difficult choice between living in increasing sociopolitical oppression and economic hardship, or finding themselves exiles and refugees locked out of their homeland. Every now and then threats of yet another war in the region, and the possible invasion of Iran by the USA, appeared in the Western media, Iran's economy was suffering, the currency was in constant devaluation, and the political atmosphere was tightening again on any criticism against the Islamic Republic. It was in these circumstances that I found myself as a feminist artist challenging the suffocating gender norms in Iran, and slowly feeling that the door I tried so hard to keep open between inside and outside, was being slammed in my face. Having the privilege of moving between London and Tehran for several years helped me to position myself at a distance from my everyday Iranian life. The experience of living aways from extremely restrictive gender norms and the constant policing of my body, enabled me to gain new embodied knowledge about my own performances.

This concept of critical distance is widely mentioned in studies on diaspora or exile. Daryoush Shayegan, an Iranian philosopher who has published extensively on the relationship between the East and the West, writes of his teenage years when he was sent to Britain to study, and his first experience of being away from Iran: 'thanks to my stay in Europe, I had acquired a kind of ability to distance myself from things' (1997, 11). He further explains how this distance became a shaping factor in his vision of Iranian culture, and helped him develop a critical distance from both Eastern and Western cultures (1997). For me personally, this distance not only helped me with shaping a more comprehensible understanding from the outside of the relationship of bodies and spaces, but also the new lived experiences inspired and reaffirmed the alternatives I was searching for. In this liminal position of neither here nor there, I began to create a third space, by performing the alternative, the change, the future. To borrow the words of geographer Tariq Jazeel, the position of diaspora or exile has enabled me to create "political intervention" through transgressive performances (2005). In analysing a novel by a Sri Lankan author in exile, Jazeel explains how through writing about the life of a queer boy from an oppressed Tamil background, the writer is intervening into the sociopolitical order of life in modern Sri Lanka:

> This type of writing "out of place" does more than describe from a distance the world such authors have left behind. It is precisely this distance, and the ability to gaze back at and across it that in fact opens new doors and finds new angles through which to enter the social and political reality of those worlds. (2005: 236)

Jazeel then goes on to call this kind of diasporic literature 'political interventions into the

complexion of the modern Sri Lankan nation-state' (2005: 237).

Although the insider/outsider position gave me certain privileges as mentioned here, with the path I had chosen the anxiety of crossing the borders each time grew larger. The increasing attention to my radical activities meant that eventually I found myself in London in the most vulnerable position, not being able to go back home. Although physically in a perfectly safe place, this final step was, to me, like a tremendous mental torture. On one hand my family in Iran have always been exposed to threats and violence owing to my activities, from the Islamic Republic's authorities. On the other hand, the pain of being deprived of my home, which was for many years at the core of my research and practice, was crippling. This situation is, however, by no means unique. Many Iranians including scholars, activists, journalists, and artists eventually had to come to this point.

In the years following my final physical rupture with Iran, I tried to find creative and performative ways to expand my embodied knowledge of the experience of women in Iran, through the bodies of other women. By opening up my practice to participation with these other women, I accepted my new painful reality, but began to challenge its limits by connecting to others. As Clare Finburgh Delijani, in her study of diaspora in contemporary French theatre writes: 'For millennia migration has defined human activity […] Travel and mobility do not, however, automatically generate transnational praxis, cultural bricolage and fluid syncretism' (2023). Although my personal circumstances put me in a privileged position for having safety and stability in my everyday life, my extended network is always fragile and exposed to risk as a consequence of my doings. This obviously prevents me from enjoying the peaceful and comfortable position many scholars from other parts of the world residing in the Global North might find themselves in. Over the years, language and cultural barriers have also added to the complexities of working across two countries.

I was born after the Revolution. I have never experienced spaces in Iran being controlled under a different set of rules from those imposed by the Islamic regime. Gender segregation, forced Islamic dress code and behaviour, and extensive surveillance over every act, were already in place before I came into the world. Despite all this, spatial segregation and bodily norms and

restrictions have not determined my life, nor those of others. Learning about spatial order for the purposes of this dissertation has made me ask myself how we create spaces of freedom in our everyday lives. This study addresses my very personal questions and contradictory feelings about our lives under these oppressive social orders. My Practice Research addresses the ways in which transgressive performances of everyday life challenge the power structure of social spaces and the hegemony of the state over the public sphere. It proposes a deeper understanding of the forces that shape the spatial dynamics of everyday sites. Focusing specifically on gender segregation, it explores the ways in which women move through space, expand their territory, perform it in unconventional ways, reclaim it for themselves and re-appropriate it in their own way. To understand all these dimensions, I propose that the focus must be primarily on the body. My Practice Research is situated at the intersection of multiple disciplines, including performance studies, gender studies, and human geography. The methods and practices used to produce and collect data are thus also interdisciplinary in nature.

In this chapter, I explore the different methodological approaches in these different fields that address the study of body and space, and explain the basis on which I have designed my performance-based mixed methods to generate and collect information. I then proceed to elaborate on the practice that I have undertaken for this study. Finally, the methodology and practice will incorporate insights from both practice-based and qualitative research methods.

This chapter is composed of two sections. First, I explore recent theoretical developments in both the disciplines of performance studies and human geography, where there are similar approaches to perceiving research itself as a performance. The second section is dedicated to the methods applied in this research and the practice I have designed and executed in order to gather and produce the data needed for my study. My practice consists of three main bodies of work: individual performance interventions as an artist and scholar (used in my performance and article *Sleeping with Tehran* (2016); the participatory site-specific online project called *Radio Khiaban* designed specifically for this Practice Research project, and including in-depth interviews with performers who use intervention tactics in their own practice along with analysis of their work, used for *Radio Khiaban* project and the “Song of Disobedience” paper (Zavarei 2022b); and in-depth open-ended interviews and performance analysis on dance practice in public spaces in Iran, used

for the article “Dancing into Alternative Realities” (Zavarei 2022a).

As the main motivation for this study is a very personal attachment to the subject, I do not try to separate the autobiographical tone of my language from the development of the research. I elaborate this personal angle in the second part, where I give a full account of my journey in order to outline the methodology and practice used in this research. It is composed of intervention, performance action, dialogical performance, semi-structured interviews, performance analysis, storytelling and participation. As the research is intimately related to my personal experience, I have to explain how this profoundly affects my work in two fundamental ways: first, to reflect on my own bodily understanding in individual performances; second, to build trust with the participants and interviewees.

This study is not a neutral survey of events. It takes a feminist position which aims for social change and disrupts the reproduction of patriarchal norms by intervening in the hegemonic spatial order. It stands in solidarity with the values and principles of similar studies – it is not done on participants or interviewees, rather with them as co-creators. Feminist scholars have written extensively on how research can contribute to social change in favour of gender equality by integrating feminist values. Empowerment and the ability to ‘effect “progressive” social change’ is an essential aim for a feminist research approach and process which promotes action and change through its methods (Meth 2003: 201). Feminist approaches encourage the inclusion and recognition of the social context in the process of research, as well as the social relations and affective reactions produced by the research itself.

One of my challenges in conducting this research has been studying something that is intangible and ephemeral. The most difficult aspects for a researcher examining the ‘sociality of public spaces’ or places where people are ‘routinely subject to interaction with strangers’, are ‘the routine, non-cognitive, embodied aspects and the solidarities that they form’ (Latham 2003: 2001). Geographer Alan Latham asks how these social relations in public space can be included within research if they are ‘non cognitive, and in large part nonverbal’(*ibid*.). Questioning the politics of site in everyday life, I find myself as a researcher and artist in a similar position. One possible answer, Latham states, could be to ‘construct a sensitively structured technique’ by which the ‘research subjects can find a space for reflection upon these practices’ (*ibid*.). In order to study the

ways in which gender performance and norms are reciprocally connected to the social construction of space, and how these structures are challenged by the performers, my performance-based methods are designed in line with Latham's ideas.

2.1 Performance as Research

In the western tradition of academia, the consensus has been that knowledge is rigid, rational and empirical, extracted from scientific methods and verifiable through experiments and repetition. The arts, by contrast, have been the site of emotions and feelings, non-graspable for scientific conclusions and knowledge production. This duality stems from the dichotomy of body and mind which creates a hierarchy between them:

> [M]ost academic disciplines […], have constructed a Mind/Body hierarchy of knowledge corresponding to the Spirit/Flesh opposition so that mental abstractions and rational thought are taken as both epistemologically and morally superior to sensual experience, bodily sensations, and the passions. Indeed, the body and the flesh are linked with the irrational, unruly, and dangerous–certainly an inferior realm of experience to be controlled by the higher powers of reason and logic. (Conquergood 2013: 43)

Performance scholar Baz Kershaw explains how throughout history this has ensured that the 'head and the heart were in conflict alongside mind and body, science and arts, culture and nature and all the rest' (Kershaw 2011: 63). This well-known version of the body and mind dualism associates mind and body with two separate worlds. Kershaw explains that this has caused conflicts in the relationship between 'the academics who created the disciplines and the practitioners who made the art' (*ibid.*). This conflict led to the removal of artistic practice from the conventional research process.

In privileging mind over body, conventional research methods study human life by producing texts and in practice they reduce the entirety of embodied actions and interactions into words. But what happens to those modes of production that are embodied, physical and bodily, if they are studied with the traditional methods? The erasure of the body from the research process has consequences. Researcher and practitioner Tami Spry explains that '[w]hen the body is erased in the process(ing) of scholarship, knowledge situated within the body is unavailable' (Spry 2001: 725).

As far as my own research is concerned, given that my focus of analysis is the female body

in segregated space, an embodied approach and a consideration of the physical and affective consequences of both the limitations and the subversions of those limitations, must inevitably be central to my approach.

With respect to the social context of this research, contemporary Iran, this duality takes a more complicated shape. According to Islamic belief and philosophy, which is a compulsory part of formal education throughout school and higher education, and promoted constantly through state-run media, the body is an object belonging to this (material) world, while the soul (although a different concept from the mind but similar in immateriality and abstraction) is an eternal entity which lives on after death and takes the person to the afterlife. According to this dichotomy, the body is of less worth as it deteriorates in this world and eventually turns to dust; whereas the soul is eternal and will be taken to the afterlife for judgement. Therefore historically, the body has been considered inferior to the soul. Due to sharia law, the representation of the body in the arts has also been frowned upon. Apart from in religious ceremonies and rituals or for religious purposes, dance, theatre and music have never been approved or encouraged by the clergy. For centuries, sculpture and figurative painting have been *harām*, as they idolise the body (Mashregh News, 2016)

The female body in particular has been targeted for removal from the public sphere. Considered the main source of sexual seduction and the 'symbol of beauty and attraction', and associated with the private realm and domestic space, the female body in Shia Islam has been forced to be covered for the sake of 'social mental health' and for 'reinforcing marital ties between wife and husband', so that sensual and sexual interactions are regulated and legitimised only through heterosexual marriage (Motahari). Many Shia scholars including Morteza Motahari have written extensively on the importance of covering women's bodies and delimiting their public presence and representation, in order to maintain the morality of society and, in addition, for women to protect themselves and keep their dignity in men's eyes. This, apparently, will prevent women from 'polluting society with sins' (Motahari).

This imposed invisibility has affected scholarly debate and research. While in the last few decades prior to the Revolution there were official attempts to bring women's issues to public attention, including the creation of the Women's Organisation of Iran in 1966, with the

establishment of Islamic laws after the Revolution, women's issues were again relegated to the private sphere. In the decades following the Revolution, with the hard work of activists and civil society, again women's matters became part of the public debate in the media and especially in the past decade, on the internet and in social media (Shojaei, 2019). Nevertheless, the official approach has remained the same: to criminalise being a 'feminist', and hinder open discussions and debates on women's issues (*ibid*.). With pressure from civil society and activists, women's studies became an official university course in 2001, but it only lasted for eleven years until it was officially changed to 'family studies' and 'women's rights in Islam' (DW Farsi, 23/05/2012). The strategy of the Islamic Republic has been constantly to associate women with family, in order to deprive them of their rights as independent individuals and citizens, and impose traditional roles on them. Despite all this, these boundaries are being pushed back more and more by scholars and students, and there is a fast growing desire and demand for studies of feminist scholarship, by women, on women, their experiences and their socio-political position within academia. As with other areas of society to which I have already alluded, resistance, opposition, challenge and contestation in relation to gender, are becoming increasingly integral parts of Iranian society.

Restrictions, censure and control of the female body go way beyond academia: in the arts, there are also limitations on representing the female gender and form. On many occasions writing about women's experiences and perspectives has caused trouble for writers and journalists and has been censored from texts. For those working in the visual arts, there are limitations on the ways in which the female body can be represented: nudity is not acceptable in official gallery displays. In performance, too, the female body can only be staged in very limited ways. As I have explained extensively in my articles (Zavarei 2022a, 2022b), women are not allowed to dance in public, they are banned from singing solo in front of mixed gender audiences, and in cinema and theatre they are not permitted to use their bodies freely.

The female body is considered a taboo and a very private topic to the extent that in many contexts, information about it is not easily accessible. In addition, the role of women in society is not openly discussed without special consideration for the traditional roles which have been imposed on them. This hush-hush culture has led to a high incidence of domestic violence, child marriage and sexual harassment, and the predator in many cases gets away with the crime with

impunity, as the price of breaking the silence is very high, in most occasions the victim does not raise a complaint (Euronews, 23/08/2020). There is shame in talking about the female body in any context. Women are traditionally considered not to have the capacity for leadership or management, and cannot be trusted with public issues as they do not benefit from the same mental and rational abilities as men. It is in this context that my research puts the spotlight on female bodies and their transformative power over social order.

The duality of mind and body has caused further removal of female bodies in other cultural contexts, as well as religious contexts. Feminists warn that the mind-body duality affects women in particular since they have historically been associated with 'conceptualisations of the body as an emotionally unruly and profane entity' (Spry 2001: 725). This alignment of women with the body and men with the mind, implemented by patriarchal constructions, 'help[s] keep the mind-body, reason-emotion, objective-subjective, as well as masculine-feminine hierarchies stable' (Conquergood 1991: 180). He points out that this division between theory and practice, abstraction and embodiment is artificial and arbitrary and creates obstacles rather than being productive. Breaking this rigid binary can expand the meaning of knowledge in order for it to exist on a spectrum which features embodied practice as an integral component:

> At one extreme, it is almost completely 'tacit', that is semi-conscious and unconscious knowledge held in people's heads and bodies. At the other end of the spectrum, knowledge is almost completely explicit or codified, structured and accessible to people other than individuals originating it. Most knowledge of course exists between the extremes. (Leonard and Sensiper, in Nelson 2013: 38)

To break this binary is to accept the production of knowledge outside the limits of scientific positivist paradigms, to acknowledge the embodiment, performance, and practice, and to deconstruct the hierarchical order of mind over body: 'Theory without practice is empty; practice without theory is blind. The ongoing challenge is to bring theory and practice together in such a way that we can theorise our practices and practice our theories' (Taylor 2001, in Berman 2017: 5).

This duality of theory and practice has in recent decades been challenged in a wide range of disciplines, and alternative methodological approaches have been introduced in order to bridge this gap and overcome the anxieties around the concept and reality of embodied knowledge. The proposals for a 'third research paradigm' go back to 1988, when Peter Reason recommended 'co-

operative enquiry', an approach which is 'with and for people rather than on people'. This involves, '[e]stablishing an aware and self-critical movement between experience and reflection which goes through several cycles as ideas, practice and experience are systematically honed and refined' (Reason 1995: 6).

Discussions surrounding Practice Research have grown exponentially. In the arts the advent of practice-based research has enabled the exploration of knowledge produced by various artistic media and practices, and their integration into the research process. Theatre studies scholar Robin Nelson argues that through artistic practice, a more 'liquid' knowledge is created that challenges the more established empirical and scientific approaches of positivist science (2013). Exploring further the effects of Practice Research, drama researcher Brad Haseman suggests that artistic praxis is 'performative', since it changes us and affects us in all different ways 'aesthetically, perceptually, ethically, emotionally, even physically' (quoted in Nelson 2013: 56). Based on J.L. Austin's idea of the performative speech act, where 'saying' becomes 'doing', Haseman argues that the 'creative art' research process, 'inaugurates movement and transformation […] It is performative' (Haseman 2010: 150). To him, this shows a new 'research paradigm', which he calls 'performative research' (*ibid.*: 148). On the role of practitioner-researcher, he writes: 'because creative practice is both ongoing and persistent; practitioner researchers do not merely "think" their way through or out of a problem, but rather they "practice" to a resolution' (Haseman 2010: 147). Owing both to the fact that Practice Research challenges the mind-body binary, and that it can offer transformative possibilities, it is clearly a method suited ideally to my own research.

According to Conquergood (1991: 190), the shift from 'world as text' to 'world as performance', opens up five intersecting 'planes of analysis', which are useful ways in which to conceive my own Practice Research:

1. Performance and Cultural Process.

This opens up the possibility of thinking of culture as an 'unfolding performative invention' rather than a 'reified system, structure, or variable'.

2. Performance and Ethnographic Praxis.

Thinking about fieldwork as performance is different from seeing it as the collection of data. This affects the positionality of the researcher and their relationship with the participants.

3. Performance and Hermeneutics.

'What kinds of knowledge are privileged or displaced when performed experience becomes a way of knowing, a method of critical inquiry, a mode of understanding?'

4. Performance and Scholarly Representation.

This posits rhetorical problematics of performance as a complimentary or alternative form of 'publishing' research.

5. The Politics of Performance.

Performance and power are related to each other; performance reproduces, enables, sustains, challenges, subverts, critiques, and naturalises ideology.

Deploying performed experience as my main mode of understanding, I use these five categories in the various stages of designing and conducting my methodology and practice.

The performance turn in the methodologies used in the social sciences has responded to the collapse of the privilege of mind over body, by integrating and valuing the body and its performances. Geographer Alan Latham draws on the work of human geographers such as Nigel Thrift in seeing social action as performance, in order better to understand this sphere of practical action. Latham goes further in his deconstruction of the practice-research, performance-text binary, to suggest that the research process itself can be seen as a kind of performance:

> This reframing allows for a more experimental and more flexible attitude towards both the production and interpretation of research evidence. It also makes it easier to think of new ways of engaging with [how] individuals and groups inhabit their worlds through practical action. (Latham 2003: 1993)

The integration of body and live performance into 'questions of knowing' profoundly challenges traditional perspectives on 'how knowledge is best produced, accumulated, stored and transmitted' (Kershaw 2011: 105). The emphasis on performance and the 'bodily being-in-the-world', according to theatre studies scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'create the possibility for the body to function as the object, subject, material, and source of symbolic construction, as well as the product of cultural inscription' (2008: 89).

Bodies are the main means to comprehend 'how performance operates and makes meaning' (Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 210). Performance studies scholars Jennifer Parker-Starbuck and Roberta Mock argue that, due to the interdisciplinary nature of performance studies,

not only bodies are analysed ‘in spaces of performance’ but also ‘bodies might become or produce performance spaces’ (*ibid.*). Therefore, in order to examine the production of space, we can also go back to the study of the body. Exploring new approaches in accessing everyday experiences of place, researchers Bijoux and Myers write that the world is ‘an assemblage of competing social constructions, representations and performances’, and researchers who apply performance as their research methodology, are ‘concerned with employing a range of conceptual frameworks in order to elucidate human environments and human experiences’ (Bijoux and Myers 2006: 47). The practice and analysis of performance therefore enable me better to understand and examine the social and gendered construction of space, as well as the challenge to normative conceptions of this space.

Generating data through semi-structured interviews, performance action, autoethnography, performance analysis and in-depth interviews, the knowledge proposed in this research is situated somewhere between tacit and explicit. On the one hand I am providing archival news excerpts and historical facts that depict the prevalence of transgression over spatial boundaries by women and provide historical context for the situation. On the other, I gather data through reflecting on my bodily experiences, and the performances of other female participants and interviewees, through dialogue and action.

While gathering data through practice and contextualising it via research, the main subject of this study remains performance. There is an increasing desire to study performance or things-as-performance in the arts and humanities. In *Practice as Research in the Arts*, Nelson argues for a ‘performance turn’ and an ‘increasingly accepted insight into the centrality of “embodied knowledge” in perception and cognition’ (Nelson 2013: 43). This focus on performance as research has two ‘practical implications of “know-how”’ that must be considered in doing practice as research: firstly, art practitioners take their knowledge for granted, and secondly, this knowledge is not easily manifested or represented in other ways (ibid). Although ‘the concept of ‘performance’’ has contributed a ‘new conceptual map’ to research and academia, various instabilities in the ‘diversity and ephemerality of performing arts practices’ challenge the ‘ideas of fixed, measurable and recordable “knowledge”’ (Nelson 2013: 4). This chapter thus introduces methodology and practice that can tackle these challenges by making the ‘tacit’ and ephemeral data of the

performance of everyday life more ‘explicit’.

2.2 Performance Intervention

Considering how performance can be studied as research material and used as research methodology; and how everyday performances and spaces can be studied as performance, I now elaborate the methods and practices that have shaped my Practice Research.

As I have explained, I was born into an Iran shaped by the Islamic regime’s spatialisation of gender and gendering of space. Therefore, I already had bodily lived experiences and memories before I started this research. The question that motivated me to go about this project was how and where did I circumvent the red lines and boundaries? Which aspects of my behaviour were taboo-breaking and transgressive? How did I create spaces of freedom for myself? The first step was to reflect on my autobiographical experiences and to take them further: to perform the transgression, and study it consciously; to make the implicit, explicit. Therefore, I started from my body and I designed individual interventions into the normative geography of space. The use of one’s own body by the researchers, and reflection on one’s own bodily knowledge, is a method that is employed increasingly. Parker-Starbuck and Mock state, ‘[t]he rise of practice-as-research in performance in recent decades has meant that many researchers are increasingly deploying their own bodies in their research methods’ (Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 223). During fieldwork trips between 2013 and 2016, I created and enacted many site-specific performances in Iran and although they all informed my understanding of my subject of study, I have opted to include two in this research: *Sleeping with Tehran*, and singing in Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque.

2.2.1 Individual Performance Interventions: *Sleeping with Tehran*

In 2013 I took my bedding and went to sleep in public spaces in Tehran. The aim was for me to blur the boundaries of the public and thee private by performing the intimate act of sleeping in an urban space. It was a reflection on my own memories of the difficulties of lying down in public as a woman: the simple body postures that were highly gendered. A woman cannot easily stretch her body, run, lie down, or perform many other movements without attracting unwanted attention. Moreover, most of the time a woman will be made to feel hugely uncomfortable if she performs any

of these movements in public. While a man owns the space and is confident with his body and his gestures, a woman often feels apologetic for taking up the space, and embarrassed and anxious as to whether what she does is appropriate or not. Reflecting on that experience in an autoethnographical article I wrote in *Performance Research* journal 'I am at the verge of an impossible state of being: a body that is both inside and outside. A feminine body, perpetually fragmented, partly belonging here, partly belonging there' (Zavarei 2016: 79).

In this performance I sought to work, notably, with the element of shock. In making an unexpected juxtaposition between the public and private space, in cutting a scene from the domestic setting and placing it at the heart of the public, I was turning the seemingly normal, into the abnormal via a technique of physical, embodied 'cut-out', 'collage' or 'montage'. This rupture put my body, a female body, at the centre of the focus and challenged the concepts of private and public as spatially defined.

This project is documented with photos. The photographer was keeping his distance during the performance so as not to affect the experience of the work by passers-by, and to avoid making my performance look and feel staged. In this way it could be perceived as an ordinary everyday act, as opposed to being framed as an artwork. This increased the shock effect on the audience. My reason for choosing to document the performance via photography is because stills offer the audience unlimited time to engage with the work, while with video, the audience has to experience the performance according to a real-time framework. Moreover, in the absence of a timeframe imposed by video, I could alter the sequence of the photos in order for my transgression to appear all the more out-of-place and subversive.

With *Sleeping With Tehran*, I employed a methodology whereby I brought together performance intervention with autoethnography. Tami Spry, a scholar and practitioner, sees performing autoethnography as a 'vehicle of emancipation' from the cultural and familial constructions that shape her personal and professional identity (Spry 2001: 708). She sees it as a self-narrative that enables one to critique the 'situatedness' of self in the social context. Reflecting on her own experience, she writes:

Performing autoethnography has encouraged me to dialogically look back upon myself as

> other, generating critical agency in the stories of my life, as the polyglot facets of self and other engage, interrogate and embrace. [...] Autoethnographic writing resists Grand Theorising and the facade of objective research that decontextualises subjects and searches for singular truth […]. (Spry 2001: 708-710)

Writing and performing about one's own experiences helps one to take critical distance from the everyday events and to be able to reflect on them to a point, as Spry states, where the self becomes 'other' in the autoethnographic performance (2001: 716). This critical distance created by performance ethnography is empowering for the performer/researcher, as it helps them to form a better comprehension of the personal event in a more objective ways. In addition, as Judith Herma states, it 'offers the researcher a vocabulary for exploring the expressive elements of culture, a focus on embodiment as a crucial component of cultural analysis and a tool for representing scholarly engagement, and a critical, interventionist commitment to theory in/as practice' (Herma 2011, in Madison 2012: 165). In my work, autoethnographic performance enabled me better to understand, in embodied ways, the spatial gendered structure of everyday life in Iran. At the same time, I used my body to challenge and contest limitations and discriminations. This goes well beyond my own experience and as my research outcomes confirm, since my contestation contributes towards protest and resistance among other women, notably artists and activists.

2.2.2 Individual Performance Interventions: Singing in Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque

In the summer of 2014, I went back to Iran for another round of fieldwork. Through performances and interventions, I was studying the normative geography of Iranian society and in what ways public spaces were gendered. I went to Isfahan to hold a short workshop on this subject at an informal gathering of art students. I spent any spare time I had in Naqsh-e Jahan Square, and especially inside Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, a masterpiece of Iranian architecture, built in the seventeenth century for private use by the royal court and especially the women of the court. It is a magnificent architectural site, not in use as a mosque anymore but only open as a tourist site. One afternoon, as I was staring at the ceiling and admiring the incredible geometrical tile patterns, I realised the mosque was empty. I took a selfie video of myself singing unveiled in the mosque, a 37-second video that a few years later sparked an extensive participatory performance project that only finished in February 2022. When I posted the video on my Facebook account, it went viral and

received huge attention after a very short period of time, getting tens of thousands of views. It was also shared several hundred times. I was the only person actually to have witnessed my own performance live, but by publishing it on social media, it was possible for a much larger audience to join the audience and together to reinscribe the space, creating conflict over who had authority over it. Who was supposed to perform there? What kind of performances? Recording that performance in selfie video format was the right choice because the voice was a powerful constituent component, but the fact that it was a low-quality phone meant that if I was caught, I could simply plead that my act was everyday and spontaneous, rather than exceptional, staged and calculated. Up until today I still receive pictures or videos from people when they visit that place. It reminds them of my video, of my presence, of my out-of-place performance. Women also began sending me videos of themselves singing or doing other transgressive acts in public places. These messages, photos and videos inspired me to do a collective project, in which I collected these transgressions, but also the stories of the performers. These moments and documents became the germ for *Radio Khiaban*.

2.2.3 Participatory Performance Podcast: *Radio Khiaban*

In 2017, I decided to make a participatory project based on the singing experience and messages I had received from women. When I started on this journey, I was not altogether concerned with the social consequences that might possibly affect my life and those of other women. As I mentioned earlier, I began with individual interventions. However, the texts and performances I published became quite controversial and on social media attracted a lot of attention, which helped me build a relatively large audience. This afforded me access to those whom I wanted to hear from, and since I was honest and critical about women's issues including my own, trust was built between me and other women, over time. Speaking of myself initially, putting myself in a vulnerable situation, being honest and open to the audience, attracted a lot of attention from women, especially younger generations. In this way, my project began to become collaborative and multiple. The women participating in my project have all lived in more or less similar situations, since we have all grown up and lived in Iran. The radical difference, as I shall discuss, lies in our respective familial backgrounds and belief systems.

My work attempts to fill the gap between the 'I' as the observer and 'them' as the observed. This research is conducted with women in Iran. I identify women not as an essential category of people who have female reproductive parts, but as a group of people who, because of the situations in which they are positioned, are subject to discrimination. Not all women are opposed to, or see this situation as discriminatory. This research is therefore confined to those who have shown interest for different reasons in being included in the project. I am not discussing women 'in an essentialist sense about all people who happen to have female genitals' but rather as 'the discursive category female/woman and the experience of being discursively constituted as one who belongs in that category' (Ellis and Flaherty 1992: 54).

I had learnt during those years since publishing the video of myself singing, and also inspired by social media, that many women were recording and publishing their transgressive acts, including singing in public spaces. Another reason I chose singing was that I wanted to focus on an everyday practice and performance, or behaviour that can even happen unconsciously. Singing is a professional activity, but it can also be part of daily life. Singing was therefore not too provocative, since the rules around it are ambiguous and it is not unequivocally unlawful. Since I was going to ask women to perform and record themselves, I also did not want to choose something that would unquestionably get them into trouble. Working with voice also had metaphorical layers in a society where women are forced to be silent, but find myriad ways to be heard: something visceral and natural, that in its own nature is a protest against the artificiality of discrimination, a cry for freedom, that links together women throughout the history of patriarchal normativity. The motivation for bringing others together was partly to overcome the ruptures between individuals, an act consciously chosen to create a collective intervention and to forge solidarity. This project is extensively explained in "The Song of Disobedience" (Zavarei 2022b), my article published in *Performance Research* journal, included in this thesis submission.

Given that my research involves a challenge to norms and rules imposed by the authorities, I cannot expect to gain easy access to the information I need in order to conduct my analysis, because much of this information is banned from the public realm. My project therefore involves gaining first-hand data by collaborating with women themselves. In this project, I inform the women of the intentions of my study, and those who have participated, want to contribute to social change,

despite the potential risks this might cause them. Instead of objectifying these women and their acts, my methods are designed in such a way that the participants themselves create the data based on their everyday singing and stories. My other aim, in gathering collective stories, is to prevent looking for the singular truth, and rather trying to open up space for the multiple, the multiple layers of shifting realities. The research in this way becomes a craft of woven stories, the threads comprised of everyday life, which reveal the silenced voices of women in a patriarchal society. Our practice is activist in the sense that it connects dissident acts of individuals, participants who join forces, putting fragmented pieces together to make a powerful image and action of protest: going from the individual to the collective.

Vulnerability is always 'formed and lived in relation to a set of conditions that are outside, yet part of, the body itself' (Butler 2015:148). Developing further Judith Butler's notion of vulnerability here, the specialist in art activism Paola Serafini states that, 'understanding that it is not the fault of the body or of the subject that she is vulnerable, but a structural issue, can lead to a claiming of vulnerability as an empowering identity' (2018: 95). Once I openly spoke of my own vulnerability, of the wounds, of how I have been suffering from the restrictive norms since I was a child, then other women started sharing their similar stories, ideas and views on those stories. I shared my stories of disobedience with them, and received their empathy. This was a turning point not just in my research but also in my career as a researcher, writer and artist, providing evidence of how research, emotion and performance are not all discrete categories, but are integrated and interrelated, where one informs, triggers, and evokes the other and vice versa. As I started to publish the documentation of my artistic interventions on my Facebook page, I began to receive photos, paintings, texts and videos from Iranian women of my generation from all over the world with similar experiences, most of them unpublished and kept private.

In Iran, social media is constantly monitored by the authorities and feminist issues are considered to be controversial. A woman who speaks up is not only habitually threatened by the authorities, especially the militia *basij*, but will also be despised by segments of society (Mehr News 20/09/2017). Bullying, patronising and judging, all pose huge pressure on women and force them to leave the feminist scene, no sooner have they joined it.

The data needed for this research is what happens on site, and this is embedded in daily

life. As my entire research project discusses the relation between these women's performances of everyday life and their production of space, I had to look for ways in which I could gather first-hand data about this site-specificity. I was on an artist's residency during the summer of 2015 at the Centre for Art and Architecture (ZK/U) in Berlin, where I explored different methods for generating site-specific knowledge. Eventually, I came to the decision that the interviewees themselves should record their interaction with the site, and their experiences. The challenge with the self-recording could have been that the very presence of the camera or of any other means for documenting the singing, could be intrusive and alter the state of the performance, rendering it all the more 'artificial'. However, this study demonstrated that recording one's own voice while moving in public space and transgressing its patriarchal spatial norms, could give a very close and intimate insight into the experience of the performer.

I believe that self-documenting does not interrupt these performances, if we accept the blurred line between experience and performance (Schechner 2002) Because the out-of-placeness is making the participant conscious of their act, experience transforms inevitably into performance. I would argue, therefore, that in this situation, the person is already evaluating her position, because she needs to know where she is in relation to others or an audience or, in this case,the authorities or members of the public who might judge her in this social context. It is within this evaluation that the citizen becomes a performer and a normal habit of everyday life, singing to oneself, becomes a performance.

Within this performance, the performer is already conscious of the scene, and of possible audiences, as I have stated. The others who play the role of the audience could come from different backgrounds and hence, different power relations could exist between them and the performer. Therefore, I would argue that the act of self-recording, on-site diary-keeping, mapping and diagram-drawing, would not alienate the performer from the act, where she is already distanced from it. The habit, the normal act of everyday life, has become framed, staged; and within this frame, of which the performer is conscious, recording would not be an extra source of interruption.

Working with taboos and social norms is extremely challenging. I anticipated receiving a lot of information that must be kept confidential from the participants' families, friends and

acquaintances. Moreover, I assumed that some of the content could be considered as unlawful or transgressive by the authorities, and people could potentially get into real trouble. One of the greatest challenges I have faced has therefore been how to not endanger my participants. Safety measures I have implemented have included using a separate phone number with the participants, keeping my emails and messages extra safe and monitoring their safety regularly. I also ask every participant to remove the content of our conversation from their devices. I used Telegram for communication because I can delete both sides of the conversation for extra security. I have asked whether participants wanted to stay anonymous and to my surprise, most want their real name mentioned.

The conversations began with an open call. In 2017 I posted a video on Instagram, inviting women to participate in a project about singing in public spaces. In less than 24 hours I received above 1000 messages from women showing their interest in being part of this collaborative work. I then explained the structure of the proceedings to each participant. I did not get to interview all those who contacted me as there were too many, and many of them decided, in the event, not to participate for fear of their own safety. Out of the 40 women with whom I had brief conversations, eventually twelve were chosen for the actual project. The next steps were: semi-structured interviews, the singing interventions, weaving the story and performance together with research material, and publishing the podcast, *Radio Khiaban*.

After asking the participants where their ideal place to sing would be if there were no obstacles, they were asked to choose a realistic place, somewhere that is part of their commute and everyday lives. In this way I wanted them to reflect on their somatic experiences of everyday spaces from a gendered point of view and record their struggle with the gendering of this space, during their singing. To some of them this was a way of activating the space in a new manner, whereas for some, it was something they were used to doing already. On these repetitive performances of alternative places, Bijoux and Myers write ‘while the patterns of everyday life may often be regular and routine, the same spaces can be utilised, experienced and perceived in vastly different ways’ (Bijoux and Myers 2006: 46). They suggest the combination of solicited diaries and photography as an option to document spatial embodiment:

Understanding movement through space of everyday life requires methodologies that can

> both move with research participants, and capture the flow of daily life. Solicited diaries and self-directed photography are portable methods. They can be engaged within the context of daily life and can offer more control to participants over what and how their information is interpreted and utilised. […] Solicited diaries and self-directed photography can create a space that engenders self-reflection and enables scrutiny, contemplation and deliberation of the taken for granted frame of reference of daily life. (Bijoux and Myers 2006: 58-59)

My choice of self-recording plays a similar role to what Bijoux and Myers describe here as the role of self-recorded photography. As I have already explained, in my case recording the voice is crucial and due to the potential risk of this work, it is the most invisible way of documenting the 'socio-spatial experience' that is 'multi-sensory and emotional' (Bijoux and Myers 2006: 44). Another important role that self-recording plays in my methods, is the distance it creates between the performer and everyday acts. On the benefits of diary-keeping, Latham writes that it functions as 'a vehicle for individuals to create a gap between their everyday self and their diary-writing self' (Latham 2003: 2004). This critical distance is especially crucial when there are extra layers of pressure and force from outside to silence the performer's expression and protest.

I would argue that the way I introduced self-recording has an equivalent effect. I gave each participant the absolute freedom to record themselves either directly to me, or without a designated audience member, and then to share their recording with me. From a security point of view, I did not want the participants to have any material evidence that could potentially put them in danger, using Telegram gave me the option to have control over deleting all conversations as soon as I made myself a copy of them.

The interview questions were asked in such a way as to encourage the interviewee to tell stories, to narrate their own personal experiences of the spatialisation of gender in Iran, and their means for transgressing the hegemony. It meant that there was much less of a rigid structure to the interviews, where participants were asked to evoke their memories and reflection of their experiences and, instead of answering specific questions, to tell me stories. The main difference here for me was that stories are not necessarily linear and neat. The storytelling integrated into the semi-structured interview opens space for the storyteller to be fluid. Ellis and Flaherty (1992) reflect on their own experience of storytelling:

> Our most powerful effects as storytellers come when we too expose the cultural plot and the cultural practices that guide our writing hands and lead us to see coherence where there is none or to create meaning without an understanding of the broader structures that tell us to tell things in a particular way. Our commitment to a realistic, melodramatic view of

> meaning and social life must be seen, […] as a form of plotted discourse that does neither us or those we write about any good; that is, lives may not have beginnings, middles, and happy endings; nor can they necessarily be told in straightforward, linear time, through representational, realistic texts. (Ellis and Flaherty 1992: 27)

These non-linear storytelling techniques were applied by my participants as I guided them through interview questions that went back and forth in time, following the flow of their narrative. It was also reflected in the production of each podcast episode. The different stories and research materials used for the podcast followed a nonlinear timeframe to recreate the participant/performer's untidy performative experience.

Eventually, the participants' performances of everyday life, as well as their public singing interventions, are contextualised as audio texts, accompanied by research material, and presented by me throughout the podcast episodes. The performer describes in detail her feelings and her surroundings before and after the singing intervention, why she has chosen that specific place, what she feels, what she sees, and then afterwards, how people have reacted and what her feelings are. In a follow-up interview a few weeks to a few months later, I ask them about the effect that the experience has had on their perception of the place where they sang. The overall experience of listening to the podcast, through its structure and collage of sounds, noises and texts, aims to stay performative, reflexive, nonlinear and subjective, 'for life is not lived realistically, in a linear manner' (Ellis and Flaherty 1992: 27).

I would argue that the openness of the interviews and participation used in my work, together with the platform I shaped through social media where participants and the audience could interact together, form what Conquergood and Spry call 'dialogical performance'. For Conquergood, a dialogical performance approach "struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another" (1985: 9). Building further on this notion, Spry suggests that dialogical performance aims at understanding the intersections of 'self, other, and context', and 'offers a critical methodology that emphasises knowledge in the body, offering the researcher an enfleshed epistemology and ontology' (2001: 716). For *Radio Khiaban* I made an Instagram page that has ten thousand followers. On this platform my main aim was to create a space where I could share the podcast and research materials in an interactive way, in order for larger number of audience members to

engage with the project. For me, this online space becomes as an extension to the performances, bringing them together with the dialogical performance definitions in order for ideas to collide.

I decided to use recording sound as my main documentation in this project for reasons I explain. In video, there is the element of visual which I consider to be unnecessary data for the purposes of my project. Moreover, video requires a camera, and cameras are highly attention-grabbing devices in public spaces in Iran especially when they are used by women: as I have already stated, on beaches, for example, women are banned from using mobile phones or cameras. A participant can get into trouble simply for filming. And if the police find the recording on her phone, she can potentially be in serious trouble and detained. The ideal way for the participant to record her stories, her singing, while remaining low key and not grabbing attention, is to use their mobile phone's hands-free function. Voice is the ideal documentation here, and not only for the security reasons. All the changes in the participant's understanding and perception of the site, her interactions with the site and the potential audience, can intimately be recorded through her voice. The intimacy of the voice, unlike the camera, which can make people feel more self-conscious, can ensure safety and the feeling of trust between the participant and the audience who listens to her later.

Moreover, listening has other benefits: 'Metaphors of sound, on the other hand, privilege temporal process, proximity, and incorporation. Listening is an interiorising experience, a gathering together, a drawing in, whereas observation sizes up exteriors' (Conquergood 1991: 183). Conquergood further suggests that conversation enables 'vulnerability and self-disclosure' as opposed to the gaze that can form closure; so by returning to the body, emphasis shifts 'from sight and vision to sound and voice, from text to performance, from authority to vulnerability', but most importantly from space to time (*ibid.*: 83). To understand the performative re-appropriation of space, through transgressive acts, I needed a methodological approach that enables me access to the temporal experiences of space. Site-specific voice recording that is applied here, takes place at the same time as when the body is reading the space, assessing its surroundings, and performing accordingly. Disobedience involves taking temporal advantage over space. The recorded voice shares the intimacy of the performer's decision-making moments, as well as her visceral emotions, which would escape the camera. She takes me, the researcher, as well as the audience, to her

place, not in a locational sense, rather, in the sense of her relationship to the site, and how her performance unfolds in time and space.

Ethics and challenges

One of the major risks here is my position as the researcher in relation to the participants and interviewees. In *Performing as a Moral Act*, Conquergood (1985) argues that dialogical performance creates 'genuine conversation' and that it is a balanced position, one that rejects four main unethical relationships between the researcher and subject: sensationalism, superficiality, selfishness, and cynicism. According to him, dialogical performance can avoid these risks if the researcher is mindful not to engage in: exhibitionism towards the community she is representing; infatuation for the community she is working with; plagiarism; and being too sceptical about the community. Conquergood (1991) further explains in a later text how intimacy and close connection to the community of study can prevent an imperialist and colonialist relationship and open up to new bodily experiences, rather than anthropological observation.

By creating a reciprocal relationship between myself, as the researcher, and the participants/interviewees, I have attempted to create a dialogical performance space in my study. The participants and interviewees were asked to record themselves whenever they encountered something, or remembered something they wanted to share. Although our conversations were often triggered by my questions, participants were free to reflect on things at any time they wished. The interviews thus aligned themselves with autoethnography and diary-keeping, which rendered my role of representing the participants much less hierarchical and more horizontal. I collected their nonlinear stories that they shared freely. Moreover, the participants had the opportunity to ask questions, and I was open to reflect on my own experiences.

When the participant went to perform her singing, she was invited to record herself beforehand and while getting ready and making her decision to go ahead, explaining everything in detail. Although some patterns and commonalities are discernible across all the performances, this individual interaction with the space enabled each story to become unique in its own way. As Latham asserts, '[a]n interview, even a series of interviews or diaries and diary-interviews, does not provide a definitive account of an event, place, or individual' (2003: 2005). Spry sees this

chaos and plurality as the opportunity for a celebration of meanings, as '[h]uman experience is chaotic and messy, requiring a pluralism of discursive and interpretive methods that critically turn texts back upon themselves in the constant emancipation of meanings' (2001: 727).

Latham argues that seeing the interview as a kind of performance helps us focus on the details 'in the sense of a fuller and more variegated picture if the interviewee', rather than digging for depth to shape 'the sense of a single unified truth' (Latham 2003: 2007).

The details of performance in relation to site make the performance-interview site-specific, and help the audience to re-perform the site through their body. They might react by reflecting on whether or not they themselves would be encouraged to or discourage from singing in the public space, and what factors might affect their performance and behaviour. In doing so the audience re-enact the space through their body.

Substituting photography with voice recording in combination with open-interview as a way of diary-keeping, offers a way to minimise the researcher's influence on what is recorded, as well as 'clarifying less than conscious experiences and feelings about daily life experiences of place' (Bijoux and Myres 2006: 44). The way that participants are encouraged to reflect on their daily lives and speak about it, also encourages them to get involved in the 'early analytical stages of the research process' (*ibid.*: 44). In creating a collective project, I was inspired by socially-engaged art (SEA) practice, especially in the way that it is 'characterised by the activation of members of the public in roles beyond that of passive receptor' (Helguera 2011: 11). Some of the defining elements of this form of artwork include:

> A: The construction of a community or temporary social group through a collective experience; B: The construction of multi-layered participatory structures; C: The role of social media in the construction of community; D: The role of time; E: Assumptions about audience. (Helguera 2011: 9)

When I mention participation, I refer to different forms of engagement in the art project. According to artist and educator Pablo Helguera, there are four means of participation:

> 1. **Nominal participation**. The visitor or viewer contemplates the work in a reflective manner, in passive detachment that is nonetheless a form of participation.
> 2. **Directed participation.** The visitor completes a simple task to contribute to the creation of the work […]
> 3. **Creative participation.** The visitor provides content for a component of the work within a structure established by the artist
> 4. **Collaborative participation.** The visitor shares responsibility for developing the structure and content of the work in collaboration and direct dialogue with the artist […]

> Usually, nominal and directed participation take place in a single encounter, while creative and collaborative participation tend to develop over longer periods of time. (2011: pp. 14-15)

Based on this categorisation, *Radio Khiaban* takes place in a combination of the third and fourth groups, in a form of co-creation, since participants collaborate creatively in the generation of the content.

In addition, the public on the streets in my practice becomes complicit in the transgression, by turning into individuals who witness the act without taking action against it. I assert that this inclusion is crucial in the study of everyday life:

> Transforming the 'public' into a series of individual collaborators creates a multiplicity of meanings and a complexity of social relations that in turn disrupt conventions of public space and stable notions of the public. This notion of the public as collaborator or active co-producer of the artwork or intervention is vital in thinking about a radical art that blurs the distinction between artist and public, between art and everyday life. (Parry et al. 2011: 28-29)

Art historian Claire Bishop argues that participation brings a new layer of authenticity to the work, since the delegation of power from the performer to the audience is not a one-way, downward act:

> In turn, the performers also delegate something to the artist: a guarantee of authenticity, through their proximity to everyday social reality, conventionally denied to the artist who deals merely in representations. […] By relocating sovereign and self-constituting authenticity away from the singular artist [...] and onto the collective presence of the performers who metonymically signify an irrefutable socio-political issue (homelessness, race, immigration, disability, etc.), the artist outsources authenticity and relies on his performers to supply this more vividly, without the disruptive filter of celebrity. (Bishop 2012: 237)

In the twelve episodes of *Radio Khiaban*, more than fifty women spoke of different topics related to gender discrimination. Twelve were the singers who performed in public spaces. Fifty different voices each talk about spatial discrimination and their everyday lives. The participants are from all different regions of Iran, from small towns in the south, to the metropolitan centres of Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan. They also come from different family backgrounds. Some have experienced support for their equal rights within the family, some have had to start their fight for equality from their very own home. This diversity is also reflected in the book I created from the podcast material. By applying different colours, I made the various voices easily distinguishable. The experience of going through the book or listening to the podcast, thus, reflects how I have engaged with different people with different stories, including myself as I wove in some anecdotal stories in addition to the research materials I presented or wrote about. The sense of authenticity then is

created through this participation.

Art historian Grant Kester uses the term ‘dialogical practice’, to explain the kind of art that engages with the community ‘through processes of dialogue and collaborative production’ (Kester 2004: 153). He writes that a dialogical aesthetic ‘requires that we strive to acknowledge the specific identity of our interlocutors and conceive of them not simply as subjects on whose behalf we might act but as co-participants in the transformation of both self and society’ (*ibid.*: 79). The creation of *Radio Khiaban* was inspired by the prevalence of transgression among Iranian women, and throughout the project I tried to create a platform that could bring these separate performances together, without diminishing their uniqueness. Although the project highlights the similarity in shared struggles and tactics, what is heard throughout the project is a collective of colourful and diverse voices, in a dialogical practice.

The Radio Khiaban project is now finished and I have stopped producing new podcast episodes.

2.2.4 Performance Interview and Analysis: *Dancing into Alternative Realities*

In 2020 I was invited by Grant Kester to guest edit an issue of *Field* journal on socially-engaged art criticism in Iran. When I began to conduct the research for this project and started interviewing artists and authors, I realised that site-specific art that engages with gender norms and the politics of space is not presented or published anywhere, especially dance-related projects. I got in touch with four performers to interview them for a piece I decided to write in this collection, including two professional dancers and one free-style dancer, and a photographer. This project is published in detail in an article called “Dancing into Alternative Realities” (Zavarei 2022a) as part of that collection, and this article, forms part of my PhD by Publication submission.

Figure 9. Kamnoush, screen shot of *I Want to Dance in Your Streets* (2017).

The essay “Dancing into Alternative Realities” includes the in-depth and performative interviews, as well as my analysis of the artists’ works. The interviews were both open-ended and in-depth, contrasting in a way with the interviews for *Radio Khiaban*, which offered a lot more non-linear autonomy to the participants. However, I built in participant autonomy in other ways. I started the conversation by asking the interviewees about how they started dancing. The interviewees were free to answer and reflect on questions for any amount of time and at any time they chose. This freedom created an open space in which they could record their voice anytime, anywhere. The questions were designed in such a way as to lead the interviewee to reflect on their site-specific experience at the moment of performance. Sometimes we would go over the same event again and again so that they could reach different layers into the experience. In addition, as a performer myself, I shared my bodily, performative and site-specific experiences of a similar nature, which helped to build deeper and stronger trust. In this safe space, many stories were shared, many in confidence, which will therefore not be published.

Figure 10. Tanin Torabi, film still from *Dérive* (2017).

I chose one self-taught/non-professional performer, Hany, and one award-winning professional dancer, Tanin Torabi, to gain an insight into the professional world, as well as the

experience of someone who is passionate about dance, but only uses everyday spaces for expressing herself. In addition, I included a dance researcher and educator Kamnoush in order to reflect on yet another aspect of the dance world. My last interviewee was Mitra, a photographer who has worked with dancers on several projects, exploring the relationship between body, dance and the city. From her, I could gain a different perspective, as she works with the medium of photography. I examined their work through their documents: Tanin makes dance films, and I interviewed her mainly about two of her works. In addition to the dance and the site-specific experiences I have already explained, my interview questions were partly focused on her medium of choice. The use of a camera in a place like Tehran, with a very high level of surveillance, is difficult without attracting the attention of the security agents. Therefore, I was curious about the contrast between the ephemerality and invisibility of performance, and the strong presence of the professional camera. With regards to Kamnoush, I focused more on the dance education and research scene. It was fascinating to learn how the similar tactics of remaining invisible and ephemeral were used to stay out of trouble. The interview with Hany was focused more on her bodily experience of performing freely in public spaces, and I invited her to watch her videos with me to reflect on them together. Mitra had sent her photos of *Ballet and the City* to me a year before I started this research. In that year we had had conversations about her work and developed a dialogue on body and space, which inspired her to do another project, but this time avoiding dance. Our conversations over two years exposed that she was increasingly encountering problems, which she shared with me in confidence, and she has to move away from highly transgressive works. As researcher I prioritised her safety and we decided to limit our dialogue to projects in the past. I gave her full liberty to opt out, but her choice was to stay anonymously in the project.

Figure 11. *Ballet and the City* (2019), photography project by Mitra.

In addition to the performers, I also use my own embodied memories of dancing at home, at parties, and in public, wherever we could have confidence that we would not to get into trouble. Moreover, I analysed a video that was recorded of a woman dancing on a car roof in Tehran a year ago. In bringing together my own narrative, the random videos found on the internet of women dancing in public, and the in-depth interviews with practitioners, I crossed over the boundaries of high-art/non-art, and brought together what is common in all these performances: transgression and resistance. My mixed method here enabled me to reveal how both artists and non-artists use similar tactics to circumvent spatial delimitations.

Documentation

Since the object of study here is performance, to participate in and experience the live event is crucial for understanding and making any judgement on the outcome of this research. Since the performances that I discuss here are not staged events open to the public, but rather

unexpected individual interventions, my subject of study is unusual, because it is impossible and against the nature of the work to invite an audience to witness it. Therefore, documenting these live happenings is an inseparable part of both the performance itself, and my critical investigation of the work. Artist and author Pablo Helguera suggests that in socially-engaged art practice: '[D]ocumentation should be regarded as an inextricable component of an action, one which, ideally, becomes a quotidian and evolving component of the event, not an element of postproduction but a coproduction of viewers, interpreters, and narrators' (Helguera 2011: 75).

There are different mediums and methods for documenting a performance and there have been many debates on the challenges of using each one of them. These arguments are usually based on the reception and experience of the audience who are not co-present at the time and space of performance. The elements affecting this perception could be argued to be on the one hand the accuracy of the document and how true it is to the live event; and on the other, what other layers of experience, presence and enactment the document creates.

One of the main challenges in studying performance is the fact famously pointed out by feminist scholar Peggy Phelan (1993), that performance is ephemeral. In addition to the anxieties around studying through doing, as Nelson, like Phelan, argues, the 'ephemerality' of the performing arts 'poses particular challenges to their inclusion in an already contested site of knowledge-production' (Nelson 2013: 3). For Phelan, the liveness can only be experienced in the presence of the performer and the audience, therefore the ephemerality of performance always resists the representational economy. The value of performance thus exists not in the representation, but elsewhere. To Phelan, the significant power of performance is that it becomes invisible, unmarked – the eponymous name of her famous study – and that it resists reproduction. She writes that representation 'reproduces the Other as the Same', and performance, as long as it could be considered 'representation without reproduction', could be 'a model for another representational economy, one in which the representation of the Other as the Same is not assured' (Phelan, 1993: 3).

Performance studies scholar Philip Auslander (2006), taking an opposite view, argues that, what creates performance in the first place, is mediation, rather than any authentic and ephemeral presentness. For him, 'documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe an

autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance' (2006: 5). Therefore, despite seeing power in the invisibility of performance, he acknowledges that the document can prove that an event has taken place, and that it has indeed left a mark on this world. He challenges the impossibility of documentation by pointing out the changes that have taken place in the notion of liveness over time in relation to technological developments. Therefore, to him, liveness is not a stable 'defining ontological characteristic of certain kinds of events' (Auslander 2008: 109-110). Opening up liveness to include forms of mediation, thus unsettles the essentiality of the specific performer-audience interaction. To him, the experience of liveness has become 'being connected to other people, of continuous, technologically mediated co-presence with others known and unknown' (*ibid.*: 111). But in this shift, time is privileged over space.

> It seems that spatial co-presence has become less and less important for a performance to be defined as live, while temporal simultaneity has remained an important characteristic, to the point that technologies that enable us to maintain real-time contact with others across distances are thought to provide experiences of liveness. (Auslander 2008: 112)

As an easy-to-use time-based visual medium, and because of its seemingly accurate visible aspect, video has been discussed widely as the most reliable method of documenting a performance. However, there are serious oppositions to this view as well. Video, like other modes of mediation, can never fully re-enact the live event. At the same time, this shortcoming is seen by some as an advantage. Kershaw (2008) argues that the partiality of video, 'activates a viewer-reception dynamic that is homologous to the now long-gone live interaction witnessed on the screen' (2008: 41). Reason also sees equivalence between video and performance. To him what distinguishes video is its features as a moving image which makes it a 'narrative of immediacy' (2006: 77). Photography, on the other hand, has been undermined as a recording tool by some, owing to the fact that it is not time-bound. However, Kairschner argues in contrast to this common understanding, that 'photography's freezing apparatus gives the spectator a great deal of time (a lifetime if necessary) to scrutinise a signified fused to the photographic surface' (2003: 13).

Phelan expresses her scepticism around the truthfulness of any image in general. To her, 'a believable image is the product of a negotiation with an unverifiable real'; hence the image as a representation of reality is 'always, partially, phantasmic' (Phelan 1993: 1). By shifting the focus from the authenticity of the image to its performativity, art historian Mechtild Widrich (2014)

challenges this idea. To her, the veracity of the image does not matter as it is not crucial for the speech-act to work. The 'performance photograph' she argues, is a 'historicising tool: neither the commodification nor the legitimation of the figurative act, it is a window on the past of performance, indispensable to the contemporary practice of restating classic events' (Widrich 2014: 53). She continues:

> [F]or a performative to work, its factual content need not be true. What is needed is a context in which the evidence is taken as decisive: in our cases, the image taken as historical evidence. This context is not a supplement, but the medium within which performative action unfolds. The social effect of performance art – its Austinian 'making it so' – depends neither exclusively on the force of live action nor on documentation, but on the documentation as the historical bearer of action into the future. (Widrich 2014: 30)

With all the complexities of mediation and recording methods, the ideal way of documenting should be different in each case, depending on the nature of the performance, the potential audience and the context. Based on the form and purpose of documenting, Peter Hulton has suggested the mnemonic AIPP in order to sum up the characteristics of documentation into four categories:

> aligned: that is, it and the documenter should be in sympathy with what the practice is doing. […] individuated: that is, it is appropriate to what it documents, but has a form and content in its own right as well. (This reinforces how documentation refers to an event, it is not the event itself.) 'P' stands for performative: that is, documentation is performative in that it functions on its own terms and relies on the perception and engagement of the end-user. Finally, Hulton suggests that documentation is also projective: that is, the document is made with future end-users in mind. So as well as the process of documenting, the documenter must envisage an audience […]. (Hulton, in Ledger et al. 2011: 167)

Documentation can therefore alter the experience of liveness by creating alternative modes of interaction. It can challenge the ways in which the audience perceives and interacts with the performance, by integrating technological mediations. By referring to the live event, a document can witness the past and carry it into the future. Despite the disappearance that Phelan claims to be the strongest feature of a performance, a document can tell something has taken place, which has marked the space and is carried through time; or can create an effect that has never taken place in reality. It opens up the opportunity for the performers, 'through the documents they release, [to] become both actors and writers of their own history – though of course, not infallibly so' (Widrich 2014: 73).

Finally, considering the transgressive nature of the performances discussed in this study, I argue that documentation itself can be seen as an act of political resistance against the hegemonic

power that denies diversity, and claims its power and authority over the space. In this case, the document not only asserts the weakness and partiality of hegemonic power in the past, but also envisions layers of a desired future over everyday spaces by multiplying and diversifying documentation, thereby broadening the archive.

Conclusion

For the three projects that I have submitted for this Practice Research, I have created my performance intervention mixed methods. Partly I have used my own body to explore the ways in which public spaces are gendered. Here I have also reflected on my autobiographical and embodied knowledge of the sites I have grown up in and have much lived experiences. Autoethnography and performance intervention has shaped my methods used in *Sleeping with Tehran* (2016).

For the project *Radio Khiaban*, I have conducted methods consisting of dialogical practice and participation, performance intervention, open-ended interviews, and dialogical performance. I have used voice-recording without timeframe as a way to keep diaries, to give participants enough freedom to share their stories in nonlinear and reflexive ways. The performance interventions of singing in public spaces, done by the participants, are site-specific and in line with socially-engaged art practice. In disseminating these performances and interviews, I have created a podcast platform (with average 20K listeners for each episode) alongside an Instagram page (that has 10K followers), so the transgressive acts can be documented and easily travel and weave back to social spaces through listening and engagement on social media. These are all explained thoroughly in my paper the “Song of Disobedience” (2022b) which is published in Performance Research journal, and all the information about this project can be found online (www.radiokhiaban.com). This project is also published as a book in Farsi, called *Stories of Street* (*ravayatha-ye khiaban*) (2022).

The last contribution is “Dancing into Alternative Realities”, where I have interviewed female dance performers, using open-ended and performative interview methods, as well as analysing their dance pieces through the lens of performance studies. For this project I have also reflected on my own experiences and weaved autoethnogarphy into the methods. All the

information about this project can be found in my paper for the Field journal called “Dancing into Alternative Realities” (2022a).

Here I have tried to show the importance of documentation when working with the ephemerality of performance, and given an extensive reading of approaches towards the study of body and space from both disciplines of performance studies and human geography. When the state denies and brutally removes any traces of alternative performance from everyday life, documenting these transgressive acts gains even more importance, as it challenges dominant representation, and create cracks in the solidity of the hegemony over meanings and definitions of space.

Chapter 3. Analysis of Performance Interventions and Interviews

This, a briefer chapter, consists of critical analyses of the practice and research that I have included in this submission: three articles: *Sleeping with Tehran* (2016), *Dancing into Alternative Realities* (2022a), and *Song of Disobedience* (2022b); one website, *Radio Khiaban*, which includes all twelve episodes of the podcast and a book in Farsi (www.radiokhiaban.com); and two edited journals: one special issue of *Field* on art and activism in Iran (http://field-journal.com/), and one special issue of *Spectrum* (a Farsi academic journal) on gender and public space in Iran (https://macholand.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Spectrum.Magazine.-Genderandpublicspaces.pdf). Here I reflect on my individual and collective interventions into the normative geography of contemporary Iran. As my practice includes a participatory project in which other women perform, the narrative is also enriched by including voices of others who have been part of this research. Here I address my main question of how site-specific performance helps to understand spatial discrimination in Iran, at the same time as contributing to social change. In different ways, hegemonic orders aim at fixing meanings and behaviours onto certain spatial maps. They also have the ultimate official control over the materiality of space. But what happens when bodies disobey? To answer this question, this study takes us back to the body and its agency, as '[o]ur bodies may know things that our more reflective intellects are unaware of […]' (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015: 117), as I have already argued in this thesis. Through alternative performances, bodies redefine social space in new ways: 'People read places by acting them. Our actions in place are evidence of our preferred readings' (Cresswell 1996: 16).

Among the researchers who work with 'bodies, embodiment and corporeality', there has been a rise in the focus on 'fluid, non-fixed subjectivities' (Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 218). Bringing together my personal embodied experiences with those of others, my notes here are also offered 'as "performances", as suggestive, open-ended engagements rather than definitive answers to the questions' of the interaction of body and space in the performance of everyday life (Jones 1998: 10). Performance, my main means of understanding, is studied as 'an analytical framework for social patterns of behaviour' (Madison 2012: 168). My argument also contributes to two questions posed by Kershaw concerning the main problems in employing Performance Research: 'Firstly, how can the ephemeral be of lasting value […] Secondly, how can the "live" of

the past be revived through its remains; [...] how might knowledge created by the liveness of performance be transmitted in its documentary traces?' (2008: 26).

The performance of everyday life, as the subject of my study, is inherently transitory. I argue that studying these acts can reveal the gendered structure of space, and the ways in which hegemonic order both exercises its power over bodies, but also provokes resistance and disobedience that can subvert ruling orders. Moreover, as I explained in the previous chapter on the importance of documentation, I argue that through these documents acts of transgression are proliferated, joined together and can challenge the meanings forced onto spaces.

For centuries, patriarchal norms have dominated space, notably in Iran, as I explained in detail in Chapter One. As I have stated throughout this study, women were excluded from the public realm, forced to maintain the domestic area and reproductive labour, and deprived of participating in male-dominated society. Over the past century, modernisation and secularisation have changed the situation dramatically for women in many places in the world. In most countries women have the right to vote, and the debate around equal rights for all genders is a high priority. With the advent of western values, Iran also underwent significant social changes over the course of the twentieth century. It was around the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11) that for the first time women's issues became part of the public debate, as I explained in my first chapter. 'The arrival of women in urban public spaces was the touchstone of westernisation in Iran, as it was in several other countries' (Amir-Ebrahimi 2006: 1). When the Revolution took place in 1979, those who supported it were hoping for a free and equal society. However, the Islamic Republic swept away these dreams all too soon. The first decade after the Revolution saw bloodshed and the oppression and even elimination of political opponents, especially the leftists. Tens of thousands of activists who were part of the force behind the victory of the Revolution were detained, tortured and killed by the newly established regime as part of a purge which allowed the Islamist Revolutionaries to become the dominant force in society. Although women were called on by the Revolutionaries to come out and support the Revolution at the time, as soon as the new regime became more established the tone changed and new policies were implemented to push them back into the domestic realm. Despite these attempts to isolate people, and '[a]midst the Islamic Republic's anti-East and anti-West (*na sharqī*, *na gharbī*) agenda, global culture entered the

Islamic Republic via movies (often illegally distributed), periodicals, video games, posters, and Internet and satellite images' (Karimi 2013: 6). Despite all the attempts to remove any non-devout, non-Muslim, non-patriarchal 'other' from society, different social groups continued to exist and although not through explicit political activity, people continued to fight back through civil disobedience. With the advent of satellite channels, internet and social media, a society propelled towards fragmentation began to rediscover its constituent parts and gained confidence in disrespecting the oppressive rules.

Social media today provides multiple examples of how many women are transgressing oppressive norms and seeking liberation in their everyday lives despite the regressive attempts of the authorities to make women feel apologetic for their presence in public. This contradiction has often been explained by theories based on the public-private dichotomy, as outlined on Chapter One.

Reflecting back on my own experience as well as on those of my participants and interviewees, I argue in this thesis that the boundaries between the public and the private are by no means confined to the materiality of space. As a teenager and later in my early twenties (I left Iran to study abroad when I was twenty-four year old), I had a rather shifting and performative relationship with space in my everyday life. Instead of the walls actually separating the *andaruni* (private) from *biruni* (public), it was my bodily performance that determined the privateness or publicness of places, in interaction with other bodies, and the level of surveillance and exposure of those places. To explain what is happening in Iran today, I argue that we need to leave behind and ignore these segregating walls and look elsewhere: at the body and its agency. It is this agency that is at the core of my argument and my practice.

My research results show that the fear women have for occupying spaces in alternative ways does not stem from internal feelings such as sin or guilt. They seem confident about what their rights are. Rather, they are afraid of the consequences of their acts, caused by the authorities and their loyal supporters. These persecutions are often justified by the persecutors according to where an act takes place, since ideology creates assumptions over space. '[E]xpectations about behaviour in place are important components in the construction, maintenance, and evolution of ideological values' (Cresswell 1996: 4). These values might not be consciously noticed, but must

be formed, guarded, reproduced, and maintained by the authorities, in order for them to be enforced. A belief system needs to be reproduced by people if ideological values are to shape society:

> It is important to keep in mind that one of the most important functions of ideology is to veil the overt power relations obtaining in society at a particular moment in history by making them appear to be part of the natural, eternal order of things. It is also important to remember that symbolic power is invisible and can be exercised only with the complicity of those who fail to recognise either that they submit to it or that they exercise it." (p. 2) [...] ideology is successful precisely to the degree that its views are shared by those who exercise power and those who submit to it. (Nochlin 1988: 8)

It is exactly by leaving this value system and rejecting internal control that bodies take back agency and begin to perform outside the poles of the binarist gender spectrum that has been imposed on them by patriarchal Islamic order. Walls become futile when bodies do not conform to the norms on either side of them. Bodies disobey; hence, transgression of gendered spatial norms becomes inevitable.

This interruption often means the gendered body is located somewhere, or does something that is not appropriate. The female body belongs to the domestic sphere and if it appears in public, there are rules and restrictions to control its appearance, performance and presence. Disrupting the private-public dichotomy is always at the heart of spatial transgression. A woman sleeping in a public space in Tehran, is a body out of place. While a man can easily relax in public, there must be a specific practical reason why a woman leaves the house. She goes out to do something, and that something cannot simply be sleeping in the streets. Sleeping is a performance that belongs to *andaruni*. To take bedding into a public space, as I did in *Sleeping with Tehran*, is to perform the private publicly. The passers-by witness an unusual scene. A clean, crisp duvet and pillow, shoes neatly paired next to them, and a young woman asleep. This picture does not belong in that place. It is a collage of *andaruni* and *biruni* that confuses. They might experience a sudden shock. The photographs of this event, on the other hand, give the audience limitless time to witness the scene. The removal of real time from the documenting process helps to break the linear narrative of moving from one place to another in the city, opening up the opportunity of expanding the act beyond its real time. In this way, transgression becomes recurrent and timeless. The simultaneity of photographs opens up the opportunity for several acts to take place at the same time.

Walter Benjamin famously discussed the element of shock in an artwork in terms of an awakening (1942). His argument of the progressive effect of shock in art pieces, especially in montages by Dadaists or in surrealist film, has been widely discussed. Rendell explains that Benjamin saw montage as a progressive method, 'because it had the ability to "interrupt the context into which it is inserted"' that 'hit the spectator like a bullet' (2006: 78). To her, this effect can go further than the moment of surprise. She explains that in order for the shock to be effective, the audience need to be able to contextualise it:

> [...] It is important, […] to recognise that the potential responses to a work composed of fragments are always conditioned by the extent of a viewer's knowledge of the original context of those fragments, and their experience of these new relationships in a particular context at a specific moment in time. (Rendell 2006: 82)

Artists since the historical avant-garde at the start of the twentieth century have explored surprising juxtapositions widely in their work. Closer to today, avant-garde Austrian artist Valie Export has worked with this shock and intervention through her site-specific performances, working extensively on the body and public space. As a woman, gender also plays an important role in her interventions, which often take place outside the gallery space. To her, '[t]he city is still a male space, but you really can make it sensual, and you also can adjust to it' (Export 2003: 149). In response to why she takes her provocative performances outside, 'expanding from the private space of the body, to the public space', to the streets she says:

> If I hadn't been provocative, I couldn't have made visible what I wanted to show. I had to penetrate things to bring them to the exterior. I wasn't doing traditional art, I needed a different audience, and this audience was outside the museum; it was only natural for me to choose the streets, the urban public, the "underground". (Export 2003: 148-149)

My audience for *Sleeping with Tehran* was a combination of people on the streets, and those who later saw the documents online on my Facebook account. The different ways in which the two groups engaged with the work was fascinating and insightful. On the streets, no one came to talk to me, no one made any comment. Only one old man followed me for a while and, walking behind me, contacted someone on his phone and reported me as 'a crazy girl who is walking around with her duvet and pillow'. He was confused and after a while lost interest and stopped stalking me. The unusualness of my act disrupted usual habits, and made normal things appear strange according to what Benjamin would recognise as a Brechtian distancing or alienation effect.

In this rupture created by this collage, one possible question that comes up from the audience's point of view is, why it is strange to see a woman sleeping, since it is completely normal to see a man is lying down and taking a nap, or singing anywhere in public in front of any audience. The very natural image of a woman in such positions has been removed from all representations of the female body in public space: even if one sees her in films, on television, in advertisements, anywhere that one finds the female body lying down, she is covered in the Islamic hijab, and her bodily movements are restricted and limited. Even in her most intimate and private moments, she practises Islamic norms and is covered and hidden away, in case she might be seen by *nāmahram*. This experience also brought new insights to me as the performer: why do I not feel comfortable lying down, falling asleep, whereas men would do the same everyday thing without thinking? By trying to fall asleep, I was reclaiming the space. This performance magnifies the ways in which women today are taking back the spaces of their everyday life: by performing out-of-place, by blurring the private and public binary with their acts, with their bodies. As I stated in my article "Sleeping with Tehran", '[t]he body neglects the roles expected of it and disobeys the order of normative geometry embedded in the place' (Zavarei 2016: 81)

If performance can create a rupture in the hegemonic order of space, can it also contribute to redefining it? The out-of-place performances conducted for this research prove that other acts are possible and alternative realities can take place. When I started receiving photographs and videos of people in Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, I realised the video had made a memory of that place for them, which they themselves had never lived. Because of the document, they felt the experience of being in that place when I was singing and spinning. This memory somehow functions as repeating the performance and for the viewers of that video, that place now has new layers of meaning. For those women who have similar experiences of transgression in their daily lives, it reminds them of their own performances when they watch my own video. It is empowering because it is a reassurance that there are others who also behave in the same way when they have the opportunity. To those who oppose discriminatory restrictions, it gives hope as it depicts an alternative space, unsettling the fixed narratives surrounding and delimiting space. Video also gives a sense of real time which affords the impression of something actually happening in that particular space. The filmic document adds a contradictory layer on top of the already established

meanings of the space: a building that is famous for being a place of worship and more recently a tourist site is now also a stage for women to sing, a platform for transgression. To understand the role of documentation in evoking liveness, I return to Kershaw (2008) once more, where he argues that the past 'liveness' of an event is an experience that can be evoked by the document. To him, the 'structural event/document similarities conceivably activate shared common senses of spectator perception-reception that regenerate such powerful energies, variously replicating responses in the lacunae that link events and documents' (2008: 41-42). He admits that this reaction cannot be promised, but even if there is the slightest chance that it does happen, 'degrees of ephemerality in documentary transmission may, paradoxically, have the potential to resuscitate something of the "live" in the past performance events' (2008: 41-42). While the state denies the diversity of beliefs and lifestyles in Iran, the possibility for alternative performance becomes vitally important.

When I returned to that place two years later, I was wracked with nerves. Two feminist activist friends had been detained for protesting against gender inequality, and owing to my video of me singing and spinning in a mosque and other transgressive acts, I was advised not to go back to Iran, and to stay quiet and invisible on social media if I ever wanted to return. Two years later, , my activist friends finally gave me the green light and I went back to Iran. When I entered the mosque, I was trembling. Thousands of people had watched that video. In response, I had received hundreds of messages and comments. Most of these messages were in praise of my bravery, but some criticised me for doing something *harām* (forbidden) in God's house, some even threatened my life. There was a message from an unknown Facebook user with a picture of a Revolutionary Guard, calling me 'a bastard' and threatening me with death. A few months after the first video, there was a series of acid attacks on women in Isfahan, where the mosque was located, and a few brutal comments even made connections between provocative acts such as mine, and those violent attacks. The acid attacks started around October 2014 on young women in public spaces in Isfahan. In no time, public opinion linked these attacks to the radical speech of the Imam of Friday Prayers in Isfahan, the highest cleric of the city, under the direct command of the Supreme Leader, who openly criticised women for 'bad hijab'-wearing and corrupting the morality of society, and said that to fight this immorality, 'the beating stick needs to be held higher', a

metaphor for increasing the seriousness of reactions to bad-hijabs. The numbers of the casualties of the acid attacks vary, but something between four and fifteen victims are mentioned in most reports. Going back to that place was stressful, as well as joyful. I felt that I had marked that place forever and had added to its meaning and memories; that when people talk about that place they might also say, 'this is where girls come and sing, we have seen videos of it!' When I was inside again, I thought I wanted to do something. I wanted to reclaim my place; mark it again and yet another time challenge the meaning of that place and what was considered appropriate there. I jumped, span around and did handstands. I span and danced. A friend who was with me started taking pictures. A family walked towards us. I stopped and got anxious. The mother was almost my mother's age, with similar dress sense and her scarf covering only half of her hair. She asked me what I was doing. I felt paranoid so I said 'nothing' and smiled. She realised I was not trusting her, so she explained: 'My daughter studies physical theatre in Austria. She does similar stuff. I recorded you when you were doing handstands and want to show her and tell her that I have met someone braver and crazier than her!' I smiled and said 'Really?' She said she enjoyed my performance, and as we were talking, her family came closer. A young woman who was with them said that I looked very familiar. I got excited but also anxious, and then all of a sudden she said, 'Aren't you the girl who sang here? I've seen your video!' Then they all said that they had seen the video. They asked if I wanted to sing again. 'Of course, but I'm so scared', remembering the past two years and the detention of two of my close friends and colleagues. They said they would stay with me and pretend to be my family so that I could sing, and that they would not leave that place without me, in case I got into trouble. I stood there under the sun rays that had fallen inside the mosque from a small opening in the wall. My voice was trembling at the beginning but then I re-found my confidence. As I was singing, a soldier in military uniform who was appointed to guard the mosque came to me and said to my face, 'Lady you can't sing here'. I stared back at him until I had finished the song. Then we said goodbye to the family and left.

This time I did not dare publish the video, until one year later. The way that family wanted to protect me against the authorities, the way they became my temporary family, is so revealing of how people are constantly aware of their environment and create private zones in public space. Trust and protest are what bring people together in acts of solidarity and resistance. In that

performance, my immediate audience not only participated, but also encouraged me to do the second performance. They knew me without knowing me in person. They demonstrated the increasing solidarity felt between women in Iran who, collectively, seek to fight in their different covert or explicit ways, to reclaim public space. They were complicit in my transgression by encouraging me, protecting me, and they even promised to not share their video on social media. While I was singing, there were other people coming and going in the mosque. Some were looking at me, some were very surprised, and for some there was nothing strange and they did not even look at me. This did not surprise me. More and more, we see videos of women removing their hijab, or singing and dancing, or performing other transgressive acts in public. What was once a huge taboo-breaking act, is now almost normalised. And that is the importance of the role of documentation, as well as the publication of documents on social media, and through satellite channels such as BBC Persian, for whom I am now a researcher and journalist, and who enjoy weekly audiences of 20 million, mainly in Iran. The shock loses its sharp acuteness each time, and what is considered taboo becomes normal through dissemination and proliferation. The possibility of crossing red lines becomes easier every time it happens.

This proliferation was the main inspiration for the participatory project *Radio Khiaban*. The messages that I received – more than a thousand – in response to the open call demonstrated that the tactics I used in my daily interventions to circumvent the obstacles, were common and desired among other women. When I sent the open call, I was expecting a small group of people to respond and I was initially thinking of making a montage video of all the selfie videos – similar to my mosque video. When I started to go through the responses, I realised they had potential to become a bigger project, something ongoing, as long as there is spatial discrimination and these bans remain in place. I thought of radio/podcast because it can intervene in space, and because it is the voice of public space. And I decided on *khiaban* (meaning street in Farsi) because it is ironic: street sounds masculine, the public space that belongs to men, and then you listen to it and all of a sudden women are singing. The element of Brechtian alienation already referred to in this chapter is also implemented by me here. This shock tactic contributes towards the nature of protest in this project, the desire to reclaim the streets.

The interviews with the participants of the podcast project have been very informative, and I

owe them a great debt of gratitude. From the first messages I received, I felt overwhelmed. The participants come from different social and geographical backgrounds. In addition to those who responded to me, I also invited those whom I found publishing their singing on social media. I started interviewing many at the same time, but decided to slow down, so as not to sacrifice quality over quantity. In “Song of Disobedience” (Zavarei 2022b) and in “Dancing into Alternative Realities” (Zavarei 2022a), I provide extensive analysis of the interviews with the singers and dancers, which I avoid repeating here.

Convening all my different practice and published projects reveals what the Iranian-American sociologist Asef Bayat (2013) calls ‘nonmovements’: ordinary people, without mega organisation or decision making, in small-scale performances of everyday lives, changing their destiny, fabricating an alternative social life, away from the watchful, censorious eyes and ears of the authorities. In *Life as Politics* Bayat explains:

> First, nonmovements, or the collective actions of noncollective actors, tend to be action-oriented, rather than ideologically driven; they are overwhelmingly quiet, rather than audible, since the claims are made largely individually rather than by united groups. Second, whereas in social movements leaders usually mobilise the constituencies to put pressure on authorities to meet their demands, in nonmovements actors directly practice what they claim, despite government sanctions. […] Third, unlike social movements, where actors are involved usually in extraordinary deeds of mobilization and protestation that go beyond the routine of daily life […] nonmovements are made up of practices that are merged into, indeed are part of parcel of, the ordinary practices of everyday life. (2013, pp. 20-21)

The three characteristics with which Bayat describes nonmovements, all apply to my subject of study. The transgressive performances by women are action-oriented, meaning that it is mostly the ban or restriction hindering their activities that inspire them to take action. As I have described extensively, the experiences of women in this project show that they all initiate these disobedient acts themselves. They are not waiting for a leader to follow, or for a comprehensive political statement to mobilise them. Finally, they are not inolved in large-scale political protests, which in any case, the failed revolution of 2009 illustrated the limitations of. Rather, they push for the performances and spaces of their everyday performances, expanding boundaries and normalising taboo-breaking acts on an individual scale. Finally, as I have explained, through the documentation and proliferation of these small acts, normative boundaries are moved on a much bigger scale, in

ways that these individuals might not have planned for.

It is impossible to make a comment on “all women” in Iran as the nation is such an uneven, diverse and fragmented society. However, from the evidence, information and analyses that I have provided in this extensive body of work, it is apparent that a large segment of women, by performing their agency, are increasingly breaking taboos and disobeying norms and rules, to create alternative spaces in their everyday lives. It would be unjust and misleading to measure their achievements by looking at the rigid regulations and normative behaviour, that has apparently not changed at all. To understand the extraordinary changes they have created, one needs to look at the increasing body of evidence of transgressive performances, from a range of geographies across Iran, and from varied backgrounds, with which women reclaim the spaces of everyday life.

Conclusion

My findings from my collaborative and individual interventions, in addition to reflections on my lived experiences, show that to understand how the transgressive performance of everyday life is opening spaces for alternative behaviours in Iran today, we need to go beyond the clichés of private-public spatial categories and focus on the body as the agent of change. Over-emphasising the materiality of space and its associated meanings, allocates all too much power to walls and their power to be decisive in the performances that happen on either side of them, be they conforming or transgressive. I argue for a performative reading of the interaction of body and space, where tactics stem from agency and subjectivity rather than a reductionist subversion of two sets of already existing architectures. My discomfort with the dominant narrative is due to the lack of flexibility in acknowledging the liminality and performativity of the spaces of everyday life. I have considered time, rendered in repetition and routine, to discuss how bodies can carry and even remove the walls. Common readings ignore the element of time and how it is interrelated to the production of space. As de Certeau writes:

> The "proper" is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time–it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing." Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities." (de Certeau 1984: xix)

Performance is temporal; as is the human means of control over the space which is partial and takes place in temporal patterns. By returning to the body as the main agent of interaction and occupation, and performance as the mode of understanding, I argue for the acknowledgement of bodies that gain control, take back their agency, and perform their subjectivity. This then leads to performances out of place, where bodies can transgress already regulated normative geography.

Tactics used here to create ruptures in the hegemonic order, as my findings show, can be summarised as follows:

- Unsettling and blurring the spatial boundaries of the private/public dichotomy, by performing fluidly regardless of the architecture of *andaruni* and *biruni*;
- Creating shock effects by collaging the incongruous and provocative juxtaposition of performances and places, and highlighting the seemingly 'normal' as problematic;
- Documenting the ephemeral performance in order to create and archive additional

memory layers for spaces with fixed identity;

- Integration of virtual and real space through the dissemination of the documents through online platforms;
- Creating a bigger image of the alternative, and shaping a collective act through bringing together the fragmented acts of transgression through platforms such as *Radio Khiaban*;
- Normalising the transgression by not framing it as ‘protest’ and instead only as snapshots of the everyday, therefore neutralising the shock effect by repetition in memory and documents;
- Evoking alternative memories of a place from the past;
- Repetition which over time normalises transgression and reclaims places through occupying memories and meanings.

While patriarchal norms are embedded in the materiality of space through segregation, the ephemerality of performance can be used as a tactic: the temporal over the spatial. Documentation then proves that the temporal has happened, then posing a challenge and contestation to those who seek to fix the performance of space: highlighting the partiality of power, the images can undermine fixed notions of hierarchy, patriarchy and authority. I claim that via these tactics, women today are creating emancipatory spaces in which to perform alternatively in order to empower themselves. I need to emphasise that women are by no means the only oppressed group in contemporary Iran, and many of the tactics argued for here are also used as acts of resistance in other contexts, for instance by LGBTQ people, labour protests, or different union protests. As an example, the LGBTQ community of Tehran uses Daneshjoo park in central Tehran for their gatherings even though homosexuality is illegal. There has never been an official announcement, but over time they have chosen this place as their stamping ground. The police regularly raid the park because this site has a contested history of political gatherings, and there is always a high level of security in place (Lashkari 2021). But over time the LGBTQ community have learnt how to use the space and disperse quickly when necessary. They use similar spatial tactics to women in order to circumvent restrictions to their everyday performances, reclaiming, redefining and unofficially making this site their own.

I should hope that the tactics that I have developed over the course of my Practice Research in order for women to reclaim public space in Iran can be adopted by artists, activists and people in general who are spatially discriminated against in situations beyond Iran. In the metropolitan centres of former colonies, for instance the UK, France, Belgium and the USA, spatial segregation is often internalised by migrants and postmigrants from those former colonies, who are made to feel out-of-place in public spaces such as art galleries, museums, theatres, arthouse cinemas and even many parks. Some of these tactics might be used in order to highlight to societies dominated by unconscious white privilege how public spaces are rarely as universally democratised as they are purported to be, and how the most oppressed members of society are often made to feel excluded if not by the law, then by centuries of discrimination.

The incompatibility of performance with the ideologically sanctioned material space creates tension. To regulate and oppress these out-of-place performances, as I explained in Chapter One, a new phase of gentrification is taking place where segregation is already embedded in the place, examples including women-only parks. On the other hand, the private sector is pushing back by providing liminal spaces where there is room for transgressing restrictive gender rules such as cafes, restaurants, shopping malls and rentable private gardens. But these do not provide sustainable spaces for women to perform equally, and they are predominantly available only to women from backgrounds with higher incomes. Transgression therefore remains the inevitable choice of protest against discrimination and for the reclaiming of space.

Over the course of this Practice Research which represents nearly a decade of my life, a 29-year-old woman and supporter of Esteghlal football club who set fire to herself, died. She tried to enter the stadium in February 2019 disguised as a man, wearing a blue wig and a long coat, when she was arrested. As I have already stated, it is illegal for women to attend men's football matches. In the detention centre, she heard that she might be sentenced to up to six months in prison. In September 2019, in front of Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Court, she set fire to herself, and a few days later, to everyone's shock, she passed away. Her death caused a seismic shock in society, with fury and frustration at the ban on women entering sports stadiums. Panahi, director of *Offside* (2006), a film about young girls crossdressing to enter the stadiums, wrote on his

Instagram account that when he made his film, he was criticised for making something that has an expiry date. But now, thirteen years later, women are still suffering from the lack of progress. Bitter events like the death of Sahar take me to a fundamental question: do these tactics and transgressions actually lead to change? Drawing on the work of de Certeau, Buchanan writes that '[t]actics are not liberatory in the material sense of the world: the little victories of everyday life do no more (but, also, no less) than disrupt the fatality of the established order' (2000: 104-105). It is true that despite the rise in transgressive protest acts, the regime has not backed off from their discriminatory behaviour against women. The production and control of space remains largely in the hands of a patriarchal authority with strict discriminatory ideological values. For social change to be achieved fully, we need material change in space as well. Lefebvre argues:

> A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realised its full potential; indeed, it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space – though its impact need not occur at the same rate, or with equal force, in each of these areas. (Lefebvre 1991: 54)

So the battle over space will continue until the day that the production of space acknowledges diversity, and respects the needs of those who do not follow restrictive Islamic codes of behaviour. There is incompatibility between immaterial architecture – the architecture of social relations – and the physics of space in Iran. So despite the allocation of heavy budgets to building women-only places, policing, monitoring and regulating, women increasingly alter the spaces of their everyday lives in their own favour, by performing out-of-place, by finding ruptures in the hegemonic order, and expanding these cracks. Lefebvre writes any '"social existence" aspiring or claiming to be "real", but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very peculiar kind of abstraction unable to escape from the ideological or even the "cultural" realm' (1991: 53).

I end this thesis by emphasising that the importance and impact of the transgressive performances that both I and my fellow female performers have enacted should by no means be belittled. They indeed contribute to the production of lived space through their prevalence and repetition and the integration of the virtual into the real. They seek consistency, overcoming ephemerality, with sustainability, by joining up across individual performers and creating solidarity and community. The conflict will continue until the day this group in society is also recognised in

the social order and production of space. The battle goes on, as tactics cannot in themselves change physical space. Spatial construction can create a new social order. To re-order space, to achieve equal access to space, we need to destroy the gates and ghettos. As Sanam, a singer and participant on *Radio Khiaban* said in our conversation: ‘Our voice penetrates through their walls and veils. Our songs shake their rules and norms. We have no fear in our minds, now it is time to liberate our bodies.’

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