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„Azadeh Akhlaghi´s Photograph Series
*By an Eye Witness* in the Context of Staged Photography
in Tehran/Iran"


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Agnes Rameder, BA BA


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## 1. Introduction

Contemporary Iranian photography is one of the most exciting art forms. However, only a limited number of scholarly publications are available about it. This thesis is a contribution to the research in the field, as it explores the placement of the photograph series *By an Eye Witness* (2009-2012) by the Iranian artist Azadeh Akhlaghi (Āzādeh Aklāqi) (b.1978) in the context of staged photography in Tehran/Iran.

*By an Eye Witness* shows seventeen deaths of freedom fighters within Iranian history, that mainly happened between the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) and the Iranian Revolution (1978-79) via staged photography. All dead protagonists were in some way politically active against the ruling elite, and if only one of them had not died, Iranian history might have taken another course.

My first encounter with Iranian art took place during an excursion to Iran in fall 2013 as part of my MA study programme with my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Markus Ritter. As we mainly discussed pre 19th century architecture only on this field trip, I became curious about other, contemporary art forms produced in Iran. The exhibition *Burnt Generation*, in which Iranian photography was on show in Somerset House in London in spring 2014, caught my attention - especially a group of works, with a content -obviously dead persons- I did not understand, and also the names in the captions of the images were alien to me. But, I was thrilled by the theatrical scenes, the detailed compositions and the thoughtful use of lighting. Later, a notion by Susan Sontag, came to my mind: "Such images can not be more than an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn […] Who caused what the picture shows? Who is responsible? Is it excusable? Was it inevitable?"[1]

As I was searching for a subject for my master´s thesis at that time, I did some further investigation on the artist and the series, until I decided in fall 2014 to write about staged photography in Tehran and the series I got enthusiastic about at *Burnt Generation* - Azadeh Akhlaghi´s *By an Eye Witness*. A lucky coincidence happened, and Prof. Dr. Staci Gem Scheiwiller, affiliated with the University of California, Stanislaus, and specialised in contemporary and modern Iranian art, was a visiting professor in fall/winter in 2014/15 at the department of art history at the University of Vienna. Here, she held two seminars on Iranian photography, both of which I attended.

1 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London et alii, 2004): 117.

I studied art history in Vienna and therefore, I am trained in working formally-descriptive and focusing on the analysis of the artworks. In Prof. Dr. Scheiwiller´s seminars however, I was introduced to the Anglo-American methodology, that connects philosophical theories to the context of the artworks – an approach, that I will partly also use in this thesis. Furthermore, due to her seminars, I re-thought some terms, and do not use "East" and "West," any more, as they are not exactly describing anything and are very dependent on one´s point of view. Moreover, they create a sharp dichotomy between two groups -not geographically, but colonially- and can be easily misused for an Orientalist reading. The term "East" is often equated with "Orient," understood as the backward and irrational "Other," while "West" is put as synonym for "Occident," understood as the modern and civilized "Self," as described by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978).[2] Therefore, I prefer to use the exact geographical designations, like "Iran," "Europe," or "Tehran."

After Prof. Dr. Scheiwillers´s seminars and months spent reading about Iranian history, art, and photography, I realised, that there is not enough research done, to write a thesis only on the basis of that. Firstly, because, although I started learning Persian last fall, however, my skills are still limited, and *By an Eye Witness* was only mentioned briefly and as a marginal note in the following non-Persian publications: Fred Ritchin describes the project shortly in *Bending the Frame: Photojournalism, Documentary and the Citizen* (2013), but mostly cites from the catalogue of *By an Eye Witness*[3] and David N. Yaghoubian mentions only the image of a shooting scene in Tehran University in his book *Ethnicity, Identity and the Development of Nationalism in Iran* (2014).[4] The Iranian photo historian Hamid Severi interprets the series in his essay *Mapping Iranian Contemporary Art Publications and Knowledge-Production* (2015) as an alternative way of knowledge production. He emphasises Akhlaghi´s extensive research and underlines, that the work provides historical, political and artistic knowledge and suggests, that Akhlaghi also conveys a message about the situation in the present and foresees similar events in the future.[5] In their article *The Narrative Reading of Contemporary History of Iran: A Case Study of Azadeh Akhlaghi's Staged Photos* (2015) Ali Sheikhmehdi and Forough Khabiri contextualise the series with Roland Barthes´ theories in *S/Z* (1970) and

2 See also: Staci Gem Scheiwiller, *Mirrors with Memorie*s (Saarbrücken, 2011): 41; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978): 1-28.
3 Fred Ritchin, *Bending the Frame* (New York, 2013): 42-43.
4 David N. Yaghoubian, *Ethnicity, Identity and the Development of Nationalism in Iran* (New York, 2014): 361.
5 Hamid Severi, "Mapping Iranian Contemporary Art and Knowledge Production," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Contemporary Art From The Middle East* (London, 2015): 82-83.

*Camera Lucida* (1980).[6] Except the last article not more than a few sentences were written on *By an Eye Witness* in the above mentioned four publications. Furthermore, a bilingual catalogue in Persian and English on *By an Eye Witness* was published by Azadeh Akhlaghi in cooperation with the Tehran-based Mohsen (Moḥsen) gallery in 2013. It depicts all seventeen images of the series, that are accompanied by eyewitnesses´ accounts, archival information and newspaper articles of the deaths. Moreover, it contains an essay by the Iranian-American literary scholar Hamdi Dabashi, who contextualises the series in *Remembrance of Things Past: On Azadeh Akhlaghi´s Photographic Memory* with the aspects of memory, trauma, history, the similarity to traditional Shia passion-plays and the Freudian uncanny. Furthermore, the catalogue consists of a short text by Akhlaghi, writing about her inspiration for the project; and a few lines about his feelings, when viewing *By an Eye Witness,* by its producer Ehsan Rasoulof (Eḥsān Rasulof).[7] A selection of newspaper and magazine articles on Akhlaghi´s series are listed in the appendix of this thesis.

Also, only sparse research on the history and development of staged photography in Tehran is available. Further information on this can be found in chapter three. Due to this lack of research, I went to Tehran for two months in fall 2015, to conduct my own field research, financed through a scholarship from the University of Vienna. There, I interviewed not only Azadeh Akhlaghi, but, tried to speak to everyone, who could give me any information about staged photography in Tehran. According to the situation some interviews were taped, some not. I prepared transcripts of all taped interviews. Relevant excerpts of them are available on the enclosed CD in the printed thesis. The page numbers in the foot-notes, therefore refer to these transcripts. Of the non-taped interviews I made notes verbatim from memory, immediately after the conversations. As they have the character of personal notes, I did not enclose them. An exception are the interviews with Azadeh Akhlaghi. I only taped one of four conversations with her, therefore, this is the only one, saved on the CD, although information of the other interviews also entered this thesis. Some of my interview partners did not want to be cited, these interviews are therefore not provided on the CD. In the footnotes, they are marked as "Interview of an anonymous person with the Author." I am aware, that this goes not in accordance with scientific transparency, but, as there is a very distinctive political situation in Iran and some of these statements are crucial for the content of this thesis, I prefer not to name these interview-partners, but still do not want exclude their statements from my work at all, as this would create illogical gaps in my argumentation.

6 Ali Sheikhmehdi/Forough Khabiri, "Narrative Reading of Contemporary History of Iran: A Case Study of Azadeh Akhlaghi´s Staged Photos," *The International Journal of Visual Design* 9 (December 2015): 1-11.

7 Azadeh Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness* (Tehran, 2013).

Furthermore, during my stay in Tehran, I reviewed books and especially magazines, that are only available in the country. At least as important as my interviews and the review of publications was, my gained insight into Tehran´s art scene and the paradoxes of daily live in Iran in general. I consider this extremely important for the understanding of art, that is produced in the current situation in the country. I even think, that the messages that are transported via the artwork, and the subjects that arise are more important, than a stylistic analysis. This does not mean, that this will not partly be executed in this thesis, but the main focus, is on the interpretations and content of the discussed artworks.

Another concern was, to evade a too European-based interpretation of Iranian art. As I was socialised in Europe a certain "Europeanness," that is inherited in this thesis, is unavoidable. Nevertheless, I did my best, not to create the "Other," Iranian artist.[8] Therefore, I tried to include statements of artists and other people, involved in Tehran´s art scene, as often as possible, in order to provide an authentic insight.

Regarding the transliteration, every Persian name is, when mentioned first, transliterated in accordance to the system of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*,[9] when repeated, either, as written in the catalogue of *By an Eye Witness*, or, as the artists transliterate their names themselves, or transliterated as in the books used.

I decided to write this thesis in English, because I want to provide a readable version of it, to anyone interested. As I initially started to write in German, I used the German version of some books and publications I refer to. Therefore, also the German version is cited. The English translations of the title can be found in the bibliography.[10]

In chapter two, I discuss the historical background by using relevant literature. The reader should not expect a history of Iran in the 20th century, or a detailed biography of *By an Eye Witness´* protagonists, but rather a short historical overview with special emphasis on the main figures of Akhlaghi´s series. The aim is, to make it clear, that these persons fought -in their understanding- for greater freedom and improvement in the country.

The third chapter is an attempt to reconstruct the history of staged photography in Tehran and serves as a basis for the placement of Akhlaghi´s series into the context of staged photography in Tehran. First, the general situation needs to be defined, before the particular, that is *By an Eye Witness*, can be contextualised within it. The chapter is mainly based on interviews, and

8 For a whole understanding of the notion of the "Other," see Said´s introduction in his ground-breaking work *Orientalism*. Said, *Orientalism*: 1-28.

9 See also the table in the appendix: 138. I do not transliterate topographical terms, author´s names and words, that already have been lexicalised in English.

10 See appendix: 121-134.

partly on literature on individual artists, as well as information, that I found in Iranian art magazines and exhibition catalogues. The main questions are: When did staged photography first appear in Iran and what led to its emergence? How did staged photography change and develop from its beginnings up to now, and what were the reasons for these changes? What were and what are the main topics of the images; and which strategies and techniques were used for the making of the photographs?

*By an Eye Witness* will be discussed in three steps in the chapters four to six. Firstly it will be introduced, secondly deciphered and thirdly interpreted.

Susan Sontag´s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), with her questions already stated above, serves as a theoretical background. In this essay, the author writes about war photography, but her reflections on the depiction of violence, murders and atrocities, shown on photographs, can be easily transferred to *By an Eye Witness*. Her preliminary question "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" is re-formulated in the context of *By an Eye Witness* "How in your opinion are we to prevent cruelties that are done to people, fighting for improvement in a country?"[11]

Chapter four introduces Akhlaghi´s photo series. Methodologically it is mainly based on my own descriptions and interviews that I conducted with the artist and other people, involved in the production of *By an Eye Witness*. The main questions are: How did Akhlaghi develop the idea for the series? What was the production process and how were the characters and the time-line selected? How does the title relate to the images? And finally, what are the formal characteristics of the series?

One of the characteristics are the carefully selected details, that are often symbolic elements. For their identification, in chapter five, I used lexicons of symbolism, as well as interviews with the artist. Also, visual references within *By an Eye Witness* are discussed in this chapter. They mainly derive from photojournalism and European historical paintings. I will name these references, analyse how Akhlaghi altered the visual quotations, and try to interpret these changes. As the artist also considered the interpretation of her citations and transferred them to the context of Iranian history, these will also be analysed by using relevant literature. The main questions are: Which symbolic elements and visual references did Akhlaghi choose and why? What did she alter in her citations and why? What does the use of symbolic elements and visual references mean in the context of *By an Eye Witness*?

In chapter six, the outcomes of chapter four and five are summarised, the main characteristics of the series are recapped and main concerns and thematic issues are analysed. Furthermore,

11 Susan Sontag, *Das Leiden anderer betrachten* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005): 9-13.

the series is contextualised within the current situation in Iran, by using the essays by the American psychologist Michael S. Roth *Trauma, Representation and Historical and Consciousness* and *Trauma: A Dystopia of the Spirit*. Both were published in 2012, and are dealing with the questions of reasons, problems and how to overcome historical traumas.[12]
In chapter seven, *By an Eye Witness* is put into the context of staged photography in Tehran, that was discussed in chapter three. The focal question of the last chapter is: How can *By an Eye Witness* thematically, technically and in terms of using visual strategies be put into the context of historical and contemporary staged photography in Tehran?

## 2. Historical Background

In this chapter, the historical background of the set time-frame for *By an Eye Witness,* that is 1908-1998, as well as the contemporary history since until today, will be discussed. Special attention is given to the main characters of the images, as it is crucial for the understanding of the series, to know who the depicted persons were. Nevertheless, this is neither a complete history of Iran -which can be found elsewhere-,[13] nor a detailed biography of the protagonists, but rather a historical background, necessary for understanding developments within staged photography in Tehran and *By an Eye Witness*. The basis of this chapter is relevant literature of Iranian history in general as well as books and articles on the protagonists in particular.

Iran was reigned as a monarchy by the tribe of the Qajars (Qājār) since 1779, and the head of the state was the Shah. The Tobacco Revolution in 1890-91 was the first public upheaval in the country and fundamental for the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), as the network that had organised the former, reunited again for the latter protest.[14] The main thinker of this network was the preacher Nasrollah-Malek-al-Motakallemin (Naṣr-Allāh Malek-al-Motakallemin) (1860-1908). One of his goals was to exchange the "ruling despotism" with "law and justice."[15] Moreover, he criticised the corruption of the governors and the clerical elite, the *Ulama (ʿOlamā)*, as well as the increasing influence of Great Britain and Russia.[16]

12 Michael S. Roth, "Trauma, Representation and Historical Consciousness," in: Michael S. Roth, ed., *Memory, Trauma, and History* (New York, 2012): 77-86; Michael S. Roth, "Trauma: A Dystopia of Spirit," in: Michael S. Roth, ed., *Memory, Trauma, and History* (New York, 2012): 87-103.
13 See for example: Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton/New Jersey, 1982); P. Avery/G.R.G. Hambly/C. Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran 7* (Cambridge et alii, 1991); Elton L. Daniel, *The History of Iran* (Westport et alii, 2001); Monika Gronke, *Geschichte Irans: Von der Islamisierung bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2003); Michael Axworthy, *Iran: Weltreich des Geistes. Von Zoroaster bis heute* (Berlin, 2011).
14 Mehrdad Amanat/Nikki Keddie, "Iran Under the Late Qajars: 1848–1922," in: P. Avery/G.R.G. Hambly/C. Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran 7* (Cambridge et alii, 1991): 192-196; Axworthy, *Iran*: 215.
15 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 75-80.
16 Amanat/Keddie, "Iran Under the Late Qajars:" 201-205.

These were also reasons for the start of the revolution. Further triggers were the populations´ economical and political dissatisfaction and the corporal punishment of Tehran´s basar traders that was ordered by the Shah, which eventually led to protests in the whole country and the call for an elected parliament, called Majles (Majles).[17] Muzaffar ad-Din (Moẓaffar-al-Din) Shah (1853-1907) accepted this claim in 1906 and the first resolutions of the Majles was the establishment of a constitution and the easing of freedom of assembly and press, which led to many newly founded newspapers. One of these was the liberal, pro-revolutionary *Sur-e-Esrafil (Ṣur-e Esrāfīl) (Esrafil´s Trumpet)*, published by the socialist Jahangir Khan Sur-e-Esrafil (Jahāngīr Ḵān Ṣur-e Esrāfīl) (1876-1908).[18] The newspaper participated in a campaign for secular reforms and caused a scandal by the publication of the first anti-clerical article in the country. Sur-e-Esrafil required the *Ulama´s* retreat from politics and designated the mullas as "greedy."[19] Also Malek al-Motekallemin wrote sometimes articles in *Sur-e-Esrafil*, in which he directly attacked the Shah and the *Ulama*. They reacted by partly destroying the offices of the newspaper and some editions were not allowed to be published.[20] Nevertheless, *Sur-e-Esrafil* even continued to exist and influence public opinion. Muzaffar al-Din Shah died in 1907 and his successor Mohammad Ali (Moḥammad-ʿAli) Shah (1872-1925) did not have any sympathies for the Constitutionalists. After the revolutionists tried to kill him, he ordered the bombing of the Majles´ building, and organized a coup d´etat, in which he dissolved the national assembly and brought himself back to power. In the course of this, he imprisoned members of the Majles, among them al-Motakallemin and Sur-e-Esrafil in Baghe-Shah, one of his garden residences.[21] The imprisoned deputies are depicted in *Fig.1*, al-Motakallemin and Sur-e-Esrafil are already dead in the scene. The Shah knew that the two men were the most influential persons of the opposition and that al-Motekallemin´s theories were published in Sur-e-Esrafil´s newspaper. Thus, he decided to stab and strangle only these two prisoners, while the others left Baghe-Shah alive.[22] The Constitutionalists gained, despite the death of their leaders, more power again in 1909, when Mohammad Ali Shah was sent to exile and another member of the Qajar tribe became the new Shah.[23]

17 Axworthy, *Iran*: 215.
18 Sorour Soroudi, "Sur-e Esrafil: 1907–1908: Social and Political Ideology," *Middle Eastern Studies* 24 (1988): 232-233; Amanat/Keddie, "Iran Under the Late Qajars:" 222-225.
19 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 93.
20 Soroudi, "Sur-e Esrafil:" 233.
21 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 94-96; Amanat/Keddie, "Iran Under the Late Qajars:" 201-205.
22 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 90; Azadeh Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness* (Tehran, 2013): 8. Cited after Ahmad Kasravi, *The History of Iranian Constitutional Revolution* (Tehran, 1977): 647.
23 Amanat/Keddie, "Iran Under the Late Qajars:" 210-212; Axworthy, *Iran:* 222-225.

In 1921, a military commander, Reza Khan (Reżā Kān), initiated another coup d´etat, that was accompanied by upheavals in the whole country. In the province of Khorasan for example, Reza Khan attempted to integrate the local police into the ministry of war, but faced resistance.[24] The provincial government, led by the colonel of the local police, Mohammad Taghi Pesyan (Moḥammad Taqi Pesyān) (1892-1921) declared the autonomy of Khorasan in 1921. Reza Khan, who considered Pesyan as a possible alternative to his own government in Tehran, sent his troops to Khorasan. They killed Pesyan in the same year and brought the province under Reza Khan´s control again.[25] Pesyan´s funeral, that was attended by approximately six hundred people, is depicted in *Fig.2*.[26]

Reza Khan started to consolidate his power in the beginning of the 1920s and established a system of control, in which he executed harsh measures against dissidents and intellectuals.[27] Victims were the poets Mirzadeh Eshghi (Mirzāda ʿEšqi) (1894-1924) and Mohammad Farrokhi Yazdi (Moḥammad Farroḵi Yazdi) (1889-1939), as well as the communist Taghi Arani (Taqi Arānī) (1902-1940). Eshghi and Yazdi wrote critical poems in the 1910s. Eshghi denounced especially the chaotic circumstances in the country and the government´s corruption.[28] Yazdi attacked foremost the foreign influence in Iran.[29] Both poets glorified the pre-Islamic, ancient Iran. In their poems they conjured mythological-historical figures like Zoroaster, Cyrus and Darius, who protested against the British and Russians, who were interpreted by Eshghi and Yazdi as suppressors, as both tried to gain influence in Iran due to its oil. Aim of their poems was, to arouse the patriotism of the Iranians.[30] They were nationalists and protested against the Anglo-Iranian treaty, that was signed in 1919 and caused even a higher impact of Great Britain. As a result, both were imprisoned.[31] After their release, they continued producing critical writings. Eshghi was nearly fully banned from public life at the beginning of the 1920s, as he had bizarre ideas, like the proposal of an annual blood feast,

24 Michael P. Zirinsky, "The Rise of Reza Khan," in: John Foran, ed., *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran* (Minneapolis, 1994): 57.

25 Amanat/Keddie, "Iran Under the Late Qajars:" 210-212; Stephanie Cronin, "An Experiment in Revolutionary Nationalism: The Rebellion of Colonel Mohammad Taqi Khan Pasyan in Mashad: April – October 1921," *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 33 (1997): 693–750.

26 Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 10. Cited after Ali Azari, *The Uprising of Colonel Mohammad Taghi-Khan Pesyan in Khorasan* (Tehran, 1950): 359-362.

27 Gavin Hambly, "The Pahlavi Autocracy: Riza Shah: 1921-1941," in: P. Avery/G.R.G. Hambly/C. Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran 7* (Cambridge et alii, 1991): 232.

28 Sorour Soroudi, "Poet and Revoultion: The Impact of Iran´s Constitutional Revolution on the Social and Literary Outlook of the Poets of the Time," *Iranian Studies* 12 (1979): 257.

29 Soroudi, "Poet and Revoultion:" 239; Ahmadi Karimi-Hakkak, "Farroḵī Yazdī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1999). Accessed May 10, 2015: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/farroki-yazdi.

30 Soroudi, "Poet and Revoultion:" 258; Ahmadi Karimi-Hakkak, "`Ešqī, Moḥammad-Reżā Mīrzāda," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1998). Accessed May 10, 2015: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/esqi-mohammad-reza-mirzada.

31 Ali Gheissari, "The Poetry and Politics of Farrokhi Yazdi," *Iranian Studies* 26 (1993): 33.

in which Reza Khan should be ritually murdered. To articulate his meaning though, he founded the nationalist newspaper *Qarn-e bistom* (*Qarn-e bistom*) (*20th century*) in 1921.[32] Also Yazdi rebelled against a society with a harsh prosperity gap. Communist tendencies in Yazdi´s thought are shown in claims, like exchanging the Shah through hammer and sickle. But also Islam played a major role in his writings, and, furthermore, he was a convinced nationalist,[33] who openly criticised Reza Khan and his coup. Like Eshghi also Yazdi founded a newspaper - *Tufan* (*Ṭūfān*) (*Storm*), in which he discussed issues like patriotism, syndicalism and class struggle. Similar to *Qarn-e bistom,* the publication was often prohibited because of his writings against Reza Khan.[34] In the last issue of *Qarn-e bistom* in 1924, Eshghi vehemently criticised Reza Khan´s plans to transform Iran into a republic, which he described as wrong, and financed by the British.[35] As a reaction, Reza Khan ordered the shooting of the poet,[36] that was executed by two killers in Eshghi´s own courtyard as *Fig.3* shows. But Eshghi was only one of many publisher, who were eliminated, in order not to turn the public opinion against Reza Khan. Also, Yazdi should be killed fifteen years later by Reza Khan´s order, who since 1926 was the Shah of the Pahlavi (Pahlavi) -dynasty, founded by him, that succeeded the Qajars. But before his death, Yazdi became a deputy of the socialist opposition in the Majles in 1928.[37] As the opposition consisted only of one other person besides Yazdi, it was always quite obvious, who voted against Reza Shah´s government. In 1930 Yazdi had to flee to Berlin,[38] where an active Iranian diaspora community existed. Also, Taghi Arani studied from 1922 until his return to Iran in 1930 in Berlin. He, like Eshghi and Yazdi, had a highly nationalist attitude, admired Iran´s pre-Islamic civilisation and heavily criticised the Anglo-Persian treaty of 1919. The stay in Germany shaped Arani´s political opinion towards Marxism and Socialism, as can be read in an Iranian exile-newspaper that was published by him.[39] Also Yazdi wrote articles in exile-newspapers in Berlin, in which he denounced the Shah. These publications also appeared in Iran, and he had to leave Germany, after pressure from the Iranian government in 1932.[40] Back in Iran, Yazdi and Arani continued their political agitation. Both were convinced, that a reform of the governmental system was needed. Their

32 Karimi-Hakkak, "`Ešqī, Moḥammad-Reżā Mīrzāda."
33 Soroudi, "Poet and Revoultion:" 241.
34 Soroudi, "Poet and Revoultion:" 241-242; Gheissari, "The Poetry and Politics of Farrokhi Yazdi:" 33; Karimi-Hakkak, "`Ešqī, Moḥammad-Reżā Mīrzāda."
35 Soroudi, "Poet and Revoultion:" 259.
36 Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness:* 28. Cited after Mohammad Ali Sepanlu, *Four Freedom Poets: A Study on Poets of Patriotism and Democracy in Iran* (Tehran, 1990): 204-208.
37 Soroudi, "Poet and Revoultion:" 242; Gheissari, "The Poetry and Politics of Farrokhi Yazdi:" 33.
38 Gheissari, "The Poetry and Politics of Farrokhi Yazdi:" 34-43; Karimi-Hakkak, "Farroḵī Yazdī."
39 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 156-157; E. Abrahamian/B.Alavi, "Arānī Taqī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1986). Accessed May 10, 2015: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arani-taqi.
40 Gheissari, "The Poetry and Politics of Farrokhi Yazdi:" 34-43; Karimi-Hakkak, "Farroḵī Yazdī."

further demands were the nationalisation of the oil industry, and a better education system. Arani moreover, organised discussion groups of intellectuals through the first Marxist newspaper in the country *Donya* (*Donyā*) (*World*), founded by him.[41] In 1937 Arani, who had become a professor of physics, was arrested together with fifty-two other intellectuals after a strike at university. They were accused of having built secret political cells, organized strikes and spread communist ideas. Arani was the leader of this *Group of 53,* that was founded in the *Donya*-discussion-rounds.[42] He met Yazdi, who was imprisoned since 1933, in Qasr prison.[43] Yazdi was killed in 1939 by a painful air injection into his vanes - it is likely that the Shah himself ordered the murder, as he realised that even prison and torture could not change Yazdis political attitude.[44] *Fig.4* shows the day after the poet´s death in his prison cell. Yazdi and Eshghi are often described as romantic martyr poets, who had to die because of their national and patriotic beliefs.[45] Both were pioneers of political literature, as they analysed and explained the most important aspects of social and political issues.[46]

Also in 1939, the trial against Arani and the *Group of 53* took place. They were accused of atheism, materialism and founding of a secret organisation, that had conspired against the monarchy. An example should be made of thus, as to, how the communist left was treated in the country. Arani´s speech to defend himself was so powerful, that it became a role model for the defence of further political prisoners. Nevertheless, all fifty three men were sentenced. Arani as the central figure received with ten years solitary confinement the maximum penalty.[47] He died one year after the trial in Qasr prison, his dead body in the morgue is depicted on *Fig.5*. The exact circumstances of his death are not fully clear, but it is most likely, that he got infected with typhus due to a conscious carelessness of his guards. Others said, he was killed by police, like many other members of the opposition at that time.[48]

41 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 156-157; Abrahamian/Alavi, "Arānī Taqī."
42 Abrahamian/Alavi, "Arānī Taqī."
43 Gheissari, "The Poetry and Politics of Farrokhi Yazdi:" 34-43.
44 Shafi Kadkani, "Persian Literature (Belles-Lettres) from the Time of Jami to the Present Day," in: G. Morrison, ed., *History of Persian Literature from the Beginning of the Islamic Period to the Present Day* (Leiden et alii, 1981): 183; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 14. Cited after Mohammad Golbon/Yusef Sharifi, *The Trial of the Judges* (Tehran, 1984): 178-181 and Mohammad Ali Sepanly, *Four Freedom Poets: A Study on Poets of Patriotism and Democracy in Iran* (Tehran, 1990): 457.
45 Karimi-Hakkak, "`Ešqī, Moḥammad-Reżā Mīrzāda."
46 Soroudi, "Poet and Revoultion:" 243.
47 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 156-162; Afshin Matin-Asgari, "Twentieth Century Iran´s Political Prisoners," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42 (2007): 694-696.
48 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 162; Abrahamian/Alavi, "Arānī Taqī;" Matin-Asgari, "Twentieth Century Iran´s Political Prisoners:" 694-696.

In 1941, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in favour of his son Mohammad Reza (Moḥammad Reżā) (1919-1980). The new Shah was only able to assert himself to a limited extent, what supported the emergence of a proper party landscape. One of those was the communist *Tudeh* (*Tudeh*) (*Masses*), that was founded by former members of the *Group of 53*.[49] The ideology and the program of *Tudeh* was widely based on Arani´s writings, who was considered by the party as a martyr and their spiritual leader.[50] *Tudeh* became forbidden in 1949, as Mohammad Reza Shah accused its members of having planned an attempt on his life.[51] Afterwards, he announced martial law and a change of the constitution in his favour. As a reaction, the opposition intensified its underground activities. Besides, the *Tudeh*, two more anti-royal currents existed, namely the Islamic faction and the liberal-nationalist party, which gathered under the leadership of Mohammad Mosaddegh (Moḥammad Moṣaddeq) (1882-1967) as *National Front* (*Jebhe-ye Melli*) in 1949.[52] Mosaddegh had already criticised Reza Khan´s coup in 1921 and was therefore excluded from public life. In the 1940s, Mosaddegh returned to it and influenced the political events in Iran, due to Mohammad Reza Shah´s weakness. Mosaddegh publicly declared his rejection of the Pahlavi dynasty, which he designated as an invention of the British.[53] He requested the end of the award of concessions to foreigners, the nationalisation of the oil, as well as the cancellation of a treaty, signed in 1933, that brought the whole oil industry of Iran under British control. Moreover, the *National Front* advocated a government free of corruption and a placement of the constitution over the Shah. As also the *Tudeh* and the religious groups supported these claims and demonstrated in their favour in 1951, the Shah was forced to nationalise the oil industry and appoint Mosaddegh as prime minister. This was followed by heavy protests from Great Britain, as the British urgently needed the earnings from the Iranian oil.[54] In 1953, Mosaddegh had to search for allies in the left *Tudeh* party. Due to the Cold War, this alerted Great Britain and the USA, as they feared a rising influence of the Soviet Union.[55] Because of this, and the hope, to get access to Iranian oil again, the USA and Great Britain decided, that the Shah, who was extremely influenced by these two states, should drop Mosaddegh. This did not work at the first attempt, and the Shah was forced to flee Iran. But in the end, the USA and Great

49 Axworthy, *Iran*: 245-250.
50 Abrahamian/Alavi, "Arānī Taqī."
51 Matin-Asgari, "Twentieth Century Iran´s Political Prisoners:" 696.
52 Daniel, *The History of Iran*: 148-154.
53 For details see Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women who Made Modern Iran: 1941–1979* (New York, 2008): 240-242; Axworthy, *Iran*: 249.
54 Daniel, *The History of Iran*: 148-154.
55 Farhad Diba, *Mohammad Mossadegh: A Political Biography*, (London et alii 1986): 151-177; Hambly, "The Pahlavi Autocracy:" 251.

Britain initiated a coup d´ etat, Mohammad Reza came back from exile and became Shah again, while Mosaddegh was arrested and sentenced to live long house arrest because of high treason.[56] Mosaddegh´s supporters, for example Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani (Maḥmud Ṭālaqāni) (1910-1979) were banned from their professions. Probably Mosaddegh was not sentenced to death, in order to refuse him the status of a martyr. The former prime minister spent the last twelve years of his life in austerity in a house in Ahmad-abad. He died of cancer in 1967, his last wish, to get a grave on a cemetery in Tehran, was denied by the Shah. Instead, he ordered to bury Mosaddegh in his house in Ahmad-abad, where only his family and close friends attended his funeral, as depicted on *Fig.8*.[57] In Iran, still today, he is seen as a fallen national leader and selfless patriot, who successfully asserted himself against Great Britain.[58] Although Mosaddegh died physically in 1967, his political death as a public person is to be dated in 1953.

As a result of his power struggle with Mosaddegh, Mohammad Reza Shah became a more repressive leader. He reacted to protests with more brutal violence, as the events at Tehran University, only a few months after his return from exile, show.[59] After the coup, a number of demonstrations against Mosaddegh´s deposition were held. One of these took place in December 1953 in the faculty of engineering in Tehran University. After soldiers had arrested two government-critical students during a lecture, other students initiated a spontaneous anti-Shah demonstration, in which the release of the two students was demanded. The police opened fire to the peaceful demonstrating masses and killed in the tumults, that are illustrated on *Fig.6,* the three students Mostafa Bozorgnia (Moṣṭafā Bozorgniā) (1934-1953), Azar Shariat Razavi (Āzar Šariʿat Rażawi) (1932-1953) and Ahmad Ghandchi (Aḥmad Qandči) (1933-1953).[60]

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Mohammad Reza Shah consolidated his power and implemented an intelligence service, that was in short named *SAVAK*. During this time, especially the *Ulama* and the *Tudeh,* drew attention to problems, like the growing corruption, a lack of support for the poor, electoral frauds, persecution of the opposition and censorship.[61] But also non-politicians criticised the situation in the country. Three examples are the poet

56 Daniel, *The History of Iran*: 148-154; Milani, *Eminent Persians:* 246; Axworthy, *Iran*: 249.
57 Milani, *Eminent Persians*: 246-257.
58 Hambly, "The Pahlavi Autocracy:" 254; Milani, *Eminent Persians*: 247.
59 Hambly, "The Pahlavi Autocracy:" 251-264; Diba, *Mohammad Mossadegh*: 151-174.
60 Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 21. Cited after Gholam Reza Shariat Razavi, *Memoirs of an Odd Physician* (Tehran, 2005): 16-20; *Ettela´at Daily* (December 8, 1953); *The Coroner Office´s Report on how Three Students of Engineering Department of Tehran University were Martyred*.
61 Axworthy, *Iran*: 251-256.

Forough Farrokhzad (Foruḡ Farroḵzād) (1935-1967), the wrestler Gholam Reza Takhti (Ḡolām-Reżā Takhtī Taḵti) (1930-1968) and the director Sohrab Shahid Sales (Sohrāb Šahid Žāleṯ) (1944-1998).

The whole life of the probably most important female poet of the 20th century, Farrokhzad, was a rebellion against the prevailing idea in Iran in the 1950s and 1960s, how a woman should behave. After having left school, an early marriage, and the birth of of a son, she got divorced in 1955, and lived alone in a flat in Tehran. Farrokhzad travelled a lot and had affairs, which, like her divorce, caught much attention. A divorced woman, who lived alone, and was seen accompanied by other men was a scandal.[62] In 1962, she directed the film *The House is Black* (*Ḵāneh sīāh ast)* and spent twelve days for the production in a leper colony. The film criticises the political, social and religious conditions in Iran. The locked-away leprous serve as a metaphor for the system´s critics, which were either imprisoned or placed under house arrest. As discussed above, Mosaddegh was also isolated from society after having spoken against the Shah. Also, Islam was attacked by Farrokhzad, when she let the leprous thank Allah in prayer for the gift of body-parts, like hands or ears, which they did not have any more.[63] In her literary work Farrokhzad fought for women´s equal rights, the end of their physical and political isolation and against the patriarchal society. Moreover, she was the first Iranian woman, who openly spoke about intimate sexual issues.[64] She died at an early age in a car accident in 1967, as is depicted on *Fig.7*. Although Farrokhzad´s works are to be interpreted as a political critique in some way, unlike the wrestler and most popular Iranian athlete of the 20th century, Gholam-Reza Takhti, she was never a member of a political party. Takhti had won a number of medals in different competitions in the 1950s and was also very popular among people due to his personality.[65] Even the Shah was a fan and supporter of Takhti - but only until the wrestler rejected his offer to become mayor of Tehran in the 1960s, and joined the *National Front* instead.[66] As a result, the incensed Shah declared Takhti as a

62 Farzaneh Milani, "Farroḵzād Forūg-Zamān," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1999). Accessed May 11, 2015: http://iranicaonlinwwwe.org/articles/Farrokhzad-forug-zaman; Jasmin Darznik, "Forugh Farrokhzad: Her Poetry, Life and Legacy," *The Women´s Review of Books* (November-December, 2006). Accessed May 13, 2015: http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE %7CA155472398&u=43wienit=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=da04bd399ad7cd720a8404aa946c2b9.

63 Elif Bezal, "Forugh Farrokhzad´s Poetry and Film: The ´Eye/I´ of Isolation in Forugh Farrokhzad´s The House is Black," in: Agnes Petho, ed., *Words and Images on the Screen: Language, Literature and Moving Pictures* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2008): 330-335.

64 Milani, "Farroḵzād Forūg-Zamān;" Milani, *Eminent Persians*: 843.

65 H.E. Chehabi, "Sport Diplomacy between the United States and Iran," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 12 (2006): 95; Lloyd Ridgeion, "The Zūrkhāna between Tradition and Change," *Iran* 45 (2007): 259.

66 Houchab E. Chehabi, "Taḵti Ḡolām-Reżā," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2005). Accessed May 11, 2015: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/takti-golam-reza; Chehabi, "Sport Diplomacy between the United States and Iran:" 95-99.

persona non-grata and forbid to mention his name in newspapers, radio and TV.[67] In 1968, Takthi´s dead body was found in a hotel in Tehran, as *Fig.8* shows. Since the hotel was situated close to SAVAK´s headquarters, although in his last will, Takhti stated, that he chose to die because of his marital problems, rumours came up, that SAVAK had killed the wrestler.[68] Also the director Sohrab Shahid Sales had his problems with SAVAK. After having studied in Vienna and Paris, he returned to Iran in 1968. Together with some colleagues, he founded a group, that tried to distance itself from the national cinema, which they criticised as unable to reflect the actual situation in the country. After Sales´ group made movies, that depicted the poverty in Iran in a realistic way, the Shah´s supporters called to censor these films, as they would convey a negative image of the country. Especially a film by Sales´, in which he among other things, showed the heavy conditions of the working class´ life in Iran, was criticised by government´s supporters. As a result, he had to leave the country in 1974. He spent the rest of his life in Germany and Chicago, where he died in 1998 of a chronic liver disease, caused by his heavy alcohol abuse, in his flat, which can be seen on *Fig.17*.[69]
The three examples depicted in *By an Eye Witness*, Farrokhzad, Takhti and Sales, demonstrate, that during the 1950s and 1960s it was possible not to act in accordance with the Shah´s government Everyone resisted in his or her own way. Farrokhzad criticised the social conditions of women in her poems, Sales showed the realistic life in Iran and Takhti joined an opposition party.

At the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s more and more people demonstrated on the streets against the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, against censorship and for the freedom of speech. The Shah suppressed these demonstrations violently and expanded his authoritarian power. He forbid opposition parties, therefore his political enemies had to operate underground. The members of the *National Front* separated into two smaller groups, one of them was led by Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, a trusted friend of Mosaddegh. He promoted the dismissal of the Pahlavi monarchy and suggested Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Ruḥ-Allāh Ḵomeyni) (1902-1979) as an alternative.[70] Also guerilla movements were during

67 Milani, *Eminent Persians*: 1072.
68 Milani, "Farroḵzād Forūg-Zamān;" Milani, *Eminent Persians*: 95-99; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness:* 26. Cited after Abbas Fateminevisi, *The Life and Death of World Champion Takhti in the SAVAK Documents* (Tehran, 1998): 35-69.
69 Mamad Haghighat et alii, "Itinerary: 1944–1983: Interviews with Sohrab Shahid Sales," *Discourse* 21 (1999): 162-165; Olaf Möller, "Olaf´s World: Sohrab Shahid Sales: Film Comment," *International Index to Performing Arts* 40 (2004): 12; Pardis Minuchehr, "Shahid Sales Sohrab," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2013). Accessed online May 11, 2015: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shahid-Sales-sohrab.
70 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 9-10; Daniel, *The History of Iran*: 161-163.

this time established. Their aim was to initiate a revolution with the help of attacks and strokes in order to dismiss the Shah. The two most important guerilla movements were the militant-Islamic *People´s Mujahedin of Iran (Mojāhedin-e ḵalq-e Īrān)*, in short *MKO*, that was founded in 1965, and the Marxist *People´s Fedayan of Iran* (*Fedā'i-e ḵalq-e Īrān*), in short *Fedai*.[71] The latter´s core came together in 1963, after the *Tudeh* party was forbidden, and some of its members were killed or imprisoned. The *Fedai´s* founder was the sociologist Bijan Jazani (Bižan Jazani) (1937-1975); and also the student of engineering, Hamid Ashraf (Ḥamid Ašraf) (1946-1976) was one of the founding members. The death of Takhti, in the understanding of *Fedai* a murder by SAVAK, was the initial reason for their violent actions.[72] In the same year, the group was infiltrated by SAVAK, Jazani and twenty other members were arrested, and the *Fedai* therefore was weakened. Ashraf was able to flee, he re-organized the *Fedai*, recruited new members and continued the preparations for the armed resistance. Moreover, he initiated a fusion of the Tehran based *Fedai* with another guerilla cell, that consisted of members all over Iran. One of those was a teacher from Tabriz, Samad Behrangi (Ṣamad Behrangi) (1939-1968).[73] He also published articles in which he criticised the Iranian school system, illegally translated poems by Farrokhzad into his native language Azari-Turkish and wrote fictional short stories for children. The content of these stories was also addressed to adults, as Behrangi was able to publish his political opinions in metaphors through these stories, and thus avoided censorship. Via them, he also reached the rural low class, in order to draw attention to the inequality and injustice under Pahlavi rule. Thus, Behrangi used children´s literature as a political instrument.[74] He drowned in 1968 in the Aras river, *Fig.10* shows the scene, of finding his dead body in the water. The exact circumstances of his death are not entirely clear, but the *Fedai* proclaimed Behrangi as its first martyr and accused the Shah´s men of having killed him.[75] Nevertheless, Ashraf managed to maintain the punch of the group and *Fedai* carried out further attacks and murders. The government answered with a proper hunt of *Fedai* members. In one of those targeted attacks on the

71 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 483-484; Daniel, *The History of Iran*: 86.

72 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 483-484; Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London, 1999): 43-45; Peyman Vahabzadeh, "Secularism and the Iranian Militant Left: Political Misconception or Cultural Issues?," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31 (2011): 86.

73 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 483-484; Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*: 43-45.

74 Brad Hanson, "The ´Westoxication´ of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, al-e Ahmad and Shariati," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15 (1983): 2-3; Negin Nourian Dekhordi, *Toy Gun instead of Doll: Politicization of Children´s Literature in the Declining Public Sphere of Iran (1963–1979*) (Tronø, 2013): 57-58.

75 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 483-484; Michael C. Hillmann, "Behrangī Ṣamad," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1989). Accessed May 11, 2015: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/behrangi-samad-teacher; Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*: 43-45; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 28. Cited after Keyvan Bezhan, *Samad Behrangi* (Tehran, 2004): 110-118.

guerilla-group, Marzieh Ahmadi Oskuie (Marżyeh Aḥmadi Oskuyi) (1945-1974) died. *Fig.11* depicts her death in 1974 in a street in Tehran, where she was shot by SAVAK agents.[76] Despite such losses, the *Fedai* continued their operations and killed for example, a SAVAK-agent in 1975. The government reacted with the execution of *Fedai´s* prisoners, among them Jazani. They were shot without a trial behind the hills of Evin prison, as *Fig.12* shows.[77]

But SAVAK´s main target was Hamid Ashraf, the leader of the group. Via a police informer, the intelligence service got to know of a house in Tehran, where *Fedain* held conspiratorial meetings. The police attacked the house during such a meeting in 1976 and shot eleven persons inside the house, among them Ashraf, as the scene on *Fig.13* shows.[78] The *Fedain* was already weakened through the death of their chief-theoretic Jazani and had to deal with more backlashes through targeted attacks by police and SAVAK on particular activists like Marzieh Ahmadi-Oskuie. With the death of Ashraf, *Fedain* was unable to act anymore and became a small guerilla-group without any power.[79]

As mentioned above, guerrilla's were founded not only among the left, but also in the religious faction. The most important group, was the *MKO*. Their main figure was the sociologist Ali Shariati (ʿAli Šariʿati) (1933-1977). He interpreted Shia Islam as a call for a social revolution, in order to fulfil prophet Mohammad´s (Moḥammad) (c.570-632) plans for a society without classes. Furthermore, he preached in his lectures for *MKO*, that true Muslims should fight against all forms of suppression and social injustice. This means, against despotic rulers, foreign exploiters, greedy capitalists and wrong clerics. His theories are an attempt to connect Shia Islam, politics and Marxist ideas and paved the way for the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Shariati had already been sent to prison in the 1960s for his ideas, but continued to spread them after his release. As he also often talked about actual political problems and questioned the Shah´s authority, he was again imprisoned in 1971, and his writings were banned. After he was set free, he and his family went into exile in England in 1977, where he died unexpectedly in his house one month later. *Fig.14* shows him being carried out of his home to hospital. The circumstances of his death are not entirely clear, probably he suffered a heart attack.[80] Another important cleric, who paved the way for the

76 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 483-489; Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*: 62-69; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 33. Cited after Sharaf Dehghani, *The Immortal Seeds* (sine loco, 2005): 103-109 and Khosro Shaeri, *Eight Letters to Iranian People´s Fedai Guerrillas: A Critical Approach an an Intellectual Code of Conduct* (Tehran, 2009): 105-106.

77 Matin-Asgari, "Twentieth Century Iran´s Political Prisoners:" 699; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 34. Cited after "Tehrani: The SAVAK Butcher: Confesses," *Ettela´at Daily* (May 22, 1979): 3.

78 Vahabzadeh, "Secularism and the Iranian Militant Left:" 81; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 36. Cited after the SAVAK report on Hamid Ashraf.

79 Vahabzadeh, "Secularism and the Iranian Militant Left:" 88.

80 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 9-10 and 464-473; John Foran, "The Iranian Revolution of

Iranian Revolution, was Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani. Between 1940 and 1979, he spent approximately fifteen years in prison, due to his publications and lectures on his interpretation of Shia Islam. He attacked the Shah´s authority, as he said, that Shia Islam would be against autocracy and for democracy, and suggested a third way, in-between the conservative Qur´an-exegesis and Shariati´s Islamic-Marixism. Nonetheless, he and Shariati shared some ideas, for example the compatibility of Islam and socialism, and both underlined, the importance of the union of secular people and clerics. The two men also met at meetings of *MKO*, that was supported by Taleghani. Furthermore, he was the link between the group and Khomeini, who was in exile in Iraq, until SAVAK got to know this in 1975, and arrested Taleghani. In prison, he met other opposition members and succeeded in uniting political prisoners of all fractions against the common enemy, and to fight for a common concern, namely to overthrow the Shah. Shortly before the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Taleghani was released and immediately took back up his political activities. He became the leader of the revolution in Iran, while Khomeini occupied this function abroad. Despite martial law and the strict prohibition of demonstrations Taleghani, organised a protest, attended by three million people who requested the abduction of the Shah in 1978. A couple of days later, Mohammad Reza fled the country, and Khomeini returned from exile in 1979. The situation in Iran in 1978 and 1979 was chaotic and full of bloody unrest. The outcome of this upheaval was the Islamic Republic, but the revolutionary forces consisted not solely of religious people, and rather were a mix of different factions, including leftists, nationalists as well as ethnic groups like the Kurds, to name just a few. Thus, I stopped using the term, "Islamic Revolution," and use "Iranian Revolution" instead.[81]

Taleghani wanted to unite the different parties, furthermore, he was elected to lead the revolutionary committee. He tried to include human rights in Iran´s constitution, expressed his opinion against one autocratic leader, and rather favoured a committee, that included members from all parts of society. But this was not in accordance with Khomeini´s ideas, and therefore, Taleghani became more and more isolated. In fall 1979 Taleghani openly criticised Khomeini and his supporters and warned, that Iran could become a religious dictatorship. One day later he died of a heart attack; although the circumstances remained suspicious. Masses of people mourned him at his deathbed, as can be seen in *Fig.15*.[82]

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1977–1979: A Challenge for Social Theory," in: John Foran, ed., *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran* (Minnesota, 1994): 173-174; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 41. Cited after an Interview of Sousan Shariati with Azadeh Akhlaghi, November 3, 2011 and Haj Babaei Ebrahimi Saeed/Mohmmad Reza Ebrahimi, *Death of Shariati: A Review of Dr. Shariati´s Death Alone with Documents* (Tehran, 2002): 301.

81 See also: Staci Gem Scheiwiller, *Mirrors with Memorie*s (Saarbrücken, 2011): 41.

82 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: 458-462; Abdollah Vakily, "In Search of ´Revolutionary Islam:´

The Iranian Revolution was initiated by various political groups, eventually the Islamic fraction pushed through and established the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Khomeini ordered the execution of former members of the Shah´s government, *Tudeh, Fedai* as well as Kurdish activists.[83]

Saddam Hossein, the ruler of Iraq, thought, that due to the turmoil, Iran would be weakened and attacked the country in 1980, in order to gain control over it´s oil fields. The Iran-Iraq war lasted eight years and served as an official reason for Khomeini to justify repressions against the opposition as well as contradictions in freedom of speech and press. Thus, the Iran-Iraq war was the last step of the Iranian Revolution, in which Khomeini consolidated his power. After the end of the war, the Islamic government was not questioned any more, as people had to deal with the war and the damages caused by it. For reasons of legitimisation, Khomeinei and the revolutionary guards referred to Shia Islam, and the myth of Kerbala, which will be discussed in detail in chapter five. Fallen combats of the Iran-Iraq war were declared as martyrs and heroes.[84] One of them was Mehdi Bakeri (Mehdi Bākeri) (1954-1985). He already protested before the revolution against the Shah´s government and was therefore imprisoned a couple of times. Bakeri joined the revolutionary guards in 1979 and became commander of a corpse in the early 1980s. He was killed during an operation on the battlefield, as *Fig.16* shows.[85]

The end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s were shaped by rebuilding. Khomeini died in 1989 and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (Akbar Hāšemi Rafsanjāni) (b.1934) became president. During his reign, some changes in economy, that led to a more liberal market, were executed and he tried to slightly rebuild ties with foreign countries, that were destroyed during Khomeini´s era and the Iran-Iraq war.[86] In 1997, Mohammad Khatami (Moḥammad Ḵātami) (b. 1943) was elected as president. During his era, the relations between Europe and Iran became better, censorship and other religious regulations were eased. Compared to any other time in the Islamic Republic until 2013, Khatami´s presidency can be considered as the most

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The Case of Taleqani and the Mojahedin," *The Muslim World* 88 (1998): 25-33; Daniel, *The History of Iran*: 172; Assaf Moghadam, "Mayhem, Myths, and Martyrdom: The Shi´a Conception of Jihad," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19 (2007): 134; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 42. Cited after *Ettela´at Daily* (September 10, 1979): 1-3 and *Ettela´at Daily* (September 11, 1979): 1-2.

83Axworthy, *Iran*: 271-278.

84Ibid.: 278-281.

85Tehran Beautification, "Martyr Haj Mahdi Bakeri," *Iran´s National Heroes* (2013). Accessed May, 13, 2015: http://en.zibasazi.ir/news/item/880-iran%E2%80%99s-national-heroes-martyr-haj-mahdi-bakeri.html; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness:* 44. Cited after Ghasem Nazemi, *Goodbye Commander* (Tehran, 2004): 119-123 and Ali Akbari, *He Could Not Stay Alive* (Tehran, 2009): 108-110.

86Axworthy, *Iran*: 281-288.

liberal and relaxed period. Nevertheless, the Islamic government continued its persecution of political dissidents, as the so-called *chain-murders*, the killings of critical writers and intellectuals, show. Furthermore, the first public mass protest in the Islamic Republic took place in 1999, when students demonstrated for more freedom of the press. These demonstrations were pushed down violently, many persons got imprisoned and the initiators were sentenced to death.[87] Khatami´s period of reforms and relaxations ended with the election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad (Maḥmud Aḥmadi-Nežād) (b.1956). He had a clearly anti-US and anti-Europe position. Between 2005 and 2009 peaceful demonstrations were often dissolved and protesters imprisoned. Ahmidenjad announced his second election victory in 2009, but as there was valid information of counterfeiting the elections, the Green Movement (*Jonbeš-e sabz*) erupted in their aftermath. In Tehran and other big cities, millions of people protested for weeks for fair elections, democracy and human rights. Many of them wore green clothes, which was the colour of Ahmadinejad´s opponent in the electoral campaign. A huge number of persons, especially young people, were killed by governmental forces. The most popular victim, and also an icon of the resistance and a martyr of the Green Movement was Neda Aqa Soltan (Nedā Āqā-e Solṭān) (1983-2009).[88] She was shot dead in one of the peaceful demonstrations, that accused Ahmadinejad of counterfeiting the elections in order to keep himself in power. Bystanders filmed Neda´s last minutes with their mobile phones and sent the videos to European relatives, who uploaded them on social media channels.[89] But she was only one of many who were killed.

The Green Movement failed, and the situation in the country stayed the same until Hassan Rohani (Ḥassan Ruḥāni) (b.1948) was elected in 2013. Since then, a period of openness and easing is detectable – for one in foreign policy, as the recent resolutions about the ease of the economical sanctions show, but also within the country, where the climate now seems to be much more relaxed and less strict than in the time of Ahmadinejad´s presidency.
Summed up shortly, Iran´s history within the last century is full of upheavals and turmoil, the Qajars were replaced by the Pahlavis, the Pahlavis by the Islamic Republic. All three governmental forms repressed dissidents, political murders happened at the beginning of the 20th century and still happen now. Azadeh Akhlaghi re-staged images of killings, but also of natural deaths of Iranians, who fought for different kinds of freedoms in the country.

87Ibid.: 288-292.
88 Ibid.: 294-310.
89 Mette Mortensen, "When Citizen Photojournalism Sets the News Agenda: Neda Agha Soltan as a Web 2.0 Icon of Post-Election Unrest in Iran," *Global Media and Communication* 7, no. 1 (April 2011): 4-11.

## 3. Staged Photography in Tehran: An Attempt

This chapter is an attempt of an overview of the history of staged photography in Tehran, from its beginnings up to the current situation. A complete documentation would need at least its own master´s thesis, and as I have to consider, that a maximum number of pages is set for me, I only provide a broad overview, and can not discuss specific developments in detail. Moreover, there are a number of gaps, caused by a lack of research in Iranian photography. Nevertheless, as this is the first time, that a non-Persian contribution about staged photography in Iran is written, this chapter could serve as a starting point for other researchers, who try to reconstruct the history of staged photography in Tehran more thoroughly. Attention should be paid to the fact, that I reduce my reflections to the city of Tehran. This means, that I exclude all Iranian staged photographers, who live abroad, like Shirin Neshat (Širin Nešāṭ) (b.1957) and Mitra Tabrizian (Mitrā Tabriziān) (b.1959), as, unless mentioned, the subjects and development of their works are in no relation to staged photography, produced in Tehran. But also staged photography in other cities of Iran is not included in this thesis.

Despite my extensive research in Tehran, I could not find anyone who was able to give me valid information about the history and development of staged photography in the city or the country. Up to now no specific publications about the topic were released, and only one MA-thesis with the title *Contemporary Staged Photography of Iran* by Houtan Noorian (Hutan Nuriān) in 2009 was written on that subject, though there are gaps in this thesis.[90] As my Persian is very limited and the library of Tehran University was under construction during my stay in the city, I was not able to review this thesis, but, talked to the author via Skype. Apart from him and me it seems, no one has ever tried to reconstruct, or has even thought about the history of staged photography in Iran in a research paper.

In his article *Mapping Iranian Contemporary Art Publications and Knowledge Production* (2015), as well as in a personal conversation with me, the Iranian photo-historian Hamid Severi pointed to the fact, that the state of research about contemporary Iranian photography is sparse. The same is also -or even more- true for Iranian staged photography in particular.[91] None of the books on contemporary Iranian art, that are listed elsewhere,[92] contain any

90 Skype Interview of Houtan Noorian with the author, Vienna/Bologna, 2015: 29.

91 Hamid Severi, „Mapping Iranian Contemporary Art Publications and Knowledge-Production," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Contemporary Art from the Middle East* (London, 2015): 72-76; Personal Interview of Hamid Severi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

92 Severi, „Mapping Iranian Contemporary Art Publications and Knowledge-Production:" 72-81. Severi lists: Rose Issa, ed., *Iranian Photography Now* (Ostfildern, 2008); Hossein Amirsadeghi, *Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art* (London, 2009); Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Amidst Shadow and Light: Contemporary Iranian Art and Artists* (Hong Kong, 2011); Staci Gem Schewiller, ed., *Performing the*

articles, which are discussing the subject. While the state of research concerning Qajar-photography has increased within the last few years,[93] up to now hardly any research, except for a few case-studies, has been done for photography in general in the Pahlavi period. Exceptions are Mohammad Khodadadi Motarjemzadeh´s doctoral thesis at the Tehran Art University from 2011, in which he addresses documentary photography only.[94] The same can be said about an article by the same author with the title *Photography in the Grey Years (1920-40)* (2013).[95] The only books, that subject aspects of Pahlavi-photography are *Ahmad Aali: Selection of Works 1961-2009* (2010), published by the artist Ahmad Aali (Aḥmadʿ Ali) himself and deals with his own works,[96] as well as Parisa Damandan´s *Faces of Esfahan* (2012). Although she focuses on portraits, that were not produced in Tehran, but in Esfahan, it is likely, that a similar situation was to be found in the capital.[97] Also Hamid Severi´s essay *A Remarkable Oversight: Iranian Art Photography of the 1960s and 1970s* (2013) provides a brief insight into the history of the art photography of these two decades, and draws attention to the not-executed research in this and other periods.[98]

Photography in the Islamic Republic is addressed in the following books and articles: *Iranian Photography Now*, published by the Lebanese-Iranian curator Rose Issa in 2008. There, the images of thirty-six photographers are accompanied by short texts and statements by the artists. Also some staged photographers are listed.[99] Hamid Severi discusses in his article *The New Generation of Iranian Art Photographers: Approaches and Challenges* (2011) Iranian fine art photography after 1979. Staged photography is not addressed in particular.[100] In 2013, the Goethe Institute organised an exhibition of Iranian, contemporary photography and

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*Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity* (London et alii, 2013); Hamid Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art* (London, 2013).
I would add: Staci Gem Scheiwiller, *Mirrors with Memories: Nineteenth Century and Qajar Imagery in Contemporary Iranian Photography* (Saarbrücken, 2011); Abbas Daneshvari, *Amazingly Original: Contemporary Iranian Art at Crossroads* (Costa Mesa, 2014); Tallin Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio* (London, 2014).

93 For a list of publications see for example the bibliography in Scheiwiller, *Mirrors with Memories*: 228-230. Furthermore, there is a new anthology in press, that will be published this year: Markus Ritter/Staci Gem Scheiwiller, eds., *The Indigenous Lens: Early Photography in the Near and Middle East* (Berlin, 2016). The publication is based on a series of lectures, "The Indigenous Lens: Early Photography in Islamicate Countires," at the department of art history at the University of Zurich/Switzerland, organised by Markus Ritter in 2011.

94 Personal Interview of Hamid Severi with the Author, Tehran, 2015. I do not know the exact title of this thesis.

95 Mohammad Khodadadi Motarjemzadeh, "Photography in the Grey Years (1920-40)," *History of Photography* 37 (2013): 117-125.

96 Ahmad Aali, ed., *Ahmad Aali: Selection of Works 1961-2009* (Tehran, 2010).

97 Parisa Damandan, *Faces of Esfahan* (Tehran, 2012).

98 Hamid Severi, "A Remarkable Oversight: Iranian Art Photography of the 1960s and 1970s," in: Fere shteh Daftari/Layla S.Diba, eds., *Iran Modern* (New York, 2013).

99 Rose Issa, *Iranian Photography Now* (Ostfildern, 2008).

100 Hamid Severi, "The New Generation of Iranian Art Photographers: Approaches and Challenges," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Amidst Shadow and Ligh*t (Hong Kong, 2011): 82-95.

released in the course of it a special issue of its *PIX*, called *The Iran Issue: The Interior*. The five texts in the first part discuss tendencies and subjects within Iranian photography since 2000 and also mention staged photography briefly. The second part consists of an introduction of different artistic positions, among them also projects of staged photography, with texts by other photographers.[101] *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives*, published by the Iranian art-historian Hamid Keshmirshekan in 2013 should also be mentioned, although, I believe it does not actually discuss the history of Iranian photography to the satisfying extent, as suggested. He analyses artistic main questions, but strongly focuses on painting; the role and development of photography, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, is discussed superficially only.[102]

Due to the absence of pre-existent research, this chapter is pieced together from the available literature, information I gained in a number of interviews with Iranian staged photographers and other people of Tehran´s art scene, as well as the review of catalogues of photo-exhibitions held by the *Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art* (TMOCA) (*Muzeh-ye honarhāye mu ʾāṣir mo'āsser-e tehrān*). These publications contain mainly images, that are accompanied by minimal texts, but no critical remarks.[103] Furthermore, I looked through all available issues of the Persian magazines *Aks* (*ʿAks*) (*Photography*) (first published in 1987) and *Herfeh: Honarmand* (*Ḥerfeh: Honarmand*) (*Profession: Artist*) (first published in 2004) in the library of the *City House of Photography* (*ʿAks k̲āneh-ye šahr*) in order to find reference points to the development of staged photography.

During my interviews in Tehran, I realised that the term "staged photography" is neither clearly defined nor used consistently and there is no consensus, as to what exactly it describes. Thus, before I start with the description of the beginnings of staged photography in Tehran, it is necessary to define how the term is used in this thesis.

### 3.1 Staged Photography (عکاسی صحنه‌آرایی شده ʿAkās ṣaḥnehārā-ye šodeh): A Definition

"Straight" and "staged" photography are usually used as antonyms. The photo-theorist A.D. Coleman writes in his essay *The Directorial Mode* (1976), that "straight" or "documentary" photographs are images, in which "the photographer is […] presumed not to interfere with the actual event going on." This means; the photographer´s presence is invisible inside the frame.[104] Another photo theorist, Andreas Müller-Pohle characterises in his article

101Rahaab Allana, ed., *PIX: A Photography Quarterly: The Iran Issue: The Interio*r 8 (2013).
102Hamid Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art* (London, 2013).
103Severi, „Mapping Iranian Contemporary Art Publications and Knowledge-Production:" 75.
104A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Notes toward a Definition 1976," in: Vicki Goldberg, ed.,

*Photography as Staging* (1988) the photographer of a "straight" image as a "discoverer," who "acts ´in motion,´" like a hunter or gatherer. "His activity can be described as ´scene searching´: he extracts something from the scenery; he acts perceptually."[105] Examples for "straight" photography, whose aim is to depict the world in a realistic way, are reports, documentaries and photojournalism, like an image by the Iranian photographer Kaveh Golestan (Kāveh Golestān) (1950-2003), taken during the Iranian Revolution in 1979 (*Fig.18*).

"Staged" or "directorial" photographs on the other hand, are described by Coleman as events, that were "consciously and intentionally" created by the photographer,

> "for the express purpose of making images thereof. This may be achieved by intervening ongoing "real" events or by staging tableaux – in either case, by causing something to take place, which would not have occurred had the photographer not made it happen."[106]

Müller-Pohle calls the photographer of a staged image an "inventor," who "acts ´stationary,´ like a sedentary producer. His activity is an ´in-scenic´ (staged) researching: he places something into a scenery; he acts conceptually."[107] Unlike the documentary photographer, the staged photographer does not have any intention to depict the world in a realistic way, but rather manipulates it via photography. Examples are studio-photographs, portrait-photographs or narrative photo-series, like Azadeh Akhlaghi´s *By an Eye Witness* (*Figs.1-17*).

Neither Coleman nor Müller-Pohle distinguish between specific kinds of staged photography, thus I resort to the cultural researcher Fritz Franz Vogel´s definition in *The Cindy Shermans* (2006). He differs between *inszenierender* (constructed) and *inszenierter* (staged) photography. The author states, that in both forms, the idea for the picture is crucial for the final photograph. Vogel understands constructed photography as a "documentary-objectified photography, that is subjectively altered […] or arranged, for example still-lifes, nudes and portraits." Staged photography, on the other hand, is the "design of imaginary pictorial worlds" and "photography [that] is subjectively set in scene," characterised by the "directorial-advisery" mode."[108] Thus, the crucial point in distinguishing constructed from staged images is the concept; the focal question is: Is the scene altered or created? Looking at two portrait-series, the difference becomes clear: Mohsen Rastani´s (Moḥṣen Rāstāni) (b.1958) *Iranian Family Portraits* (1983-2014) (*Fig.19*) are constructed photographs, as their main goal is to make a portrait of the people depicted and tell something of the live of the

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*Photography in Print* (Albuquerque, 1981): 484.

105Andreas Müller-Pohle, "Photography as Staging," *European Photography* 34, no. 2 (April/May/June 1988). Accessed December 11, 2015: http://equivalence.com/labor/lab_mp_wri_insz_e.shtml.

106Coleman, "The Directorial Mode:" 484.

107Müller-Pohle, "Photography as Staging."

108Fritz Franz Vogel, *The Cindy Shermans* (Cologne et alii, 2006): 30-31.

families. In order to underline their specific characters, Rastani advised them to pose in a particular way, make special gestures or added selected attributes, like the boy´s jacket, that characterises him as a shepherd in an inhospitable area. Rastani subjectively altered a found scene, that is, the people portrayed. Moreover, the families existed anyway. The making of a portrait of them, would also have been possible without Rastani´s alterations.[109] Shadi Ghadirian´s (Ṯadi Qadiriān) (b.1974) *Qajar* series (1998-2001) (*Fig.20*) on the other hand, is staged photography. She dressed women in garments of Qajar-times and included anachronistic items like a Pepsi-can or a bicycle. Nothing is told about the individual woman depicted, the portrait would not exist, if Ghadirian had not designed the whole scene according to her imagination. She chose every single detail of the picture, from the backgrounds to the items and the poses and gazes of the women. Ghadirian made a comment on the role of women, bound between tradition and modernity in Iran, but she did not want to create a portrait of the individual woman depicted. The whole image is based on Ghadirian´s concept, and would not exist without it at all.[110] Rastani´s photographs on the other hand, could also have been taken without his directions – they would have looked different, but could exist. In some cases, though, it is hard to determine, if a photograph should be called constructed or staged. Sadegh Tirafkan´s (Ṣādeq Tirāfkan) (1965-2013) *Persepolis I* (1995-1998) (*Fig.21*) series, is a good example for this difficult question. He staged himself in front of the ruins of the ancient capital of Persia. One could argue, that the photograph is constructed, because the photographer altered the found scene of Persepolis. On the other hand, it could also be understood as staged, as Tirafkan created a new scene in front of a consciously selected background.[111]

In summary, three types of photography have been determined here. Firstly, straight photography, that depicts the world in a realistic and documentary way. Secondly, constructed photography that is the alteration of a found scene and thus can be called an interstage between straight and staged photography. The latter is the third type; here, pictures are constructed by one or more persons only for the camera. The images are neither authentic nor real. It is crucial, that without the photographer´s concept, the picture can not exist. Only the last type of photography is the content of this chapter.

109Mohsen Rastani, "The Iranian Family: A Tradition of Portraiture Captures a Nation," in: Malu Halasa/Maziar Bahra, eds., *Transit Tehran: Young Iran and Its Inspirations* (Reading, 2009): 200-212.
110Hossein Amirsadeghi, *Different Sames* (London, 2009): 148.
111TIRAFKAN Cultural Foundation, ed., *A History for the Future: Sadegh Tirafkan* (Tehran, 2015): 44-49.

### 3.2 Staged Elements in Constructed Portraits (1844-1964)

The forerunners of staged photography in Tehran are to be found in early constructed portraits, taken since the invention of photography in Iran in 1844 - during the Qajar period (1844-1925) and the early Pahlavi-period (1925-1964). One can not speak of staged photography in these photographs, although, plenty of images were constructed, due to technical reasons and long exposure times. But there are a number of pictures that include some staged elements. These typically were backdrops, poses, gestures, arrangements of people as well as props, and attributes in order to characterise the persons depicted in the portrait. An example is a group portrait by Antoin Sevruguin (Antuān Sevrogin) (ca.1838-1933) (*Fig.22*), in which a family is arranged in front of a flower-patterned curtain and a backdrop, on which columns are painted. The families´ poses, as well as their gestures of the hands on the knee or on the table next to them are probably directed by Sevruguin. The use of props and attributes is visible in a photograph of Mirzadeh Eshghi (*Fig.23*), taken by an unknown photographer. Books are lying next to him in order to identify him as a poet, his pose, one arm braced on the book seems to be directed. Nevertheless, in *Fig.22* and *Fig.23* not the whole image is staged, as the main purpose was to portrait the family, respectively Eshghi, and only some elements were the photographers addition. A more elaborate use of staged elements can be detected in photographs by Sevruguin, in which he portrays himself in front of one of the Colossi of the Porch of Xerxes in Persepolis (*Fig.24*). He is the left of the two figures. It is significant, that Sevruguin placed himself inside the photograph after he had arranged the whole set of the image.[112] His appearance is neither necessary for the documentation of the ruins of Persepolis, nor for the display of the height of the colossi, as there is a second person within the photograph. Rather, he shows his quest for being present in his own picture as; staged element, in front of an important site of Iran´s history.[113]

Another example of a photograph by Sevruguin, where he depicts not only himself, but in addition refers consciously to the composition of a European painting - namely Diego Velázquez´ *Las Meninas* (1656) (*Fig.25*) - is *Interior in Gulestan Palace* (*Fig.26*). Five mirrors are hanging from the walls; a number of men, among them Naser al-Din (Nāṣer al-Din) Shah (1831-1896), are inside the hall. The Shah´s front, who is sitting with his back to the viewer, can be seen via the reflection of the mirror and also Sevruguin depicts himself in this manner.[114] This picture is constructed, as Sevruguin photographed an altered scene, but he

112Aphrodite Désirée Navab, "To Be or not to Be an Orentalist?: The Ambivalent Art of Antoin Sevruguin," *Iranian Studies* 35, no. 1-3: 116-117.
113Ibid.: 116-117.
114Ibid: 138-39.

chose the frame and viewpoint consciously. Staged elements are the depiction of the Shah and the inclusion of the photographer himself via a mirror - at the same position as Velázquez did inside his painting.
During the Qajar monarchy, only staged elements in constructed photographs can be detected. The most creative use of these can be seen in photographs by Antoin Sevruguin. It is remarkable, that despite the close contacts to Europe during Qajar times, the idea of the *Tableaux Vivant*, in which paintings are re-staged, obviously did not arrive as a whole concept in Tehran.[115]

The Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), that caused among other things the power shift from the Qajar to the Pahlavi dynasty, also marks the beginning of a gap in research, that lasts approximately until 1970.[116] In other words, up to now no comprehensive research of art-photography during Pahlavi times has been executed. Therefore, my assumption, that there was no staged photography in Iran until 1964 is not certain. But looking at the material I have, it seems, that this is the case. According to Motarjemzadeh, photography was only used for portraiture, advertising and photojournalism between 1920 and 1940.[117] If this statement is true, and art photography did not exist between 1920 and 1940 the question, if there was already staged photography would be obsolete. Moreover, Gohar Dashti (Gohar Dašti) (b.1980), a staged photographer and university-teacher of staged photography at Tehran University, told me, that during the reign of Reza Pahlavi photography played only a minor role, and there was also no staged photography up to the 1960s.[118] Also Parisa Damandan´s above-mentioned publication consists only of portraits, which can be called constructed, similar to portraits taken during Qajar times, with the staged elements like made backgrounds, attributes, and poses directed by the photographer,[119] like *Fig.27* shows. A girl is standing in front of a painted backdrop, holding a cuddly rabbit in her left hand, while having her right artificially placed in front of her stomach.
A more pronounced staged element can be determined in another photograph of the publication (*Fig.28*). It depicts four men in front of a painted backdrop, showing curtains and an arch. The man on the very left seems to kick the one who is facing him, who again is pointing with a revolver towards him while the person in the middle looks towards the sky,

115For *Tableaux Vivants* see for example Bettina Brandl-Risi, *BilderSzenen: ´Tableaux vivants´ zwischen bildender Kunst, Theater und Literatur im 19. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisigau et alii, 2013).
116Also Houtan Noorian confirmed this gap of research: 32.
117Motarjemzadeh, "Photography in the Grey Years (1920-40):" 119-124.
118Personal Interview of Gohar Dashti with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
119Damandan, *Faces of Esfahan*: 272-73.

pretending not to take notice of what is going on just next to him, although, it seems, he prevents the man on the very left to attack the one facing him. The face of the fourth man is erased, his hands are clenched to fists, and he is turned towards the man on the right. Still, these photographs can not be called staged, as their main goal was to portray these persons. They came to the photographer´s studio in order to have a picture of themselves made, and the photograph is not solely a product of the photographer´s imagination. Although, as *Fig.28* shows, some experiments with staged elements already took place.

Not many names of photographers, except of the few, listed by Damandan, that were active during (approximately) 1920-1960 in Iran are known. This is mainly due to the fact, that, up until now, hardly any research has been done for this period of Iranian photography. The fact, that I do not know a single staged photograph, produced before 1964, does not mean, that really none existed, but due to the actual state of research, I consider it as unlikely and see the next important step towards staged photography in 1964.

### 3.3 Staged Elements in Early Fine Art Photography (1964-1989)

Despite the importance for the further development of art photography in Iran, little research is done about the medium also in the 1960s and 1970s.[120] In the 1960s, photography was explored as an art form in Iran.[121] Severi mentions, that the task of photography started to be seen not only as a documentary tool, but also artistic photographic works like photo-montage, collages and sequences were produced.[122] Furthermore, the first two photo-exhibitions in the country were held in 1963, and 1964.[123] A pioneer, in art photography was Ahmad Ali (b.1935), as Turaj Hamidian states,

> "In the early 1960´s famous Iranian photographers were studio professionals. These with aesthetic taste would occasionally work on artistic themes, but they never held exhibitions. Aali […] brought his work to the public and held exhibits."[124]

And Aali himself wrote in the brochure of the photo-exhibition, in which he participated in 1964: "In our society photography is regarded only as a tool for recording memorable scenes and doesn´t go beyond this function."[125] Aali changed this approach and introduced photography as an art form in Iran. He described his idea of using the medium in the following sentence: "I have never wanted to record things for the sake of recording them […]. It is such that photography for me is not a pure copy of nature and objective reality. I want to

120Hamid Severi, "A Remarkable Oversight:" 97.
121Rose Issa, "Still Revelations," in: Rose Issa, ed., *Iranian Photography Now* (London, 2008): 11.
122Hamid Severi, "A Remarkable Oversight:" 101.
123Turaj Hamidian, "I want to Intervene in Nature and Its Realities," in: Ahmad Aali, ed., *Ahmad Aali: Selection of Works 1961-2009* (Tehran, 2010): 246.
124Ibid.: 243.
125Ibid.: 246.

intervene in nature and its realities."[126] This statement is not only important for the idea of photography as an art form, but also for staged photography, in particular, as especially this mode of the medium does not show nature as it is, but intervenes in it. Aali´s theoretical approach is reflected in his practical works. An example is his *Self-Portrait*, that he produced in 1964 (*Fig.29*). He put a photograph of a self-portrait on a wall over a stove with a pipe, that ends in his mouth and took a picture of the juxtaposition. What is crucial in Aali´s work is, that he brought the idea of photography as a form of art to Iran. I am not sure if this photograph is constructed or staged, as I do not have enough information about the production process and the overall concept. If the stove was already there, and Aali put only the photograph behind it, the artist would have altered a found scene, and the photograph should be named constructed. Nevertheless, if Aali´s concept had included to arrange and organise the stove and the photograph, and thus created a new situation, the image should be called staged. Neither the curator Fereshteh Daftari nor the photographer Shariar Tavakoli describe *Self-Portrait* as staged, the former calls it "photomontage,"[127] the latter "constructed photograph."[128]. Now the use of staged elements -if one follows Tavakoli´s and Daftari´s assumption, that *Self-Portrait* is not a staged photograph- exceeded from portraits to the arrangement of objects, for the purpose of being photographed. Furthermore, Aali´s photograph does not have a "function" in real life; he did not want to depict the world how it actually is, but he selected and assembled things; in an order, he wanted them to be together. Daftari indicates, that already Aali´s work consists of metaphors and allegories, caused by political circumstances. The pipe in the artist´s mouth, resembles asphyxiation. Asphyxiation and suppression are synonyms in Persian.[129]

Besides Ahmad Aali, two other persons should be mentioned here as examples for the art photographs that were produced in the 1970s. Marcos Grigorian´s (Mārku Grigoriān) (1925-2007) *A Place to Rest* (1977) (*Fig.30*), is described by Daftari as "performative photograph."[130] Grigorian stages himself in a landscape, as he is lying on his back inside a crater. Here again, as little information about this image is available, it is hard to detect whether it should be described as constructed or staged. It would be constructed if its main

126Ibid.: 245.
127Fereshteh Daftari, "Redefining Modernism: Pluralist Art Before the 1979 Revolution," in: Fereshteh Daftari/Layla S.Diba, eds., *Iran Modern* (New York, 2013): 40.
128Shariar Tavakoli, "In Search of a New Language," in: Ahmad Aali, ed., *Ahmad Aali: Selection of Works 1961-2009* (Tehran, 2010): 249.
129Daftari, "Redefining Modernism:" 40.
130Ibid.: 36.

purpose was a portrait of the artist in a landscape, or the depiction of the landscape with the artist as a prop. But if Grigorian consciously thought about the place of taking this picture and his body pose, and thus created a new scene in front of the landscape, it could also be a staged photograph. It is definitely a forerunner of the staged photography produced in the early 2000, as Grigorian included his own body as a performative element within the image.

Also to mention is Kaveh Golestan´s polaroid-series´ *Az div u dad* (*Of Demon and Beast*) (1976) (*Fig.31*), where Qajar kings and women fight with wild animals like serpents and lions.[131] The curator Vali Mahlouji described it as a creation of

> "[…] surrealistic works that blend fairytale and history, appropriating found photographs and images from the 19th and 20th century. The collages depict visions of anthropomorphic, beast-headed uniformed and nude figures set against natural and architectural backgrounds with references to modern and Qajar era histories."[132]

Although the series is a collage, Golestan created an imaginative world, and introduced by the mix of reality and fiction, past and present; elements, that should be used later in staged photography. The owner of Aaran- (Ārān) gallery Nazila Nobashari (Nāzilā Nobāšāri) said:

> "I think that was probably the start of creating something unusual, something unordinary […]. I think by concept and by idea, that is probably the first man [Golestan], that a world, an imaginative world has been created. And this was just something new."[133]

It is hard to ascertain, if staged photography already occurred in Iran the 1960s and 1970s, but the crucial development in these two decades was; that the medium of photography was understood as a form of art, and although photography was not part of any curriculum in higher education, artists started to experiment with it in terms of juxtaposing elements that were not directly related to each other and also with placing their own person into the photograph in a performative way. An analysis of the reasons for these new developments in the 1960s and 70s still needs further research and discussion, and I can only speculate, that the new developments might have been caused by political restrictions or the adoption of ideas, that artist brought from Europe to Iran.[134] It is crucial, that the discovery of photography as a form of art in the 1960s and 1970s should lead to the tendency of staged photography after the turbulent events of the Iranian Revolution (1978-79) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). During this decade, documentary photography and photojournalism saw their heydays, while art photography played a minor role.[135] Hamid Severi states

131Ibid.: 40.
132Vali Mahlouji, "Az Div o Dad: Fantastical Polaroids of Kaveh Golestan," *Personal Homepage of Vali Mahlouji* (2015*).* Accessed December 14, 2015: http://valimahlouji.com/curatorial/az-div-o-dad-fantastical-polaroids-of-kaveh-golestan/.
133Personal Interview of Nazila Nobashari with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 29.
134Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art*: 121-125.
135Ibid.:161-169.

> "The revolution and the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war promoted and encouraged ´committed art´ and discouraged ´irresponsible art.´ As a result, photography in general -and photojournalism and social documentary in particular- became important because they could vividly communicate vital information about the revolution and the war."[136]

Because of the discovery of photography as a propaganda tool, the status of the medium increased. This was one of the reasons, why a BA study program was established in 1983. Sadegh Tirafkan, who was one of the first photography students in Iran, described the situation of photography in the 1980s in an interview with Shahrooz Nazari,

> "[...] I began photography at a time when the reason believed, educating photographers was to have trained individuals in the fields of photojournalism and documentary photography. This was evident in the education that was offered in the academic curriculum and naturally the war and the revolutionary atmosphere heightened this need. […] At that time no knowing about the various styles of photography existed."[137]

But also fine art photography was produced during the war, although a number of wrong statements, like Tallin Grigor´s, who even speaks of a "period of inactivity" of art in Iran between 1979 and 1990, can be found in secondary literature.[138] The establishment of the photography course was one of the reasons why students turned also to artistic photography, and engaged not only with documentary, as they were attending some courses together with other visual art students.[139] Gohar Dashti was a child during this period and grew up in Ahvaz, one of the cities that suffered most from destruction during the war. She told me, that art photography did exist in the 1980s and compared it with her own childhood, saying that despite bombs being dropped over the city, people went to weddings, as one can not stay at home for eight years. The same can be said of photography, although the situation during the war was not inviting, to make art. Photographers produced art photography though, as one can not refrain from doing art for eight years.[140] In 1987, the first issue of *Aks* was published, and in 1986, and thus in the midst of the war, the first *Ketab-Azad (Ketāb Āzād)* exhibition was held in Tehran, organised by a group of university students, "who wanted to present their artistic expression using a camera."[141] Although no photographs of this period were available for me, these developments show, that during the 1980s, a new generation of students and young photographers became active, who showed an interest in fine art photography,[142] and somehow continued the movement of fine art photography of the 1960s and 1970s. Nonetheless, these efforts were those of individual students in the closed space of Tehran

136Severi, "The New Generation of Iranian Art Photographers:" 82.
137Shahrooz Nazari, "Interview with Sadegh Tirafkan," in: Homa Art Gallery, ed., *Sadegh Tirafkan: Initial Steps* (Tehran, 2013): 9.
138Tallin Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art* (London, 2014): 117-118.
139Severi, "The New Generation of Iranian Art Photographers:" 82.
140Personal Interview of Gohar Dashti with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
141Mehran Mohajer, "Introduction," in: Homa Art Gallery, ed., *Sadegh Tirafkan: Initial Steps* (Tehran, 2013): 2.
142Skype Interview of Houtan Noorian with the Author, Vienna/Bologna, 2015: 32-33.

University. I was told, that some innovative and constructive photographs were made. Unfortunately, most of these photographers refrained from the medium in the 1990s or changed to documentary photography. A photographer, who kept on producing fine- art photography was Sadegh Tirafkan.[143]

It is not easy to describe formal changes between the photographs, taken in the 1960s and those taken in the 1980s, as no pictures of the latter period are available for me, I can only cite Houtan Noorian, who characterised art photography in the 1960s as "more experimental" and the 1980s as "more conceptual."[144] Staged photography still did not exist, as Tirafkan confirmed in an interview "When I was at university neither students nor teachers and not even the arts media knew anything or had any knowledge of staged photography."[145] This was also caused by Iran´s isolation during the war, and; in the pre-internet-era it was nearly impossible to receive books or any other information from abroad.[146]

### 3.4 Early Works of Staged Photography (1989-1996)

Right after the war, "at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties [...] fine art photography [...] did not exist,"[147] said Sadegh Tirafkan. But he made crucial steps for the development of staged photography in these years, starting with his final project at university, *The Armenians* (1989) (*Fig.32*), shot in the Armenian quarter of Julfa in Esfahan. What makes this documentary series remarkable, is Tirafkan´s self-inclusion within the picture in front of a wall, hiding his face and other parts of his body behind a piece of white cloth. This is a link to the performative elements in art photography of the 1970s, like Grigorian´s works (*Fig.30*), but further developed, due to the inclusion of other items than the body only, and with more staged elements, like the act of hiding. Tirafkan said, he drew his influence from theatre and cinema, which aroused, similar to Aali, the wish "to interfere" in photography."[148] He only dared to implement his ideas after he read a feature about the American photographer Cindy Sherman and thus realised, that "another kind of photography existed."[149]After this reading, he

> "[...] begun looking at photography with this mentality, [...] my instructor and my friends laughed at my works and my final grade at university was the least possible passing grade. The reason was clear; it had nothing to do with the definition of photography, which was known at that time."[150]

143Personal Interview of an Anonymous Person with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
144Skype Interview of Houtan Noorian with the Author, Vienna/Bologna, 2015: 32.
145Nazari, "Interview with Sadegh Tirafkan:" 11-12.
146Ibid.: 13.
147Ibid.: 11.
148Ibid.: 13.
149Ibid.: 13.
150Ibid.: 13.

Apparently Sadegh Tirafkan and the group of students, who participated in the *Ketab-Azad* exhibition in 1986, mentioned above, acknowledged that another form of photography, besides that of documentary and photojournalism existed. Tirafkan´s series was published in a number of books and catalogues. How Tirafkan developed the wish to intervene in realities and construct his own pictures, is not mentioned anywhere, but his role as a pioneer of the fine art photography in Iran at the beginning of the 1980s, is indicated in a number of publications. Hossein Amirsadeghi, for example, describes him as "the vanguard of the Iranian artistic movement,"[151] and Andrea D. Fitzpatrick states, "Tirafkan was the artist who initiated the performative stream of photography in Iran in the late 1980s."[152] But Tirafkan´s staging scenes and re-enactments were still dependent on the area in the background of *The Armenians*. This is also true for his series *Ashoura* (1990) (*Fig.33*) and *Persepolis I* (1995-1998) (*Fig.21*), to name only two. These photographs can be either seen as constructed or staged, depending on the viewpoint. If they are understood as an alteration of the found background of Julfa, for example, via Tirafkan´s appearance, they are constructed. On the other hand, the series can also be described as staged, if the artist´s self-appearance is seen as the creation of a new scene through his performance in front of a selected background. Special attention should be given to *Persepolis I*, as this is a clear reference to Iranian history. The artist, his face hidden behind a white cloth, is standing in front the ancient ruins.
Tirafkan introduced self-staging in Iranian photography after the war, his use of cloth, that makes him faceless are characteristic for his works, and, according to Abbas Daneshvari, could be understood as questioning his identity and mystification of history via the hidden face.[153]

But it was not only Sadegh Tirafkan, who explored new ways of photography in the 1990s. Another person, who did not get the attention, she should get for her contribution to the development of fine art photography in Iran, as she is not mentioned in any publication on contemporary Iranian art, is Zahra Irani-Sefat (Zahrā Irāni Ṣefat) (b. ca. 1965). I analysed the available catalogues of the photo biennials and photo exhibitions, that have been organised by TMOCA since 1987.[154] Although the majority of the exhibited works between 1991 and 1997

151Amirsadeghi, *Different Sames*: 282.
152Andrea D. Fitzpatrick, "Seeing Iran Through the Art of Sadegh Tirafkan," in: TIRAFKAN Cultural Foundation, ed., *A History for the Future: Sadegh Tirafkan* (Tehran, 2015): 59.
153Abbas Daneshvari, *Amazingly Original* (Costa Mesa, 2014): 376-382.
154I used the following catalogues: Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *The 4th Annual Photo Exhibition of Iran* (Tehran, 1992); Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *The 5th Annual Photo Exhibition of Iran* (Tehran, 1993); Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *Iran Photo Biennial (The 6th Exhibition)* (Tehran, 1994); Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *Iran Photo Biennial (The 7th Exhibition)* (Tehran, 1996);

were documentary-, nature- and portrait-photographs, also art-photographs were on display every year. I can not name all art photographers, who exhibited during this period, but will focus here on Irani-Sefat as an example. She can be considered as one of the most active fine art photographers at the beginning of the 1990s, because she exhibited staged photography three times in a row at the TMOCA photo-exhibitions.[155] At the *5th Biennial* in 1993, Irani-Sefat participated with a photograph named *Ascension* (1992) (*Fig.34*), which shows a headless, female body in front of a window in an interior.[156] Contrary to Tirafkan´s works; I have no doubt, that this photograph is staged, as it was arranged in a room only for the sole purpose of being photographed and exhibited. Moreover, there is no indication, that the scene was a found one, but rather looks entirely arranged. The pose of the woman´s hands, the drapery of the curtains, the direction of light towards her missing head were all selected by Irani-Sefat, it seems the first staged photograph in Iran was produced at latest in 1992.

In 1994, Zahra Irani-Sefat exhibited staged photography at the *6th Iran Photo Biennial* again. Her image *Mandala* (1993) (*Fig.35*) shows a woman in rear view in front of a latticed window. Below her, a cut of the image, the woman´s occiput and a part of her left arm, without the lattice is visible.[157]

At the *7th Iran Photo Biennial* in 1997, Irani-Sefat showed a three-piece staged photograph series named *First Choice* (1996) (*Fig.36*). Different body-parts of the same woman are shown with one or more apples. The first photograph depicts her torso and her right hand, that holds an apple in front of her stomach. The second photograph shows her feet up to her knee. Right next to her lie five apples, each, except for the one on the very right, are of yellow colour. On the third photograph, the body of the woman is visible from her hair to slightly under her chest. Her hands, that hold a yellow apple, are placed in front of her face, the eyes are closed. Seen together, it is clearly visible, that it shows the woman´s whole body and that the series is staged. It is likely that the photographer advised the woman how to pose with the repetitive motif of the apple.[158] Nonetheless, one should not forget, that the term staged photography had not yet been introduced at that time in the country, and, that it is more than unlikely, that Irani-Sefat knew, that she was producing staged photographs.[159]

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Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *The 8th International Iran Photo Exhibition* (Tehran, 1998).

155 Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *The 4th Annual Photo Exhibition of Iran;* Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *The 5th Annual Photo Exhibition of Iran;* Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *Iran Photo Biennial (The 6th Exhibition)*; Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *Iran Photo Biennial (The 7th Exhibition)*.

156 Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *The 5th Annual Photo Exhibition of Iran*: 31

157 Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *Iran Photo Biennial (The 6th Exhibition)*: 71.

158 Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *Iran Photo Biennial (The 7th Exhibition)*: 69.

159 Unfortunately, I was not able to talk to Irani-Sefat in Tehran, all my attempts to get in contact with her were in vain.

I argue, that staged photography emerged in the 1990s at latest, primarily because of political factors. The atmosphere in Iran, was very tense after the war, and there was a lot of censorship; in some way negative pictures of the country, that were not directly connected to the harm, that was done by the Iraqis during the war, were not allowed to be shown.[160] After Khomeini´s death in 1989 and the election of Rafsanjani as president, this changed slowly towards an increased openness in Iran. One of the measures, that were taken to create a less claustrophobic atmosphere, was, the permission for artists with foreign training, who were banned from teaching at universities, to work again. Other factors, that contributed to the development of fine art photography, were the establishment of the first MA study programme on photography in 1996,[161] the artistic developments in photography of the 1980s, the regular photo-exhibitions of TMOCA, translations of articles about staged photography abroad in photo-magazines, a rising interest in the history of photography, especially among students at the University of Tehran[162] and the fact, that photography was easily affordable, available and could be distributed quite rapidly.[163] Nonetheless, art-photography was not institutionalised during that time, but some artists carried out a self-study of developments in other countries and were influenced by them.

The two examples of staged or constructed photography of this period, the works of Tirafkan and Irani-Sefat, show an interest in the depiction of people with symbolic attributes, metaphors, and allegories. Examples are the lattice, the apple or the fragmented body in Irani-Sefat´s works and the inclusion of the cloth and the consciously chosen background of Persepolis and Julfa in Tirafkan´s photograph series.
While Tirafkan shows and hides himself behind the cloth or is turned away from the viewer, a work of Irani Sefat shows a headless woman, another one a woman in rear view and in another photograph, the woman´s eyes are closed. Therefore, the facelessness is a repetitive element in the works of both artists. Tirafkan´s interest for staged, or constructed photography was developed from documentary photography of an exterior, in which he placed himself, while Irani-Sefats images in interiors can be understood as pure fine art images, that were arranged only to be photographed and exhibited. While, as discussed above, it depends on one´s point of view if Tirafkan´s series should be called staged or constructed, Irani Sefat´s

160Personal Interview of Jila Dejam with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
161Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art*: 119.
162Skype Interview of Houtan Noorian with the Author, Vienna/Bologna, 2015: 32-33.
163Julia Allerstorfer, "Performing Visual Strategies: Representational Concepts of Female Iranian Identity in Contemporary Photography and Video Art," in: Staci Gem Scheiwiller, ed., *Performing the Iranian State* (London et alii, 2013): 176.

series is definitely staged. Therefore, the arrival of staged photography in Iran happened in 1992 at the latest, maybe even earlier, although I do not have a certain example before 1992. It is noteworthy, that the term staged photography had not yet been introduced in the country, Irani-Sefat thus, was not aware, that she was practising staged photography.

### 3.5 The Tendency towards Staged Photography (1997-2009)

Another turning point for contemporary art in general in Iran, and thus, also for staged photography, was the election of Mohammad Khatami as president in 1997. His presidency, that is called by Keshmirshekan "reform period," lasted until 2005.[164] Due to his reforms, that led to an opening of Iran towards Europe and the USA, books and journals from other countries arrived in Iran. More or less at the same time the internet was introduced. Because of these facts, Iranian artists gained more comprehensive access to art from abroad.[165] In addition, after the election of Khatami, censorship became less strict for a short period, and thus more critical art could be exhibited and photographers who lived abroad visited the country.[166] These factors altogether led to an increase of the number of exhibitions and other art activities, especially, in Tehran.[167] Through the framework conditions, set during the presidencies of Rafsanjani and Khatami, more artists entered the art scene, more public institutions, that supported art activities were opened, and this period also coincides with the arrival of the information age, and thus an easier cross-linking with the rest of the world.[168]

Therefore, the tendency towards staged photography started during and because of the reform period. An increased use of the medium was also noticed by some authors. Mehdi Moghimnejad writes in his short essay on Iranian photography *Exposure and Privacy* (2013) "During the last decade, […] photography has undergone a process of its own conditioning – a situation in which there is a tendency towards ´staged´ imagery, a renewed form of the tableau."[169] Also Tanvi Mishra detects a "strong presence of staged imagery in contemporary Iranian photography,"[170] as more and more artists use this genre to express themselves.

Because of the amount of staged photographers in Iran from this period until today, it is impossible to name all of them. Thus I selected a number of examples, that I subjectively consider as important because of the quality of their work, the issues they are addressing, and

164Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art*: 233.
165Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art: Developments and Challenges," in: Hossein Amirsadeghi, ed., *Different Sames* (London, 2009): 33-36.
166Issa, "Still Revelations:" 13.
167Keshmirshekan, "Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art:" 33-36.
168Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art*: 233-234.
169Mehdi Moghimnejad, "Exposure and Privacy," *PIX* 8 (August 2013): 3.
170Tanvi Mishra, "The ´Other´ Reality," *PIX* 8 (August 2013): 16.

their impact on other artists. It is not necessary to analyse whether the works discussed below are staged, as they all clearly fulfil the above mentioned criteria of staged photography.

The starting point of the tendency is marked by Shadi Ghadirian´s *Qajar* (*Fig.20*) series, which she produced in 1998. Ghadirian, worked in the *City House of Photography*, and there she had the possibility to study photographs of the Qajar era. In *Qajar*, she rebuilt backgrounds, typically used in 19th century portraits and dressed the women in clothes, worn in the Qajar era. Moreover, she added a contemporary, and thus anachronistic object, like a bicycle or a can of Pepsi cola, instead of the usual Qajar-attributes to every portrait. Thereby Ghadirian illustrates, as Rose Issa states, in which paradoxes Iranian women of the artist´s generation live and which boundaries are settled by society between tradition and modernity.[171] Ghadirian continued the exploration of the status of Iranian women with a sense of humour and irony in her later works of staged photography. Examples are *Like Everyday* (2000) (*Fig.37*), a photo assemblage, in which the faces of women in chadors are covered by kitchen utensils. The artist produced the work in the aftermath of her marriage, when she was irritated by the number of kitchen utensils, she was given, in order to improve her domestic skills. Issa describes the series as a

> "witty parody of expectations and restrictions. […] Her fascination with the paradoxical life of women in Iran today, shown mostly behind doors, is a spirited wink at authority, showing the impossibility of restricting a person in a situation that humour can save."[172]

The issue of Ghadirian´s series *White Square* (2009) (*Fig.38*) and *Nil Nil* (2008) (*Fig.39*) is the Iran-Iraq war. Both are a combination of military items in domestic spaces; bullets are decorated with a pink ribbon and a gas mask is placed next to cuddly toys in a nursery.[173] In doing so "Ghadirian [...] transports us to a place where war has a very silent but powerful role. […] Defamiliarized (sic) and removed from their context, these accoutrements of war appear at once menacing and delicate, their aggressiveness tempered by the feminine element,"[174] is to be read in the flyer of the exhibition *Burnt Generation*.

Also Sadegh Tirafkan was still active in this period. He can be seen as Ghadirian´s counterpart, as he examined the role of masculinity in Iranian culture in his series *Iranian Man* (2000) (*Fig.40*). Here, he depicts himself in front of a sparse background with a traditional red cloth over his head, worn by men in Iran since pre-Islamic times, and a sword

171Rose Issa, *Contemporary Iranian Art* (London, 2001): 35.
172Rose Issa, "The Fabric of Life and Art: The Emergence of a New Aesthetic Language," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, *Amidst Shadow and Light* (Hong Kong, 2011): 173-174.
173Shaheen Merali, ed., *The Promise of Loss: A Contemporary Index of Iran* (Vienna, 2009): 24.
174Candelstar, ed., "Burnt Generation," *Flyer of the Exhibition* (London, 2014): 1.

in his hands. Tirafkan, who continued his self-representation from his early works until his death, said about this characteristic

> "perhaps it is the ´self˝ which is bearing witness to everyhing, everyhwere. You see the witness both in my early works and in my recent works of the past few months; a dazed and confused person unable to do, anything about that which takes place around him, except to watch. There is always such a person present in my photographs, the monologue of their eyes while passive, bitterly reveals that which has befallen us. […] He is the representative of a kind of identity, nationality and a specific period of history."[175]

Tirafkan also includes himself in *Temptation* (2005) (*Fig.41*), that resembles Leonardo da Vincis *Last Supper* (ca.1494/1498) (*Fig.42*), as it shows male persons, behind a table. All four men in *Fig.41*, one of them is the artist himself, and the boy are dressed in white clothes. Another man is standing and pressing pomegranate juice into his mouth. Pomegranate juice is also flowing like blood in a line down his body, his head is put back, thus his face is not visible, while the other four people are sitting and looking spellbound up to him. In another image of *Temptation* (*Fig.43*), all five are shown in rear view, all make the same gesture as the standing man in *Fig.41.* Most of the pomegranates on the table are already eaten, only their peels are lying around. The meal is obviously in full swing. *Temptation* is a highly symbolic and allegorical work, as the pomegranate and its likeness to blood, as well as the reference to da Vinci inherits a number of meanings.[176] The photographer Mehran Mohajer understands *Iranian Man* and *Temptation* as

> "the conceptual framework of male violence contrasts with the typical aestheticization (sic!) of the body, creating an unfathomable anxiety. Here, through the direct or indirect use of the genre of self-portraiture, Tirafkan manages ingeniously to integrate the archetypal triple roles of "the artist," "the narrator" and "the actor", which frequently appear in traditional, staged studio photography. Covertly, and without disrupting representational norms, Tirafkan poses serious questions about Iran's patriarchal culture and about society at large."[177]

Thus, here is a similarity in Tirafkan´s work to Sevruguin (*Fig.24*) detectable, as both pose within their photographs as inventors of the images, and therefore are photographers and artists, but are also part of the scene as actors.

Although, I consider Ghadirian and Tirafkan as the most active and influential staged photographers in this period, there were of course also a number of others, who were doing staged photography, which is visible if one flips through the catalogues of the 8th,,9th and 11th photo-biennials, held by TMOCA in 1998, 2004 and 2008/09.[178]

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175Nazari, "Interview with Sadegh Tirafkan:" 17-18.

176Shahrouz Nazari, "Rostam Supplicating Over Sohrab," in: TIRAFKAN Cultural Foundation, ed., *A History for the Future: Sadegh Tirafkan* (Tehran, 2015): 74.

177Mehran Mohajer, "The Sincere Art in Memory of Sadegh Tirafkan: Iranian Artist and Photographer," *Art Asia Pacific Magazine* (August 2, 2013). Accessed December 22, 2015: http://artasiapacific.com/News/TheSincereArtInMemoryOfSadeghTirafkanIranianArtistAndPhotographer.

178Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *The 8th International Iran Photo Exhibition* (Tehran, 1998); Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *9th Tehran Photo Biennial* (Tehran, 2004); Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, ed., *The 11th Iranian National Photo Biennial* (Tehran, 2008/09). No catalogue of the 10th

I will shortly introduce two more staged photographers here, in order to demonstrate, that gender topics and the Iran-Iraq war, were important issues within staged photography in this period. Shirin Aliabadi (Širinʿ Aliābādi) (b.1973) shows in her series *Miss Hybrid* (2006-2008) (*Fig.44*) young Iranian women, who try to look as European or American as possible. Their barely veiled hair is dyed blonde. They wear heavy make-up and a nose-plaster -a reference to a very current beauty trend in Iran-, and are attributed with consumer´s products like ice-creams or mobile-phones.[179]
Arash Hanaei (Araš Ḥanāyi) (b.1978) on the other hand does not address gender issues, but his experiences during the Iran-Iraq war as a child, where he saw dead corpses after the use of chemical weapons. He uses puppets, which he cuts into pieces, paints black or chars, for staging scenes of violence in the series *The Benefit of Vegetarianism* (2004) (*Fig.45*).[180]

The way to staged photography was a process. A number of photographers, who began working in the early 2000s, did not start with staged, but with constructed photography, and should turn to the staged medium later in their careers. Arman Stepanian´s (Ārmān Estepāniān) (b.1956) *Graveyards* series (1999) (*Fig.46*) for example, is still not staged photography, as he put images on graves, and thus altered a found scene. Also Tooraj Khamenezadeh´s (Turaj Kāmeneh-Zādeh) (b.1977) *Cemetery Worker* (2003) (*Fig.47*) is constructed photography, as he advised an actual cemetery worker how to act on the cemetery, thus he altered the behaviour of a found person in a found scene.[181] Ramyar Manoucherzadeh (Rāmyār Manučehr-Zādeh) (b.1980) photographed his parents for his project *The Father* (2003-2005) (*Fig.48*) in their home and partly advised them what to do. As all three projects were the alteration of found conditions, and not the creation of new scenes, they can still not be called staged photography, although they inherit a number of staged elements.

At the end of the period of the tendency towards staged photography, the first cinematographic work was produced in Iran. That is to say, that many elements of cinema frames and film stills, like acting, or in the photo theorist David Campany´s words the "preparatory image construction typical of narrative cinema," were adopted to photography.[182]

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Biennial was published.
179Amirsadeghi, *Different Sames*: 70.
180Issa, *Iranian Photography Now*: 84.
181Personal Interviews of Tooraj Khamenezadeh and Arman Stepanian with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 19 and 43-44.
182David Campany, "Introduction/When to be Fast? When to be Slow?," in: David Campany, ed., *The Cinematic* (London, 2007): 14.

Most publications, that mention the term cinematography use relatively vague definitions like Campany, thus I cite Abigail F Schoenberg´s relevant and simple answer to this question in her article *What is Cinematography?* Although she is writing about film-making, her statement can be transferred to photography:

> The cinematographer—also known as the Director of Photography, or "DP"—though one of the most obscure members of the production team, is responsible for all the visual elements of a film. He or she makes every creative choice related to composition, lighting, and camera motion—anything that audiences can see in a given shot. The DP determines everything from color (sic!) to depth-of-field—how much of the shot is in focus versus how much is blurry—from zoom to the positioning of people and objects within any given frame.[183]

This definition applies to Gohar Dashtis series *Today´s Life and War* (2008) (*Fig.49*). It shows a couple in its everyday life activities in front of a landscape with elements of war; they hang the laundry on barbed wire for example. Dashti, who, as mentioned above, grew up in Ahvaz during the Iran-Iraq war, tried to show how the war still affects the lives of her generation nowadays. Although it is already over, the war is still present in the minds and the memories of people. Similar to Ghadirian she states through her work, that the past has not passed, but that it effects the present.

What were the reasons for this increase in the production of staged photography, aside from Khatami´s reform period, that was discussed above? Firstly, there were Iranian art magazines, like *Aks*, that introduced art and historical photography, which led to a slow rise of awareness for this genre.[184] Staged photography was featured in 2000 with Shirin Neshat´s *Women of Allah* (1994),[185] and one year later; an article on Cindy Sherman was published.[186] Further examples are introductions of Neshat´s *Rapture* (1998) and *Women Without Men* (2002-2010) in 2005, and an article about Loretta Lux in 2006.[187] *Herfeh: Honarmand* depicted works by Cindy Sherman and Shirin Neshat in 2004;[188] Mitra Tabrizian in 2005;[189] Cindy Sherman, David La Chapelle, Christopher Griffith, Loretta Lux and Yasuma Morimura in 2007;[190] Gregory Crewdson[191] and Jeff Wall in 2008. In the latter article the English term "staged

183 Abigail W. Schoenberg, "What is Cinematography? An Introduction to the Most Mystifying Academy Award," *The Harvard Crimson* (February 8, 2011). Accessed December 2, 2015: http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2011/2/8/what-is-cinematography/.
184 *Aks* 143 (1998): 20ff. For Qajar examples see for instance *Aks* 139 (1998): 32ff; for European photographs *Aks* 133 (1998): 10, for Iranian photography of the 1960s *Aks* 130 (1997): 30-31.
185 *Aks* 156 (2000): 9.
186 *Aks* 175 (2001): 51.
187 *Aks* 221 (2005): 82; *Aks* 223 (2005): 70ff; *Aks* 235 (2006): 24-31.
188 *Herfeh: Honarmand* 1 (2002): 34 and 53 and 71; *Herfeh: Honarmand* 2 (2002): 22ff and 133-150.
189 *Herfeh: Honarmand* 11 (2005): 56ff.
190 *Herfeh: Honarmand* 20 (2007): 50; *Herfeh: Honramand* 21 (2007): 1-23.
191 *Herfeh: Honarmand* 24 (2008): 1-25.

photography" was used.[192] Thus at the latest in 2008, the term and the most important staged photographers were known in Iran. The magazine also continued to report about staged photography in the following years.

A second reason was, that Alireza Sami Azar (ʿAli-Reżā Šāmī-Āzar) became director of TMOCA in 1998. He invited international artists, critics and academics and held exhibitions with a conceptual approach at the beginning of this century.[193] Also Iranian artists, who lived abroad were invited, among them the two staged photographers Mitra Tabrizian and Shirin Neshat. The former held a lecture in TMOCA in 2005 or 2006, the latter an exhibition.[194] At the beginning of this century, the term "staged photography" was still not broadly known in Iran, not even at the photo-department of Tehran University. Ramyar Manoucherzadeh, who studied photography at that time, told me

> "It was after the time that we started doing staged photography, that the TMOCA invited Mitra Tabrizian. It was the first time, that maybe talking about staged photography became more open in Iran. […] It was the first time, she talked about staged photography, and after that I knew, what I had done before was staged photography.[195]

Other factors for the increasing number of staged photographers were according to Severi,

> "widespread access to the internet, satellite TV and other new media; the importation of new photography and art books through annual book fairs [...] increased opportunities for Iranian artists to travel to other countries; and the evolution of the photography students of 1980s and early 1990s into photography instructors at today´s universities."[196]

The election of Ahmadinejad in 2005 marked the end of the reform period, which also meant a change in the art scene, as Kehsmirshekan states

> "Private sectors such as galleries, too gained more influence from their international connections […] This period also witnessed the development in the market of all sorts of non-Euro-American art, including contemporary Iranian art, with more exhibitions of this art in western and non-western cultural venues. The wealthy Persian Gulf states started to play an increasing role as a market for artists from other regional countries including Iranian art; their museum infrastructure has been developed and international events created-like the Sharjah Biennial, Art Dubai and Christie´s auctions."[197]

With the emerging market, also more artists produced for it and started to imitate well-selling artists like Ghadirian or Tirafkan, which caused an increased production of staged photography.

192 *Herfeh: Honarmand* 25 (2008): 1-20.
193 Severi, "The New Generation of Iranian Art Photographers:" 84-85.
194 Issa, "The Fabric of Life and Art:" 172; Personal Interview of Ramyar Manoucherzadeh with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 24.
195 Personal Interview of Ramyar Manoucherzadeh with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 24.
196 Severi, "The New Generation of Iranian Art Photographers:" 84-85.
197 Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Globalisation and the Question of Identity: Discourses on Contemporary Iranian Art during the Past Two Decades," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Amidst Shadow and Light* (Hong Kong, 2011): 75.

Thus, the reasons for the populating rise of staged photography were an openness towards Europe and the USA, which led to a warmer reception of staged photographers from these counties in Iranian magazines, efforts by TMOCA to exhibit conceptual art forms, lectures and exhibitions held by international and Iranian artists, who lived abroad as well as an emerging market, that demanded staged photography. Moreover, since 2005, and even before it was easier to produce art photography than documentary photography, due to political factors, a development, that even increased in 2009.

The main subjects of the staged photographs produced during the period of the tendency towards staged photography were the Iran-Iraq war and gender issues. It was typical to use symbols, metaphors and allegories.

### 3.6 Staged Photography since 2009: Current Situation

The Green Movement in 2009, that shook Iran in all courses of life, also effected the arts, and led to an increase of the production of staged photography. After 2009, the working conditions for photojournalists who covered the demonstrations, became harder, or even impossible, thus some switched to staged photography. Two examples are Newsha Tavakolian (Niušā Tavakoliān) (b.1981) and Tahmineh Monzavi (Tahmineh Monzavi) (b. 1988).

After being released from prison, where she was sent, because of her documentation of life in Iran, Monzavi produced her series *All About Me, nicknamed Crown Giver* (2014) (*Fig.50*), here, she stages women, who are wearing beautiful, precious dresses and brass crowns, in and around a dusty, ruined house. Monzavi deals in this series not only with womanhood and female dreams, but also with the behaviour of Iranian society in general.[198] Also Tavakolian´s project *Listen* (*Fig.51*) (2011) focuses on women´s issues. She produced the staged portraits after her press card was confiscated in 2009, and she was banned from working, due to her coverage of the demonstrations. Tavakolian made photographs of professional singers, who were not allowed to perform solo, because they were women, and made "dream cover CDs for each."[199] In *Look* (2013) *(Fig.52)*, Tavakolian staged portraits of her neighbours in her bedroom. At *Burnt Generation*, the work was describes as follows:

> "[it] springs from her desire to delve into the lives of those who live in the same building as her [...]. These photographs depict the story of middle class youths attempting to cope with their isolated society, and battling with their lack of hope for the future. Over a period of six months at 8pm, Tavakolian fixed her camera [...] in front of the window and tried to capture a moment that illustrated each of their stories."[200]

198Tahmine Monzavi, "Biography," *Homepage of Tahmine Monzavi* (2015). Accessed December 23, 2015: http://www.tahminehmonzavi.com/.

199A.S. Studios (Sabz Gallery), *Newsha Tavakolian/Photography* (Tehran, 2013): 41.

200Candlestar, "Burnt Generation:" 2.

Tavakolian does not see herself as a staged photographer, but produced her portraits, only out of the need to do something, and not just to sit at home.[201] She states

> "Intense pressures in Iran have now forced me to almost completely forgo photojournalism and engage even more in conceptual photography As a result I now create my own perspectives, based on the emotions of those around me."[202]

But also artists, who were not punished by the government opted for staged photography as a measure of prevention of getting into trouble, as Arman Stepanian told me

> "[...] in Iran you can not take your camera to the street to take photos. Every photograph in Iran is in places, where is no police and take your camera. Documentary photography is dead in Iran now. No one does it. A camera costs four- or five thousand dollars and no one likes to do this. And when you loose your camera you loose four thousand dollars. "[203]

Mehdi Moghimnejad mentions, that the tendency towards staged photography

> "[...] points to the state enforced restrictions and artistic freedom, and hence the artists commitment as reactionary voice. For some the presence of professional photographers in urban spaces has stirred resentments and morphed the very sense of an active ´photo journalism´ into taboo, i.e. something that is practiced with trepidation."[204]

And Tanvi Mishra states "What can not be documented in the real world, may be reconstructed through fiction, though always drawing inspiration from real time events and issues."[205]

Tooraj Khamenezadeh told me something similar

> "Maybe because of the restrictions in showing your idea, to find a way to react about the social matters, you can usually make the stories in the way you want. Because taking pictures from the real events is not possible in some ways. And even if you take these kind of photos you can not show them. So maybe there is a way to react, to show your fear about the social problems and everything."[206]

Nazila Nobashari sees even a therapeutic aspect in the medium of staged photography "[...] it is a critical way to create a story, that is a product of the imagination. I would explain the medium as a cure. Staged photography is just a cure."[207]

For these reasons, and due to the development of staged photography by artists, who already experimented with constructed photography in the 2000s, namely Stepanian, Khamenezadeh and Manoucherzadeh, the current popularity of staged photography can be explained. At the time of the creation of the following works, the artists were already introduced to the principles of the medium, and the term was widely known in the art scene in Iran.

Arman Stepanian stages women in his series The *Hidden Meaning of Photography in Iran* (2010-2011) (*Fig.53*), who are not dressed in accordance to the Iranian laws of clothing, in his

201Personal Interview of Newsha Tavakolian with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
202A.S. Studios (Sabz Gallery), *Newsha Tavakolian*: 10.
203Personal Interview of Arman Stepanian with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 45.
204Moghimnejad, "Exposure and Privacy:" 4.
205Mishra, "The ´Other´ Reality:" 16.
206Personal Interview of Tooraj Khamaenezadeh with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 22-23.
207Personal Interview of Nazila Nobashari with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 28.

studio. He refers to European and Iranian art by using "symbolic elements that resonate with cultural associations, but remain ambiguous." Furthermore, he includes the position of photography in the country, by adding the Persian word for photography "Aks," in red or green letters in his photographs. *Fig.53* depicts a young women, wearing a black dress, her legs are exposed, a black veil covers her face.[208] The green letters "Aks" in the right foreground are covered by oak leaves. Behind her, Stepanian placed a birdcage, which could be read as a symbol for women, who are coming of age or imprisonment, or as a sign of the restrictions, that apply to women in Iran. A photograph of an Armenian girl from the artist´s Qajar-era-photograph collection is hanging on the wall. Andrea Fitzpatrick interprets this as Stepanian´s quest for women´s literacy, as during the Qajar era, Armenians educated their girls, while the Qajars did not.[209] Other works by Stepanian resemble Shirin Neshat´s *Women of Allah* (1993-1997) (*Fig.54*). An example is *New Version of Ghajar Photography* (2008) (*Fig.55*), on which two women in chadors are depicted in rear view, the leg of the left woman is exposed. He does not take up the subject of women in chadors only, but also, like in Neshat´s picture, the writing of Persian letters onto the image. In his recent works Stepanian also shows himself in front of the camera, for example in *1919-2015 Antoine & I* (2015) (*Fig.56*), where he is sitting on the very left. Furthermore, this image deals with Iranian photo-history, Antoine, is of course, Antoine Sevruguin, an image by the Qajar photographer is hanging in the background on the right of Stepanian´s picture.

Shortly after the Green Movement Ali Nadjian (ʿAli Nājiān) (b.1976) and Ramyar Manoucherzadeh´s *We Live in a Paradoxical Society* (2009) (*Fig.57*) was exhibited. The series shows images of Iranians at home, for example a sad looking girl who stands on the right side of the image next to a wall, while two men in the room next to her apparently consume drugs. It was the first time that an Iranian art-project addressed the tensions and duality between inside and outside, in other words, the daily life in Iran, that is separated into a domestic and a public space, that strongly differ from each other. While there is a certain freedom inside the house, the rules, set by the government, have to be followed in public. Manoucherzadeh said, their main concern was to understand why they have to live with these paradoxes and what they are. He explained the project´s success, in direct relation to the upheavals

208Andrea Fitzpatrick, *Gender and Exposure*: 15-17.
209Ibid.: 15-17.

> "It was like a prediction, a matter of how these paradoxes can go on between the society and the government. And when the project was finished and to be shown, it was at the peak of the problems between the people and the government. […] The content of this project and being simultaneous with the historical event of that time [the Green Movement], was something that was needed for seeing this project so much. For thirty years before that event [the Green Movement], the Iranian people divided the history in two parts, before the revolution [of 1979] and after the revolution. [of 1979] After that [the Green Movement] before the election of 2009 and after the election of 2009. After that [the Green Movement] it was like the history happened between these two parts. And in that time the decision was made, to say no [...] So in that time, showing this disagree [...] is kind of shown in the pictures."[210]

Another artist, who began his artistic career with constructed photographs, and switched to staged photography is Tooraj Khamenezadeh. In his series *Apprehension Jungle* (2014) (*Fig.58*), he stages one or two persons in a dark and gloomy wood, accompanied by a white rope. Their poses are taken from famous works of historical European art, for example the girl on *Fig.58* is a reference to Edvard Munch´s *Ashes* (1894) (*Fig.59*). The artist told me "I tried to make a connection with the history of art. All pictures are influenced by old paintings, like Goya, Munch, Käthe Kollwitz." The artist selected the paintings,"because of their contents and concept and also the forms. […] And the context is the same as my context."[211] I read the series as a comment on the sad life in Iran, that became more claustrophobic and strict after the Green Movement failed.

In addition, Khamenezadeh told me, that he drew inspiration from the cinematographic works of the US-photographer Gregory Crewdson.[212] Like Khamenezadeh, Crewdson also staged a person in a dark and gloomy wood in his series *Beneath the Roses* (2003) (*Fig.60*). Comparable are also the technique of cinematography, the use of lighting and the creation of an "uncanny" situation, that lets the viewer not know what has happened before and after the depicted scene.

Also Gohar Dashti, who continued her work in staged photography by using cinematography after 2009, is influenced by a European staged photographer. In one image of her series *Slow Decay* (2010) (*Fig.61*), a girl´s head rests on a table next to a telephone, that stands in a pool of blood and is covered with bloodstains. It resembles a photograph by the German artist Loretta Lux. In *Yanan* (*Fig.62*) also a girl´s head lies on her hands on a table with her eyes closed. The principle of Dashti´s series is similar to Ghadirian´s *White Square (Fig.38)* and *Nil Nil (Fig.39)*. Both artists depict seemingly peaceful scenes, but include disturbing elements, like army boots or pools of blood, that address the impact of the war on their generation. Dashti used a similar concept in her series *Volcano* (2012) (*Fig.63*). It reminds of

210Personal Interview of Ramyar Manoucherzadeh with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 26.
211Personal Interview of Tooraj Khamenezadeh with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 21.
212Ibid.: 22.

advertising photographs, where people laugh and seem to be happy in a gallery room. Dashti explained to me, that so many people in Iran are laughing, although they are not happy, because there is something disturbing, that is not visible at first sight, like the reptile´s tail in *Volcano* on the right side of the gallery room.[213] Another project by Dashti, *Iran Untitled* (2013) (*Fig.64*) is obviously influenced by Mitra Tabrizian´s series *Untitled* (2009) (*Fig.65*), as both works show a group of people in front of the barren landscape of Tehran´s suburbs.

But new photographers also entered the field of staged photography after 2009. Not only political limitations were the reason. There is additionally a growing interest towards photography in general, and staged photography in particular, detectable in Tehran at the moment. Julia Allerstorfer states "Galleries, exhibitions and events with their foci on photography […] are continually growing, and different universities with courses in photography have numerous students."[214] Furthermore, something like an art market, that did not exist before 2000 emerged only in the middle of this century in Iran, although it is not comparable to a typical market in Europe or the USA. But some events like the Tehran auction are now held regularly.

While gallery owners did not want to spend money on the production of staged photography projects until the mid 2000s, this changed in the last couple of years, as they realised, that there is an increasing interest and willingness among collectors to buy works of this field.[215] I was told, that young artists see successful colleagues like Dashti or Ghadiran, whose works are selling quite well and thus, try to produce something similar in order to become successful in the market. Ramyar Manoucherzadeh thinks,

> "[...] in Iran [...] after some successful works, which have been done here, and then the interest in other countries in this art [staged photography], became a reason, that more people here became interested in doing this kind of photography [in order to] make themselves more famous or more known in the world."[216]

Also new buyers emerged, Tallin Grigor states "The clerical elite is certainly among the active collectors."[217] Furthermore, I was told by one of my interview partners, that in the last years a number of people, who were in close relation to Ahmadinejad, suddenly entered the market, and obviously had money with which they started to buy art. Moreover, due to the actual talks about the cancellation of the economical sanctions of Iran, many foreigners are coming to Tehran at the moment, in order to buy art. [218]

213Personal Interview of Gohar Dashti with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
214Allerstorfer, "Performing Visual Strategies:" 177.
215Personal Interview of Maryam Roshanfekr with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 41-43.
216Personal Interview of Ramyar Manoucherzadeh with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 24.
217Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art*: 144.
218Personal Interview of a Tehran-based Artist with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

One of these newcomers is the trained graphic designer Alireza Fani (ʿali-Reżā Fāni) (b.1975). He produced his first series of staged photography *A Memorial for Today* in 2011 (*Fig.66*). It shows persons in an interior, who are looking down, they appear frozen and do not show any interaction. According to the enclosed caption, the series should be understood as a comment to the passivity of the people in Iran today, how they accept things passively.[219] Another series of the artist, *I´m the One Who* (2012) (*Fig.67*) depicts a man, wearing a headgear with horns inside his house, performing different activities of daily live. Via the ridiculous headgear, Fani addresses the absurdity of approaches of life in Iran, that is caused by history. *Fig.67* reminds me of an image of Mitra Tabrizian´s *Border* series (2005-06) (*Fig.68*). Like the woman, Fani´s man is also sitting on the left side of the image, while packed suitcases are standing on the right side.

Another graphic designer, Siamak Filizadeh (Siāmak Fili-Zādeh) (b.1970), also switched to staged photography after 2009. In *Underground* (2014) (*Fig.69*), he narrates the story of the life and death of Naser al-Din Shah on the surface. The actual content of the project has deeper layers, as the artist told me:

> "Most people think that it is the story of Naser-al-Din Shah, but is connected to another concept. There is a city now at the moment, under Tehran, and they have a king who was killed at an exact date. And in the morning, after he was buried, he got alive again and he was king during 50 years. It is a loop. The idea behind it, is, that the history of Iran was also a loop of rulers. The leaders are changing somehow, but the way of ruling is the same, [...] but the actual people change. [...] I picked Naser-al-Din-Shah. […] Because the king himself has a famous story, people know him very good, and at the time as he was a leader of Iran, he was a king who went up, wrote a lot and brought Western culture to Iran. [...] Naser-al-Din Shah was killed fifty years after the start of his reign. He was killed after his fiftieth anniversary celebration. Fifty as actual number was very important for me. For this reasons I chose Naser al-Din Shah. Another reason is, because of this loop, if you read Iranian history some things happen again and again and again. People do not have a historical memory."[220]

The aesthetics of *Underground* are very grotesque and Filizadeh includes European pictorial references, anachronistic elements and symbols. In an image, that depicts the killing of a minister, he refers to Jaques-Loius David´s *The Death of Marat* (1793) (*Fig.70*), and thus shows, that murders of national heroes are a global phenomenon, that happened and still do happen all over the world. Furthermore, as I will argue in chapter five, the underlying pictorial formula of the *Death of Marat*, is the Pietá of Christ as an innocent martyr. Filizadeh, who considers Naser al-Din Shah as a cruel king, mentioned, that within history and through his death, he like Jesus, became an innocent and a martyr. Thus the artist also referred to representation of the dead Jesus, like in Michelangelo´s *Pietá* (1498-99) (*Figs.71-72*). The

219Alireza Fani, "A Memorial For Today–2011," *Homepage of Alireza Fani*. Accessed December 24, 2015: http://alirezafani.com/2011-a-memoiral-for-today-1/.

220Personal Interview of Siamak Filizadeh with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 14.

backdrops of *Underground* are influenced by Gothic paintings, and also the perspective, where the main figure is depicted much bigger than the other persons is a Gothic principle. Filizadeh says, that he has chosen this era consciously, as the church was powerful during Gothic times. A fact, that can be transferred to the institution of Shia Islam in Iran.[221] The artist also included actual Qajar-elements of contemporary photographs. For example, the woman in *Fig.73* wears a plastic, modern version of a shalithe (šalit), a typical piece of cloth, worn by Naser al-Din Shah´s harem-women. Furthermore the photograph is made after the reference of a Qajar photograph, that shows a woman who is riding a bike (*Fig.74*), although the bicycle is turned into a motorbike in *Underground*. The same image was also cited by Shadi Ghadirian in her *Qajar* series (*Fig.20*). Moreover, Filizadeh added contemporary items in his series, that did not exist during the Qajar era, in order to show, that the work has also a current approach and makes statements to the actual situation in Iran. For example, the onlookers of a hanging scene (*Fig.75*) hold mobile-phones in their hands, which is a criticism on the current enthusiasm with which people still watch and record public hangings in today´s Iran. Filizadeh wanted to draw attention to the fact, that hangings even nowadays are rather seen as a public event, than a tragic death. The loudspeakers, that are visible in some images (*Fig.71*), are a comment on the one-way communication of the governments in Iran, where only one party is communicating, while the second is not in a position to respond or talk back.[222] A similar work of staged photography is Azadeh

Akhlaghi´s series *By an Eye Witness* (2009-2012) (*Figs.1-17*). She also refers in her highly symbolic work to Iranian history, using pictorial references of European historical paintings, Iranian images and anachronistic elements.

After 2009 more artists turned to the medium of staged photography due to political restrictions, but also because of the market, that was and is demanding these kind of images. Typical in the last years are references to historical European painting and a growing influence of foreign photographers, but also from Iranians, who live abroad can be noticed. The main topics at the moment are the daily life in the Islamic Republic, gender issues and the own personal and national past.

221Personal Interviews of Siamak Filizadeh and Nazila Nobashari with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 15-18 and 28.
222Personal Interview of Siamak Filizadeh with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 16.

### 3.7 Conclusion

The first elements of staged photography in Iran can be detected in portraits of the late 19th, and first half of the 20th century. Although one can not speak of staged photography, these images are important, and serve as a base for the further development of the medium. In the 1960s and 1970s, photography was explored not only as documentary tool, but also as a mode of fine art, as has been shown with works by Ahmad Aali, Marcos Grigorian and Kaveh Golestan (*Figs.29-31*). I could not find a certain explanation for this increasing interest in artistic photography, and thus, can only presume, that political factors or a broader influence from other countries were the reasons. If Aali´s and other artists´ works are staged or constructed photographs can not be said with certainty, but they are definitely an important step towards the pure form of staged photography. Of special significance is Golestan´s *Az Div o Dad* (*Fig.31*), as this is the first photo-series, known to me, that juxtaposes past and present, history and fiction, in other words, Golestan created an imaginative world in photography, for probably the first time in Iranian art history.

In the 1980s, art activities were not non-existent, like many authors wrongly suggest, but produced inside Tehran University. Even exhibitions of fine art photography were held during the war, unfortunately no pictures of this time are available to me, thus I can not make an absolute statement, whether staged photography existed during that time or not. After the end of the war, young photography students like Sadegh Tirafkan and Zahra Irani-Sefat produced staged photographs or at least photographs with staged elements. With Irani-Sefats *Ascension* (*Fig.34*), the arrival of staged photography in Iran can be dated in 1992 at latest. Political restrictions and censorship at the beginning of the 1990s, made it complicated to exhibit images of Iran, that were seem to be showing the country in a bad light. For this reason and thanks to increased knowledge of art photography produced abroad, photographers started to create their own realities. From around 2000, one can speak of a "tendency towards staged photography," with its starting point marked in 1998 by Ghadirian´s *Qajar* (*Fig.20*) series. Here, the reason was also political, as with the election of Khatami in 1997, art became more supported and it was easier for artists to exhibit and produce art, which led to an increase of fine art and staged photography. Furthermore, the term "staged photography" was introduced by the London-based photographer Mitra Tabrizian in a lecture in TMOCA in Iran at the beginning of the 2000s. Although staged photography was already done before, now the artists knew **that**, what they had done was staged photography, so in a sense started to produce staged photography consciously. Paradoxically, after 2005 with the election of Ahmadinejad, and the end of Khatami´s reform period, staged photography became again

more popular, because new limitations for artists were set, which they tried avoid via producing imagined worlds, that do not refer to the actual happenings in Iran at first sight, but actually do so on a deeper level via symbols and metaphors. With Gohar Dashti´s projects since 2008, cinematography as a technique was introduced in Iran, and more photographers like Tooraj Khamenezadeh or Siamak Filizadeh also started using it in the following years. After the upheavals in 2009, again an increase in staged photography is detectable. Firstly, because many documentary photographers and photojournalists were banned from working after they covered the protests. Therefore their only possibility to do photography, was to produce art photography, and secondly, because of the success of staged photographers like Ghadirian and Tirafkan, that other artists wanted to gain as well. Furthermore something like a market emerged in Tehran in the mid 2000s and galleries started to focus more on photography than they had ever done before and invested in it´s production following some successful sales.

The reasons for the current popularity of staged photography are on the one hand the knowledge of staged photographers, who are living in other countries, as well as the exploration of the concept of staged photography at the beginning of the 2000s, and on the other hand the harsher political restrictions, that were put on street photography since 2005 and especially after the 2009 elections. Because of these limitations, it was easier for photographers to create and make their own images in front of the camera indoors. As the latest change of presidency took place not even three years ago, it is too early to analyse changes within staged photography right now - but I was told by a number of Iranians, that the situation in the arts has calmed down since and it is now more relaxed. Of course, one should not forget, that the term artistic freedom can still not be applied to the Tehran art scene, like the sad example of the harsh sentence and imprisonment of the artist Atena Farghadani (Ātenā Farqadāni) (b. 1987) for drawing a cartoon, criticising a law on female sterilization, shows.[223]

I will end this chapter with an analysis of the main visual strategies and subjects within Iranian staged photography.

223Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iranian Painter and Women´s Rights Activist on Trial for Insulting MPs," *The Guardian* (May 20, 2015). Accessed December 26, 2015: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/20/iranian-painter-and-womens-rights-activist-on-trial-for-insulting-mps.

a) Visual Strategies

- The Depiction of the Self: Antoin Sevruguin already included himself in front of Persepolis at the beginning of the 20th century (*Fig.24*). In the 1960s and 1970s artists like Ahmad Aali and Marcos Grigorian continued the exploration of the self within their pictures (*Figs.29-30*). In the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s Sadegh Tirafkan showed himself in his photographs, like in *Persepolis* (*Fig.21*), although it is unlikely, that this is a direct reference to Sevruguin,[224] and he continued doing so until his death. Still today, an interest for the own person is detectable, like the example of Arman Stepanian (*Fig.56*) shows. According to Severi, the self-representation expresses a quest for finding and showing one´s own identity, as it is frustrating to conceal ones feelings all the time.[225] Keshmirshekan sees the body as "an integral site of exchange between the Self and the world [...] a challenge of representation and an attempt to reclaim cultural space."[226] I do not have an ultimate explanation where this longing for showing the own person comes from, but it seems to be an existing need in Iranian art photography of the last one hundred years.
- Humour and Irony: Rose Issa detected these elements as characteristics of Iranian photography already in 2001.[227] They are still visible today, for example in Ghadirian´s *Like Everyday* (*Fig.37*), Filizadeh´s *Underground* (*Fig.71*), and Dashti´s *Volcano* (*Fig.63*).
- Metaphors, Allegories and Symbols: Julia Allerstorfer states, that with these elements, artists can transform their works "into subversive" ones.[228] Political statements are often made by the use of surprising, disruptive or anachronistic elements; examples are Ghadirian´s bicycle in *Qajar* (*Fig.20*), Dashti´s tail of a reptile in *Volcano* (*Fig.63*), or Filizadeh´s mobile-phones in *Underground* (*Fig.73*). Via the use of symbols there is not just one interpretation how the work should be understood, but there are always a number of ways how it could be read. Rose Issa´s description of Iranian photography in general as "real fictions," that "blur life between reality and creativity"[229] can also be applied to the construction of alternative worlds in staged photography in particular.

224Arman Stepanian, who knew Sadegh Tirafkan, told me, that he does not think, that Tirafkan was aware of Sevruguin´s photographs, it rather seems to be a coincidence, that both depicted themselves in front of the ancient capital. Personal Interview of Arman Stepanian with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 45.
225Severi, "The New Generation of Iranian Art Photographers:" 87.
226Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art*: 282.
227Rose Issa, "Borrowed Ware," in: *Contemporary Iranian Art* (London, 2001): 26-27.
228Allerstorfer, "Performing Visual Strategies:" 177.
229Issa, "Still Revelations:" 14-15.

- References to Other Staged Photographers: It also seems to be popular among staged photographers to cite other works by contemporary staged photographers. On the one hand of those, who have Iranian roots, but live elsewhere, for example Shirin Neshat´s aesthetic language can be found in Arman Stepanian´s works (*Fig.55*), while Gohar Dashti and Alireza Fani were obviously influenced by Mitra Tabrizian (*Fig.64*). But also staged photographers without a connection to Iran are references for Iranian artists, Dashti again, cites Loretta Lux (*Fig.61*), while Tooraj Khamenezadeh was inspired by Gregory Crewdson (*Fig.58*). The cinematographic works of Khamenezadeh and Dashti, somehow remind of works by the American photographer Jeff Wall (b.1946), who, at least like Khamenezadeh, re-stages historical European paintings. For example in his *Picture for Women* (1979) (*Fig.76*), that is staged after Édouard Manet´s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergére* (1882). These influences are relatively new, Tirafkan was the first who said, he was inspired by works of Cindy Sherman in the beginning of the 1990s. While no other direct influence of photographers who live abroad can be detected before 2005, this changed due to articles in magazines like *Herfeh: Honarmand* and the widespread internet access.
- References to Historical European Art: Already Sevruguin referred to Velázquez in *Interior of Gulistan Palace* (*Fig.26*) and this citations of historical European paintings can still be detected today. Examples are Tirafkan´s *Temptation (Fig.41; Fig.43)*, Khamenezadeh´s *Apprehension Jungle* (*Fig.58*) and Filizadeh´s *Underground* (*Fig.69*), as these artists refer to painters like da Vinci, Munch or David. While working on this thesis, I was often told by people, how peculiar and extraordinary it is, that Iranian artists cite works of European art history. - This fact is actually neither peculiar nor extraordinary, but only shows that people who mention this, do not know too much about contemporary Iranian art. All artists I interviewed in Tehran had a broad knowledge of European art history, book stores in museums and other cultural institutions, like the Niavaran (Nīāvarān) Cultural Complex are full of books on European and American art history, and a number of citations can be found not only in photography, but also in other media like painting or sculpture.[230] This Euro-American presumption, that Iranian artists do not know about European art, unless they have lived abroad for some time, is in an era of widespread internet-access, not only absurd, but also deeply Orientalist, as it creates an Iranian "Other," who is presumed not to

230See for example Daryoush Qarezad´s painting series *National Identity,* 2012, that resembles works by Andy Warhol or Fatemeh Emdadian´s *Untitled* (2000), that refers to Henry Moore.

know anything about the European canon of art history, while European and American artists are expected to do so.

- References to Historical Iranian Art: Kaveh Golestan was something of a pioneer, when he included original Qajar photographs in his *Az Div o Dad* (*Fig.31*) series, but until 1998 and Shadi Ghadirian´s *Qajar* (*Fig.20*) series no further use of Iranian photo- or art history in fine art photography can be detected, although today a stronger interest seems to exist, as Armanian´s *The Hidden Meaning of Photography in Iran* (*Fig.53*) and Filizadeh´s *Underground* (*Fig.72*) show. These three artists also question via these references how the history influences the presence. Tirafkan did something similar in *Persepolis* (*Fig.21*) in 1996, and thus was probably the first who, after Golestan, brought history back to constructed photography.

b) Subjects

- The Own and the National Past: A particular event in the past, that strongly effects the present, namely the Iran-Iraq war is addressed quite often by artists, who grew up during it. Examples are Shadi Ghadirians *White Square* (*Fig.38*) and *Nil Nil* (*Fig.39*), Arash Hanaeis *The Benefit of Vegetarianism* (*Fig.45*), Gohar Dashti´s *Today´s Life and War* (*Fig.49*) and *Slow Decay* (*Fig.61*). The inclusion of the past can be interpreted in several ways. It is a vehicle that is used to express a current meaning, which can not be shown with the depiction of contemporary elements, thus the issue of the works is about today, but communicated via the layer of the past.[231] Addressing the past in photographs, also tells of the continuity of the past in the present. Another aspect is, that via the haunting past, national identity can be created, because, the very distinctive history and situation in the country today, applies to Iranians only. As Abbas Daneshvari mentions, the photographers do not idealise the past as a memory of golden times, but indicate, that there is an inexplicable persistence of memory of all Iranians.[232]

231Edward Lucie-Smith, "Contemporary Art in Iran and Its Relation to Other Non-European Art," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Amidst Shadow and Light* (Hong Kong, 2011): 43; Personal Interview of Nazila Nobashari with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 28.

232 Daneshvari, *Amazingly Original*: 152.

- The Daily Life: Another popular subject among staged photographers is everyday life in today´s Iran Ali Nadjan and Ramyar Manoucherzadeh were the first, who addressed in *We Live in A Paradoxical Society* (*Fig.57*) the tensions between the public and private space. The absurdity of the life in the country is also subject of Alireza Fani´s series *I´m The One Who* (*Fig.67*) and Siamak Filizadeh´s *Underground* (*Fig.73*). In *Volcano* (*Fig.63*), Gohar Dashti draws attention to the fact, that there is always something wrong in society, although people are smiling and the colours are bright. Explicitly sad images were produced by Alireza Fani, who focuses on the people´s passivity in *A Memorial For Today* (*Fig.66*); Newsha Tavakolian, who shows the unhappiness and melancholy of her neighbours in *Look* (*Fig.52*)*;* and Tooraj Khamenezadeh´s *Apprehension Jungle* (*Fig.58*), that tells of a certain fear, people have.
- The Status of Women and Gender: These issues started to be explored in photography at the beginning of the 1990s, for example by Zahra Irani Sefat, who shows women without visible faces in her images, like in *Mandala* (*Fig.35*). As the woman is also placed behind a lattice, she also points to the legal inequality of women. At the end of the 1990s Shadi Ghadirian addressed the status and domestic expectation of women in her series *Qajar* (*Fig.20*) and *Like Everyday* (*Fig.37*). Shirin Aliabadi´s *Miss Hybrid* (*Fig.44*) brings the new ideal of beauty to light, while object of Arman Stepanian´s *The Hidden Meaning of Photography in Iran* (*Fig.53*) and Newsha Tavakolian´s *Listen (Fig.51)* is the repression women have to face in Iran. In *All About Me* (*Fig.50*), Tahmineh Monzavi tells of behaviours that women are urged to by society. Sadegh Tirafkan on the other hand explores the concept of masculinity in Iran in series like *Iranian Man* (*Fig.40*) and *Temptation* (*Fig.43*).

Nearly all staged photographers, who are currently active and have been discussed here, were born in or after 1970. They are the *Burnt Generation*. This was also the title of an exhibition, in Somerset House, London in 2014, mentioned earlier in this thesis. Curator Fariba Farshad characterises them as "the generation who have never known any other reality than that of post-revolutionary Iran."[233] This means, they grew up or came of age during the Iran-Iraq war, and they only experienced life in the Islamic Republic with its religious frameworks. Severi describes the photographers among this new generation as

233Gemma Padley, "Iranian Photography on Show in London," *British Journal of Photography* (April 23, 2014). Accessed December 26, 2015: http://www.bjp-online.com/2014/04/iranian-photography-on-show-in-london/.

> "[...]university-educated art photographers […] still challenged by difficulties and potential restrictions, but choose their approach accordingly, sidestepping the political, social and religious constraints. These limitations require the photographers to approach their work more delicately and to employ a more complex and symbolic method. […] they do not express their political opinions directly; nor do they limit themselves to a pure aesthetic, apolitical approach. Instead, one sees in their works many personal and social issues addressed in ambiguous modes."[234]

One of the photographers of this generation is Azadeh Akhlaghi, who produced with *By an Eye Witness* a series of staged photography, that explores Iran´s sad and cruel history in the last century and is a comment on today´s situation at the same time.

## 4. Introducing Azadeh Akhlaghi´s Photograph Series *By an Eye Witness*

This chapter discusses Azadeh Akhlaghi´s photograph series *By an Eye Witness* (*Figs.1-17*). Following a short introduction of the artist, I examine the development of the idea for the series and the production process, based on interviews with Akhlaghi, and other people, who were involved in the creation of the project, and, to a lesser degree, articles in newspapers and magazines. After this, an investigation of the etymology of the title is conducted by using relevant literature, concluding with an analytical and to some extent interpretative description of the photographs in terms of visual contents, composition, colours and lighting.

### 4.1 Azadeh Akhlaghi and *By an Eye Witness*

Azadeh Akhlaghi is an Iranian photographer, film maker and translator, who lives and works in Tehran. She was born in 1978[235] in Shiraz and grew up in Mashad. Aged eighteen, she moved to Melbourne/Australia, where she received her master´s degree in Computer Sciences from RMIT University. Akhlaghi also took courses in cinema and photography electively and got acquainted with the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami (ʿAbbās Kiā-Rostami). As a result of this meeting, she returned to Iran in 2005 and worked as assistant director for Kiarostami among others. Her first two solo exhibitions, the photograph series *Suspension in Tehran* and *Me, As the Other Prefers*, were held in 2009 and 2010 respectively. *By an Eye Witness* is her third project, which went on show in 2013. In this series Akhlaghi recreates the deaths of seventeen Iranian freedom fighters via staged photography. The thoughtfully arranged images are aesthetically very dramatic and show cinematic compositions. In the catalogue, every picture is accompanied by several eyewitnesses´ accounts, newspaper articles or archival material, that provides detailed information about the depicted scene in Persian and English.[236]

234Severi, "The New Generation of Iranian Art Photographers:" 85.

235Hamdi Dabashi wrongly dates her year of birth as 1979 and strongly injects meaning into it, as it was the year of the Iranian Revolution. But Akhlaghi was born in 1978. Hamdi Dabashi, "Remembrance of Things Past," in: Azadeh Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness* (Tehran, 2013): 51.

236Azadeh Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness* (Tehran, 2013): 49; Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the

### 4.2 Development of the Idea for *By an Eye Witness* and Selection of Characters and Time-line

Akhlaghi's original inspiration for *By an Eye Witness* was in her words, the "collective shock" after the murders of many protesters during the Green Movement in Iran in 2009 and the Arab Spring in 2010.[237] When she saw photographs of the killed demonstrators, she started to think "about the revival of history,"[238] as it was not the first time in Iran, that people died in the streets, fighting for a better life within the country. But unlike the one of the best- known victim of the Green Movement, Neda Aqa-Soltan, most of these deaths were not captured with cameras. The whole world could watch Neda dying via YouTube – but there were so many other, unnoticed deaths on the streets of Tehran in 2009. The artist told me, that she started during that time

> "[... ] to think about the power of image and photography, and also about the history of Iran and all these heroes of our history, who died in a tragic way. Who were freedom fighters, or intellectuals, or journalists, writers. [...] And there wasn´t a camera to capture the moment. […] And a few months after, the Arab Spring started. So there were many images from the Arab countries. […] I was sitting in front of my computer and looking at all those images, and thinking about the people who actually died in the streets somewhere in the Middle East, and there wasn´t a camera present at that moment."[239]

Akhlaghi asked herself, like Susan Sontag did in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, which pictures of cruelties were **not** shown in public media.[240] This notion significantly shaped the artist´s concept to reconstruct important deaths of freedom fighters and political activists within Iranian history, of which no publicly accessible photographs exist. Furthermore, she said, that she wanted to show a big variety of people, whose deaths marked a turning point, in other words, if they had lived longer, the country´s history might have taken another course.[241] Ehsan Rasoulof, the producer of *By an Eye Witness* told me, that it was important to "choose people from the most variety we could."[242] Akhlaghi affirmed this approach, and tried to include people from all courses of live and political groups. That is to say, in her opinion, all motives of freedom fighters should be respected equally. Thus, Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani´s (*Fig.15*) actions, for example, were as crucial for Iran as those of the *National Front´s* leader Mohammad Mosaddegh (*Fig.8*). Of same importance for the country´s history were the dissolutions of the left-guerrilla fighter Marzieh Ahmadi-Oskuie (*Fig.11*) and the soldier Mehdi Bakeri (*Fig.16*), who died for the Islamic Republic during the Iran-Iraq war.[243]

Author, Tehran, 2015.

237Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 52; Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 1.
238Rex Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran," *Art Collector* 70 (Winter 2014): 108.
239Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 1.
240Susan Sontag, *Das Leiden anderer betrachten* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008): 21.
241Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran:" 108.
242Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 37.
243Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

After having chosen about eighty persons, Akhlaghi started to rationalise the characters. The reason for this was either, that some deaths were comparable, and the artist did not want to show similar pictures,[244] or because she found photographs of the dead body of a chosen figure. For this purpose, she omitted, for instance, Iran´s foreign affairs minister Hossein Fatemi (Ḥosayn Fāṭemi) (1917-1954).[245]

Finally, she decided to show seventeen images of important deaths of Iranian history. Most of them occurred between the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), the first public upheaval, in the last century in Iran (*Fig.1*), and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) (*Fig.16*). The ending point is due to political limitations in Iran, that do not allow Akhlaghi to show more recent deaths in the country.[246]

Remarkable is that five (Ahmadi-Oskuie *Fig.11*, Jazani *Fig.12*, Ashraf *Fig.13*, Shariati *Fig.14*, Taleghani *Fig.15*) of the seventeen deaths, depicted in *By an Eye Witness* occurred in the 1970s. These are significantly more than in any other decade. When I asked Akhlaghi for the reasons, she answered:

> The seventies was a very brutal decade, we had so many tortures. In the 60s we didn´t. But the head of SAVAK changed at the beginning of the 70s. And the head of SAVAK in the 60s was a poker man [...], there wasn´t any torture in prisons. The prisoners were OK. It was a prison, but when there is no torture it is much easier. […] But in the 70s, it is because […] the movement of the guerilla started, so the Shah started to torture all these students or intellectuals in prison and it was [...] a decade of all these killings and the power of SAVAK."[247]

Furthermore, the chaotic events, the political protest of the 1970s and the high number of underground activities in our country resulted in the Iranian Revolution 1979, which is the cause for the current state of Iranian society and politics.

On the other hand, between 1940 and 1967 there is a gap in *By an Eye Witness*, with only the photograph of the shooting of the students (*Fig.6*) in 1953 being set during this period. Akhlaghi explained this fact with the following words: "After 1940, after Reza Shah left the country. The people of Iran really had freedom, if you look at the newspapers you can feel it. And it was like that until the moment of coup d´ etat of 1953."[248]

244Ibid.: 1.

245Golnaz Fakhari, "Iranian Photographer Azadeh Akhlaghi Revives History Through Staged Images-Interview," *Art Radar* (September 19, 2014). Accessed June 15, 2015: http://artradarjournal.com/2014/09/19/iranian-photographer-azadeh-akhlaghi-revives-history-thourgh-staged-images-interview/.

246An exception is Sales, who died in 1998. He did not die in Iran, but in the USA.

247Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 6.

248Ibid.: 6.

### 4.3 Production Process and Exhibition

After having determined the time-line and the characters, Akhlaghi conducted a three year-long research on the biographies of the selected persons. She read memoirs, books and old newspapers articles about the protagonists in libraries and archives and tried to find contemporary radio reports and records of discussions in parliament. For the more recent characters, she talked to eyewitnesses, friends, relatives and other people, who could give her information about the moments of death. If the accounts differed from each other, she chose the version, she considered most reliable. After the research, Akhlaghi drew sketches of the events surrounding the deaths, how she imagined, they had happened.[249] Initially, she planned to show the deaths in a realistic way and tried to create the scenes under original conditions. For instance, if someone had died on a sunny day in Baghe-Shah in Tehran and three people were watching the person passing away, Akhlaghi tried to re-arrange exactly this situation. Soon it turned out, that historical precision was impossible, as some buildings did not exist any more or eyewitnesses could not remember details, like the weather on a particular day. Hence, Akhlaghi had to find a new approach and as she told Rex Butler, "focused [now] on capturing the spirit of the moment."[250] To achieve this, the artist combined historical authentic and fictional elements in her images. Therefore, I argue that David Campany's description of Jeff Wall's artistic method as "semi-fiction," can be transferred to *By an Eye Witness*. One part of the pictures tries to be realistic and follows the accounts of eyewitnesses and archival information. Nevertheless, the other part is imagination and appropriation of combined elements.[251]

With this concept, Akhlaghi convinced Ehsan Rasoulof, the owner of Tehran-based Mohsen gallery, to produce *By an Eye Witness*. He sponsored the project and was responsible for the management and supervision of the whole production, which was very similar to the making of a movie, a field in which Akhlaghi was already experienced. According to Rasoulof, this process was unique in Iran, as*:*

> "It was the first time during our contemporary art history, that […] there was a production team. In other projects before, just the artist and a very small team were working on small projects. But we, at the first time, gathered a very professional team. […] we had a very long pre-production."[252]

249Ibid.:1.
250Raha Namwar/Laura Pannasch, "Die Kunst des Attentats," *Zenith* no. 3 (July/August 2014): 18-19.
251David Campany, *Jeff Wall: Picture for Women* (London, 2011): 64.
252Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 36.

a) Pre-Producton

Akhlaghi and Rasoulof hired a complete cinematography team for the production. This team included an executive officer from cinema and Akhlaghis first assistant, Laleh Mostofi (Lāleh Mostofi), who was also experienced in film-making. One of her responsibilities was the coordination of the subdivisions, in which the team was separated, namely: camera, set and costume design, make up, special effects, production management, production coordination, services, transport, cinemobile, extras administration.[253] At the beginning of the pre-production, Akhlaghi and her set designer were looking for suitable locations, while Mostofi and the executive manager were responsible for realising the scenes.[254] Due to financial reasons, only a few professional actors could be hired, and the majority of the cast were extras. Furthermore, Akhlaghi did not engage well-known actors, as she wanted to avoid associations by the viewer with other films or plays. However, she tried to find persons who had a similar appearance as the depicted characters. Laleh Mostofi searched for the actors and extras in specific databases, but also friends and relatives from the crew were recruited.[255] An example is Mina Bozorgmehr (Minā Bozorgmehr), the daughter of the stage designer, who played the role of Marzieh Ahmadi-Oskuie (*Fig.11*) and a woman mourning for Taghi Arani (*Fig.5*).[256]

Once an actor or an actress, was chosen, he or she was shown to the make up designer and the costume designer, who made a costume, that fitted exactly for this person.[257] Old photographs served as models for this.[258]

Akhlaghi also emphasised, that the actors and actresses knew, who they were playing. Mina Bozorgmehr remembers, that Aklaghi showed her photographs of Marzieh Ahmadi-Oskuie and gave her literature on the character. After this preparation, she and Akhlaghi had a rehearsal, where they practised Ahmadi-Oskuie´s fall and chose the costume.[259]

Forty days of pre-production was estimated too tight, but as the contract with Rasoulof was already signed, Akhlaghi couldn´t change her timetable any more and had to start with the production, although "[…] in the pre-production we couldn´t find some of the locations, so we started the production and we still didn´t have [all] the venue[s], the locations."[260]

253Personal Interview of Laleh Mostofi with the Author, Tehran, 2015; Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness:* 48.
254Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 2.
255Personal Interview of Laleh Mostofi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
256Personal Interview of Mina Bozorgmehr with the Author, Tehran 2015: 10-12.
257Personal Interview of Laleh Mostofi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
258Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 2.
259Personal Interview of Mina Bozorgmehr with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 10-12.
260Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 2.

b) Production

Akhlaghi planned twenty days of production. This means, she wanted to take about one picture every day. But, as she still had not found all locations, she usually shot a picture in the morning and went into the streets in the afternoon, in order to find sites for the remaining images.

She described this problem with the example of finding a place for the scene in Tehran University 1953 (*Fig.6*).

> "Because we […] couldn´t go to Tehran University. It is still there, but this was during Ahmadinejad´s time […] so they wouldn´t let us do it, or we didn´t have the courage to tell them what we gonna do. […] Three days before the end of the production, we finally found one [a location] […] and said […] this is very similar to Tehran University."[261]

The order of the shooting of the images was not chronological. Initially, Akhlaghi wanted to start the production with less-crowded pictures, but in the end she had to photograph the funeral ceremony of Colonel Pesyan (*Fig.2*) with two hundred actors on the second day, because it was one of the few scenes with an arranged site.[262] "Arranged" means, that Akhlaghi had constructed the locations, including equipment, lighting and composition and advised the actors and extras what to do.

Every shooting lasted about two to three hours, as the takes were repeated several times. Furthermore, as Mina Bozorgmehr and Ehsan Rasoulof told me, Akhlaghi used the panorama technique. This means, the whole photograph was not shot as one image, but consists of four or five adjusted photographs.[263]

Akhlaghi´s instructions to the actors differed. In some scenes, she gave clear advice, in some not. For her role as Marzieh Ahmadi-Oskuie (*Fig.11*), Mina Bozorgmehr was only told to lose her chador while falling to the ground. In the photograph of Taghi Arani (*Fig.5*) on the other hand, she remembers, that Akhlaghi showed the actors "paintings or photos" as an example of how they should act, and advised the second woman from the right to look up.[264] Akhlaghi also wrote little scripts for some scenes, like the one of the university shooting in 1953 (*Fig.6*), as she wanted to encourage the actors to think about their role and what happened before and after the depicted moment.[265] The artist limited exact instructions to selected scenes only. The reason for this was, according to Mina Bozorgmehr, "[...] Because all of

261 Ibid.: 2.
262 Ibid.: 4.
263 Personal Interviews of Azadeh Akhlaghi, Mina Bozorgmehr and Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 2 and 11 and 36.
264 Personal Interviews of Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mina Bozorgmehr with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 7 and 13.
265 India Stoughton, "Azadeh Akhlaghi Finds Beauty in Iran´s Bloody Past," *The Daily Star* (April 18, 2014). Accessed June 15, 2015: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Art/2014/Apr-18/253833-azadeh-akhlaghi-finds-beauty-in-irans-bloody-past.ashx.

these people who came [the extras] were not really professional. If you give many instructions to amateur people, it is not natural. [...] They will be frozen." Not appearing frozen is one of the biggest challenges in staged photography, where a story has to be told in only one image, especially if many inexperienced extras are part of the scene.[266]

After the locations were arranged, a photographer captured the scene. The takes of two pictures, those of Marzieh Ahmadi-Oskuie (*Fig.11*) and Ali Shariati (*Fig.14*), were repeated one and a half years after the first shooting. This means, Akhlaghi´s statement during an interview with Rex Butler, in which she said, "and there was no chance of re-staging them [the scenes] in the future"[267] is not fully correct. In addition, Mina Bozorgmehr told me, that the scene of Marzieh Ahmadi-Oskuie (*Fig.11*) was one of these images, that was re-staged, because the artist was not satisfied with the first image.[268] For these two scenes a new photographer was hired. He took, like his predecessor, one thousand to two thousand photographs of one scene.[269]

c) Post-Production

In the post-production the best photographs were selected and, in some cases, juxtaposed or altered with Photoshop. After the shooting, the artist tried to find from thousands of photographs "the best shot possible" and selected the single takes for the panorama images, which consist of four to six photographs. One of her employees made a complete picture out of them, in a process that lasted about six months. Akhlaghi tried to use digital aids as seldom as possible, but had to in some images, such as in the battle-scene of Mehdi Bakeri (*Fig.16*). One of the extras in the background was smiling at all two thousand shots, that were taken. As Bakeri´s death was not an event, to which a happy face was fitting, this expression was corrected with Photoshop.[270] Another example of the need of using technical appliances, is the picture of Mohammad Mosaddegh (*Fig.8*). As Akhlaghi did not get permission to shoot in front of his last residence, she had to take a photograph of Mosaddegh´s house and one panorama of the acting cast separately. These two pictures were combined in a digital process. In the other images only small alterations, for instance, in the balance of colour, were executed.[271] The next step, the printing of the images, lasted again about five months.[272]

266Personal interview of Mina Bozorgmehr with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 11.
267Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran:" 109.
268Personal Interview of Mina Bozorgmehr with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 10.
269Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 48; Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 36.
270Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
271Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 36.
272Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 3.

Rasoulof said, that it "took a long time to find the best way to present and frame the photos for gallery presentation. And after that it was shown in March 2013."[273]

The stages of the production of *By an Eye Witness* were research, pre-production, production and post-production, thus it is comparable to the making of a movie, and can be called cinematic. It is noteworthy, that a project of this size and financial expenditure was never executed in Iran before. The production process lasted about three and a half years, as it started in 2009 and ended in 2013, when the series was first exhibited in Iran.

d) Reactions at the Opening of the Exhibition of *By an Eye Witness* in Mohsen Gallery on March 12, 2013

The first time that *By an Eye Witness* was exhibited in Iran was in March 2013 in Tehran´s Mohsen gallery. Although the series was on display for twelve days only, as Ehsan Rasoulof told me, about ten thousand people came to the show, which was a record in the number of visitors in one exhibition in a private gallery in Iran.[274] The art scene in Tehran is relatively small, and usually the same group of approximately four- to five hundred people go to galleries on Friday, the day on which most openings take place. This art interested audience could be described, according to my observations in Tehran, as urban, well-educated, as cosmopolitan as possible in Iran and part of the middle class.

When *By an Eye Witness* was on show, not only the usual visitors came to the exhibition, but also many people who had never been to a gallery before or usually were not interested in art at all. Rasoulof explained the reason, "Because the photos touched them [the visitors], because it was about their lives, their history […], about their fathers and grandfathers."[275]

People, among them also relatives and friends of the characters depicted, travelled even from other cities to Tehran, in order to see Akhlaghi´s exhibition. The artist described this mix of people "[...] thirty guys came […] from Azerbaijan to Tehran to see Samad Behrangi on the wall. Some very religious people came to the exhibition. They wanted to see Bakeri or Taleghani. And many relatives of the lefties came [...]."[276] Seeing *By an Eye Witness* was like revealing an old, open secret for many Iranians. The deaths depicted were still remembered by a number of people, but they did not have the chance to mourn them publicly or collectively thus, especially the opening, was a very emotional event as it was the first time, that mourning

273Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 36.
274Ibid.: 36.
275Ibid.37.
276Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 5.

the main figures of *By an Eye Witness* was possible. Akhlaghi also remembered that people cried and hugged each other at the opening.[277] She described the exhibition: "The gallery was like a […] graveyard, in which each picture was a tombstone for a person whose death went unappreciated by all the regimes of Iran during the past century."[278]

But not all reactions were positive, *By an Eye Witness* also evoked negative criticism. Some people in Tehran even fully refused to talk to me about the project, when I wanted to interview them. The points of criticism were firstly, that Akhlaghi was accused of glorifying the past, secondly, people found fault with the fact, that Akhlaghi did not show more deaths, that happened after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, thirdly there was no understanding, why Akhlaghi showed this broad variety of people in one project, in other words, that she considered the cleric Taleghani for example, as important as the nationalist Mosaddegh. The fourth negative statement was, that *By an Eye Witness*, although such a high amount of money was spent on it, had no deeper content.[279]

### 4.4 Etymological discussion of the title به روایت یک شاهد عینی *(Bah revāyat-e yek šāhed-e ʿayni)/ By an Eye Witness*

I could not find out irrevocably, at which stage of production the title *By an Eye Witness* was given to the series. Ehsan Rasoulof said that it was determined "from the first day of production."[280] Azadeh Akhlaghi on the other hand, told me, that she did not have a name for the project until two days before the exhibition in Mohsen gallery. Presumably her statement is credible. Six pictures of the then still unfinished series were shown at the Festival *Iranian Arts Now* in June 2012 in Paris. The title *By an Eye Witness* does not appear on the list of exhibited works, and only the names of the single images are mentioned.[281] In order to understand the project fully, the evaluation of the title´s meaning is of higher significance, than coinage the exact point of time of its denomination. The Persian title of the series is به روایت یک شاهد عینی (*Bah revāyat-e yek šāhed-e ʿayni)*, the English translation would be *The*

277 Fakhari, "Iranian Photographer Azadeh Akhlaghi Revives History through Staged Images–Interview;" Sean O´Hagan, "Atrocities Revisted: Conflict and Cruelty in Iran," *The Guardian* (April 9, 2014). Accessed July 25, 2015: http:// www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/apr09/azadeh-akhlaghi-conlict-cruelty-iran; Stoughton, "Azadeh Akhlaghi Finds Beauty in Iran´s Bloody Past;" Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

278 Pauline Eifermann, "Seventeen Deaths. Q & A with Azadeh Akhlaghi," *Roads and Kingdoms* (2014). Accessed June 15, 2015: http://roadsandkingdoms.com/2014/seventeen-deaths-qa-with-azadeh-akhlaghi/.

279Interviews of various persons with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

280Personal Interviews of Azadeh Akhlaghi and Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 4 and 38.

281Plan of exhibited works of art at the Festival *Iranian Arts Now*. Accessed November 9, 2015, http://www.iranianartsnow.com/exposition-2/.

*Narrative of an Eye Witness*, and the English name given to the project is *By an Eye Witness*. In both languages, a reference to the terms "martyr" and "witness" is detectable. Sandy Habib states in his article *Dying in the Cause of God: The Semantics of the Christian and Muslim Concepts of Martyr* (2014), that the Persian words شاهد (šāhed), meaning "witness" and شهید (šahid), meaning "martyr" are closely related, as the latter roots etymologically in the former Persian loanword from Arabic. Both terms occur in the Qur´an, as well as in a number of hadits."[282] Also the English word "martyr" is based on the term "witness." Mette Mortensen draws attention to the fact, that "martyr" derives from the Greek word μάρτυρ, meaning, "witness," who is a person, who attests to the truth by suffering.[283]

According to R. Peters, a شـاهد (šāhed) is someone who gives testimony in Islamic law. "Testimony is a statement in court based on observations […] concerning the right of other. […] One can only testify to what one has heard or seen." [284] شهید (šahid) on the other hand, is "a word often used in the sense of martyr. […] and they [Muslim scholars] explain in various ways how this meaning derives from the word shahida (sic!)."[285] Sandy Habib defines an Islamic martyr as "someone who dies in the cause of Allah."[286] However, the concept of martyrdom is diversified in the understanding of Islam. E. Kohlberg lists a number of different types of martyrs:

> "[...] martyrs who die on the battlefield […], persons who die violently or prematurely either murdered while in the service of god or […] killed for their beliefs and [killed] through disease or accident. […], martyrs of love, martyrs who died far from home. Also persons who die a natural death can be regarded as martyrs if they die during a meritorious act or leading a virtuous life."[287]

The Christian concept of martyrdom is more narrow, as Christian martyrs are "Christians who are killed by non-Christians because of their belief in Jesus Christ."[288] Habib cites from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity." Thus, martyrs are at the same time also witnesses, who testify, that Jesus Christ actually died and rose for the sake of Christianity. The author concludes, that martyrs are not only aware of their death, but even chose it, as they did

282Sandy Habib, "Dying in the Cause of God: The Semantics of the Christian and Muslim Concepts of Martyr," *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 34, no. 3 (May 2014): 392-93.
283Mette Mortensen, "When Citizen Photojournalism Sets the News Agenda: Neda Agha Soltan as a Web 2.0 Icon of Post-Election Unrest in Iran," *Global Media and Communication* 7, no. 1 (April 2011): 9.
284R. Peters, "Shāhid," in: E. Bosworth et alii, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: Volume IX* (Leiden, 1997): 203-204.
285E. Kohlberg, "Shahīd," in: E. Bosworth et alii, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: Volume IX* (Leiden, 1997): 207-208.
286Habib, "Dying in the Cause of God:" 392-93.
287Kohlberg, "Shahīd:" 204-206.
288Habib, "Dying in the Cause of God:" 390.

not want to refrain from their religious convictions.[289]

In English as well as in Persian the terms martyr and šahid, that denominate persons that were killed because of their religious beliefs, derive from the words witness (in the semantic meaning) and šāhed (in an etymological sense) respectively, that are persons that bear witness to something.

When I asked Azadeh Akhlaghi and Ehsan Rasoulof about their awareness of the title´s meaning, their answers differed from each other. While the artist said that she was not sure, if she was conscious of any relevance, her producer told me, that they were. [290]

According to the title, به روایت یک شاهد عینی *(Bah revāyat-e yek šāhed-e ʿayni)*, *By an Eye Witness*, one could assume, that the content of the series is somehow related to martyrdom and witnessing. These relations will be discussed following a descriptive analysis.

### 4.5 Analytical and to some Extent Interpretative Description of *By an Eye Witness*

In this subsection, I will discuss the images of the series. The reader should not expect a detailed examination of all pictures, but an analytical and to some extent interpretative description of *By an Eye Witness*.

The staged photographs were shot in 2012 in Iran and are courtesy of the artist and Mohsen gallery. Every image has an edition of nine plus one artist´s proof. Each picture´s title is neutral and informative, and thus resembles a documentary mode, as it consists of the depicted location, which is connected by a hyphen to the name of the dead character, followed by a slash and the exact date of the scene, for instance: *Southampton, UK–Ali Shariati/19 June 1977*. All coloured digital prints on photographic paper are of the same height, but differ in width. The average size of the landscape formats is about 110 x 185 centimetres. Ehsan Rasoulof fixed the height, while the width was determined by Azadeh Akhlaghi.[291] Four photographs, namely those of *Bakeri* (*Fig.16*), *Taleghani* (*Fig.15*), *Sales* (*Fig.17*) and *Razavi/Ghandchi/Bozorgnia* (*Fig.6)* exceed two metres. The dimensions of *Ahmadi-Oskuie* (*Fig.11*) are as much as 110 x 318 centimetres; therefore, it is distinctly the series´ largest photograph. According to the artist, these notable dimensions are a result of scene and composition.[292]

289Ibid.: 390.
290Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi and Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 4 and 38.
291Personal Interviews of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 38-39.
292Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

a) Visual Contents of the Images

The seventeen images can be divided into groups, according to the depicted stage in the time-line of death. Two photographs of the series, *Tehran-Marzieh Ahmadi Oskuie/26 April 1974* (*Fig.11*) and *Tehran-Bijan Jazani/18 April 1975* (*Fig.12*) are showing the main characters at the *Moment of Being Shot*. While Jazani and his comrades were executed by SAVAK in the hills above Evin prison, and the only witnesses were his murderers, Ahmadi-Oskuie was hit by a bullet on a crowded street in Tehran, surrounded by many passer-bys. It is also specific to these images, that the murderers are present in the photographs.

Images that show the *Discovery of a Death or a Moribund Body* form with six pictures the biggest group of of the series. In *Tehran-Mirzadeh Eshghi/3 July 1924* (*Fig.3*) and *Tehran-Forough Farrokhzad/13 February 1967* (*Fig.7*), the poets are still alive, lying on the ground of a street or a courtyard, respectively, while people are rushing towards the protagonists in order to help them. While Eshghi is discovered by his lover, who raises her arms in panic, the driver of the school bus, children and Akhlaghi are running to the moribund body of Farrokhzad, who was just thrown out of her car. The scene in *Aras River Iran-Samad Behrangi/3 September 1967* (*Fig.10*), shows the retrieval of the drowned Behrangi, who was found in the river and is now brought to land by four men. The protagonists in *South Mehrabad House Tehran-Hamid Ashraf/29 June 1976* (*Fig.12*), *Southampton, UK-Ali Shariati/19 June 1977* (*Fig.14*) and *Chicago-Sohrab Shahid Sales/1 July 1998* (*Fig.17*) died in their homes. Ashraf´s corpse is lying in the midst of his comrades. Members of SAVAK are already in the house and leads two imprisoned *Fedain*-fighters, who are supposed to identify the bodies, into the room. They are depicted, while taking off their blindfolds, in other words, at the moment, in which they learn of Ashraf´s death.

Also Ali Shariati died indoors, *Fig.14* shows the moment of the removal of his body out of the house in a wheelchair. Shariati´s daughters are just about to discover the death of their father, who like Sales did not pass away in Iran. The latter died in 1998, and thus significantly later, than all other protagonists. Akhlaghi included Sales in her series, as she wanted to depict a death in exile, which is an unavoidable fate, that many Iranians have still to face nowadays.[293] Sales died lonesome; his body remained in his flat for four days, until it was found. As the title of the image indicates, the depicted scene shows the day of Sales´ death, when the viewer and Akhlaghi who is standing in the kitchenette, are the first persons, discovering Sales´ corpse.

293Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

The third group, *The Dead Body Lying on a Bed*, consists of three pictures, *Qasr-Prison, Tehran-Mohammad Farrokhi Yazdi/17 October 1939* (*Fig.4*)*, Tehran-Taghi Arani/4 February 1940* (*Fig.5*) and *Atlantic Hotel, Tehran-Gholam Reza Takhti/7 January 1968* (*Fig.9*). The dead bodies are surrounded by persons who are looking at the corpse. While the women around Arani are mourning his death, the bystanders in the pictures of Yazdi and Arani seem to be more interested in the fact, that the person has died. Their deaths happened in bright rooms, while Arani is lying in a dark and dusty mortuary.

The last stage in the time-line of dying is *The Mourning Ceremony,* depicted in three images: *Mashad-Colonel Mohammad Taghi-Khan Pesyan/07 (sic!) October 1921* (*Fig.2*)*, Ahmad-abad, Iran-Mohammad Mosaddegh/5 March 1967* (*Fig.8*) and *Tehran-Mahmoud Taleghani/10 September 1979* (*Fig.15*)*.* While a huge number of people behind the window try to attend Taleghani´s mourning ceremony inside his house, and also many mourners came to Pesyan´s funeral parade in the streets of Mashad, only a few family members and neighbours are present at Mosaddegh´s burial in his garden.

Not directly related to the time-line of death is the *Depiction of Suffering Masses,* in the two images *Faculty of Engineering, Tehran University–Azar Shariat Razavi, Ahmad Ghandchi, Mostafa Bozorgnia/7 December 1953* (*Fig.6*) and *Majnoon Island, Iraq-Mehdi Bakeri/14 February 1985* (*Fig.16*). The first picture shows a mass of panic-fuelled students, who are trying to flee from the building; dead and injured protesters are lying in between them on the floor. Dead and living persons are also depicted together in one image in the battlefield of Majnoon, where soldiers are fighting, while the ground is scattered with lifeless bodies. The rising smoke in the background is similar to the one, that hangs in the foreground of the image depicting the shooting of the students.

The initial photograph of the series, *Baghe-Shah, Tehran-Jahangir Khan Sur-e Esrafil, Nasrollah Malek-al-Motekallemin/24 June 1908* (*Fig.1*), does not fit in any of the above-mentioned categories. Akhlaghi shows prisoners in chains and a few members of the Cossack brigade -who were allied with the Shah- in a spacious vault. It is remarkable, that this is the only photograph of the series, in which the main characters are not present in the image, as they were already dead at the depicted moment. Just two pools of blood remind of them.

The whole time-line of death is shown in *By an Eye Witness*, starting with the *Moment of Being Shot*, followed by the *Discovery of a Dead or Moribund Body*, which forms the biggest group of the images, and *The Dead Body Lying on a Stretcher*, concluding with T*he Mourning Ceremony.* Not directly related to the time-line of death is the *Depiction of Suffering Masses* and *Sur-e Esrafil/al-Motekallemin* (*Fig.1*).

Based on Susan Sontag´s statement, that taking a picture is combined with choosing a part, which means, to exclude something,[294] I asked Akhlaghi, which criteria she followed to select the depicted scenes. The artist answered, that she tried to find the most important moment of each person´s death. For instance, she opted for *The Mourning Ceremony* in *Pesyan* (*Fig.2*) and *Mosaddegh* (*Fig.8*), because she wanted to show, that in the former "the whole city came", and in the latter "the absence of the people of Iran." In *Farrokhzad* (*Fig.7*), Akhlaghi considered the accident as the most crucial event in the time-line of the poet´s death, as this led to the creation of a myth in Iran.[295]

The visual content of the individual photographs of *By an Eye Witness* are subjective choices by the artist. She depicted the very moments, that she estimated most important in each individual´s time-line of death. Also the compositions of the images were determined by Akhlaghi.

b) Aesthetics, Composition, Blurring, Lighting, Colours

Through the thoughtful harmony of colours and arrangements of people, most of the images of *By an Eye Witness* transmit, despite their tragic contents, a certain calmness. The figures within the photographs are either depicted in a motionless moment (e.g. the men staring at Yazdi in *Fig.4* and the boy looking at the viewer in *Taleghani Fig.15*) or move very slowly (e.g. the musicians in *Pesyan Fig.2* and the servant in *Yazdi Fig.4*). In very few cases, for example, in the image of *Ahmadi-Oskuie* (*Fig.11*), a more hectic pace is detectable. It is remarkable that, even though the events are brutal, Akhlaghi did not create bloody pictures. Indeed, it seems, she tried to use blood sparingly, some photographs, for instance, *Taleghani* (*Fig.15*) and *Shariati* (*Fig.14*), do not even contain a single bloodstain. Rather, the photographs obtain a sense of Pathos, that is evoked by big gestures, like Jazani´s raised arms (*Fig.12*) or Ashraf´s outstretched body posture (*Fig.13*), which are frozen in time. Most images are very detailed and consist of a number of small elements; examples are the bookshelf and other items lying and standing in Sales´ flat (*Fig.17*) and the flowers, bottles and other things in Eshghi´s courtyard (*Fig.3*). Furthermore, Akhlaghi preferred long shots instead of close-ups; examples are Eshghi (*Fig.3*) and Taleghani (*Fig.15*), also some extreme long shots, for instance, *Jazani* (*Fig.12*) can be detected.

Moreover, straight lines are characteristic for *By an Eye Witness.* An example is the image of *Arani* (*Fig.4*), where three horizontal axes, namely the corpse, the women´s heads, and the

294Sontag, *Das Leiden anderer betrachten*: 56.
295Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 3-4.

transition from tiles to brick on the wall form the main composition. Furthermore, Takhti´s (*Fig.9*) dead body creates a diagonal, which is continued by the heads of the medical worker and the man who is carrying a tray. The line ends in the upper left corner of the frame of the picture on the wall. A second diagonal is composed by the persons who are standing next to Takhti´s bed and the spectators in the hallway. In *Ahmadi-Oskuie* (*Fig.11*), Akhlaghi placed the actors in two lines around the corner of a house, and, thus, creates a V-shape, whose vanishing, and central, point is Ahmadi-Oskuie.

Motion blur is another recurring element of *By an Eye Witness*. This means, certain parts of the image are depicted fuzzy and indistinct, and they are shown less clear, compared to the other elements of the image, because the persons were moving when the shutter was pressed. Akhlaghi usually uses this technique for people, who are in fast motion, like the fleeing students in *Razavi/Ghandchi/Bozorgnia* (*Fig.6*), or the falling Ahmadi-Oskuie (*Fig.11*). Also the man on the left, who carries the dead body out of Arani´s morgue is motion blurred (*Fig.4*).

Moreover, the use of cast shadows is characteristic; an example are the branches of the trees on the façade of Mosaddegh´s house and people in the garden and other items, visible on the ground (*Fig.8*). The most elaborate use of cast shadows occurs in the picture of Shariati (*Fig.14*). An impression of stairs in-between two railings is evoked through the shadow of the railing. Besides that, the shadow upon the wall on the left side, that is apparently a person in a window frame, transports a scene from outside into the image.[296]

Most pictures are dominated by dark and subdued earthy colours, with a concentration on pastel or saturated black, brown, beige, grey and white tones. Particular elements are singled out by strong colours. These are in most cases either green or red, but in some photographs, also other colours are used to emphasise specific parts. Examples are the green-white-red Iranian flag, that covers Mosaddegh´s body (*Fig.8*), Farrokhzad´s red scarf (*Fig.7*)[297] and the purple-rose dress, worn by the woman who discovers Eshghi (*Fig.4*).

The main colour of four pictures, namely *Behrangi* (*Fig.10*), *Ahmadi-Oskuie* (*Fig.11*), *Razavi/Ghandchi/Bozorgnia* (*Fig.6*) and *Sales* (*Fig.17*), is a cool-bleached blue. Moreover, particular parts of the four images are accentuated via different colours, for instance, the blood-red wounds of the dead and injured students on the floor in *Fig.6* immediately catch the eye. Another example are the bright green, pink and red plants in the right foreground of Ahmadi-Oskuie´s shooting scene, that generate an odd contrast to the other colours used.

296I will not discuss in this thesis, who this person could be, and what the meaning of his or her depiction is.

297Akhlaghi, who is present in every picture, wears a burgundy headscarf. The artist´s presence and the meaning of her dress will be discussed below.

Three photographs consist mainly of strong colours. *Shariati* (*Fig.14*) and *Taleghani* (*Fig.15*) show an intense brown and, to a lesser degree, the above mentioned earthy tones. Particular elements are again singled out by other colours, visible in the red cover of the coffin and the green plant in Taleghani´s house.

Unique, concerning the colours, is *Ashraf* (*Fig.13*), as it shows, besides the earthy colours, warm and strong tones of red, green and yellow. Ashraf is lying on a rug, that is located directly in the axis of a ray of light, and thus, this is Akhlaghi´s first strategy of highlighting the main character. Another example for using light in order to emphasise the protagonist, is the accentuation of Arani by a semi-circular light-cone (*Fig.4*).

Akhlaghi´s second strategy of marking the protagonists within the pictures, is the placement of a red item close to them. This item is mostly blood, like in *Sales* (*Fig.17)* and *Farrokhzad* (*Fig.7)*. But the artist also uses other elements, like flowers. As such, Pesyan is accentuated by red flowers around his photograph, that is affixed to the gun carriage (*Fig.2*), and Eshghi by the red blossom, which is lying next to his head (*Fig.3*).

Characteristic of the calm and almost bloodless long-shots of *By an Eye Witness* are their richness of details, straight lines, the partial use of motion blur and cast shadows as well as the use of dark and subdued earthy colours. The protagonists are highlighted either via lighting or the placement of red elements close to them. The meaning of those and other symbolic elements within the series is content of the following chapter.

## 5. Deciphering *By an Eye Witness:* Symbolic Elements and Visual References

Although the images of *By an Eye Witness* look simple at first sight, they contain many elements, that inherit a particular significance. Furthermore, the artist cites a number of other photographs and artworks in the series, that also imply a meaning and were consciously chosen by Akhlaghi. She told me, that she knew about the symbolic meanings of specific elements, and did not only copy formal characteristics of other paintings and photographs, but, that she was also aware of the images´ interpretations, and thus, transferred the underlying meanings of these pictorial references and symbolic elements to *By an Eye Witness*.[298] In order to understand the whole message of the series, it is crucial to examine these symbolic elements and quotations. Or, in other words, as Barbad Golshiri, who curated

298Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 6-8.

the photo-section at the festival *Iranian Arts Now*, put it in an interview with Euronews Le Mag: *By an Eye Witness* is a work of art, that needs to be *deciphered*.[299] The Oxford Dictionary defines "to decipher" as "Succeed in understanding, interpreting, or identifying (something)."[300] In order to decipher *By an Eye Witnes*s, firstly one has to identify Akhlaghi´s visual references and symbolic elements in the work. Secondly, it is necessary to understand them; that is to say, to gather information about their meanings, backgrounds or interpretations. And thirdly, these meanings, interpretations and backgrounds need to be read within the context of *By an Eye Witness,* that is, the history of Iran and the situation in the country today. Thus, the last step of deciphering *By an Eye Witness* in chapter six consists of my reflections on which messages are communicated via the use of these particular symbolic elements and pictorial citations.

As space is limited and there are a number of elements and quotations, that need to be discussed in order to convey the whole meaning of the series to the reader, I have to limit myself to a superficial discussion. A profound examination of all potential symbolic meanings or interpretations of the specific elements and references is neither possible nor in any way significant for the conclusion of this thesis. Nonetheless, all aspects, that are important for the understanding of *By an Eye Witness* will be mentioned, e.g. I discuss the use of the colour green in the series, but will not conduct a detailed analysis of the meaning of the colour, that can be found elsewhere. Rather, I focus on the meanings of its significance **in** *By an Eye Witness*.

### 5.1 Deciphering Symbolic Elements

As mentioned in chapter four, the images of *By an Eye Witness* are very detailed and contain a number of elements, that inherit a symbolic character. According to Rowena and Rupert Sheperd a symbol is

> "[...] something that a particular culture considers to mean something else. […] A symbol […] exists in his own right […] the meanings carried by symbols are `loose´: that is, often capable of more than one interpretation, and beyond really precise definition. The world of symbols is a world of inference and suggestion, rather than of concrete facts and definite statements."[301]

The aim of this subsection is to indicate the symbolic character of specific elements in the series, and to discuss some of their meanings within the context of *By an Eye Witness*. This will be based on relevant literature.

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299Euronews Le Mag, "´Iranian Arts Now:´ Kritik in Kunstforum," *Youtube,* Video (June 28, 2012): Minute 2:03. Accessed August 15, 2015: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGjCZanHTfA.

300Oxford University Press, ed., "decipher," in: *Oxford Dictionaries* (2015). Accessed December 7, 2015: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/decipher.

301Rowena Sheperd/Rupert Sheperd, *1000 Symbols* (London, 2002): 10-11.

Akhlaghi selected these symbolic elements carefully, she told me she included,

> "[...] some layers for those people who […] know art […] who are intellectuals, so I put all those details for them. [...] for *Taleghani [Fig.15]* […] I was doing research in order to find […] a surah, that is about […] tragic deaths […]"[302]

The most obvious symbolic element is the artist´s self-depiction in every image. This was also mentioned in almost every article, published on *By an Eye Witness*. Symbolic elements of martyrdom and signs, that indicate the biography of the dead person were less recognised. Raha Namwar/Laura Pannasch mentioned in die *Kunst des Attentats* [The Art of Assassination] (2014) the anachronistic depiction of the soldiers in *Ashraf* (*Fig.13*), and Jason Rezaian in his article *Unique Photography Project Gets Strong Reception in Iran* (2013) the use of the same actor in *Mosaddegh* (*Fig.8*) and *Taleghani* (*Fig.15*).[303] Up to now, no one has either addressed the symbolic elements, that refer to the personal biographies of the protagonists or the symbolic elements of martyrdom.

a) Symbolic Elements and Colours of Mourning and Martyrdom

As discussed in chapter four, all images of the series are dominated by dark colours. This was a deliberate decision by Akhlaghi, because she wanted to express the tragic visual contents of the images through the colours, and tried to transport the depicted sorrow and grief via the use of dim tones. It is could also be the reason why the artist wears a black dress in every image (e.g. *Farrokhzad Fig.7* on the right-hand side), as she understands black as the colour of mourning.[304] Furthermore, in Iran as well as in Europe black is associated with death, mourning, negative emotions and bad luck.[305] Thus, it seems Akhlaghi´s black dress symbolises, that she is mourning the protagonists.

302Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 8.

303Rex Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran," *Art Collector* 70 (Winter 2014): 105; Pauline Eifermann, "Seventeen Deaths. Q & A with Azadeh Akhlaghi," *Roads and Kingdoms* (2014). Accessed June 15, 2015: http://roadsandkingdoms.com/2014/seventeen-deaths-qa-with-azadeh-akhlaghi/; Raha Namwar/Laura Pannasch, "Die Kunst des Attentats," *Zenith,* no. 3 (July/August 2014): 19; Jason Rezaian, "Unique Photography Project Gets Strong Reception in Iran," *The Washington Post* (March 7, 2013). Accessed June 15, 2015: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp72013/03/07/unique-photography-project-gets-strong-reception-in-ira/; Ali Sheikhmehdi/Forough Khabiri, "Narrative Reading of Contemporary History of Iran: A Case Study of Azadeh Akhlaghi´s Staged Photos," *The International Journal of Visual Design* 9 (December 2015): 1-11; Rachel Spencer, "Burnt Generation: Terrace Rooms: Somerset House: London – Review," *The Financial Times* (April 15, 2014). Accessed June 15, 2015: http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/b1be16ba-c3bb-11e3-a8e0-00144feabdc0.html; Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

304Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

305Eva Heller, *Wie Farben wirken* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1989): 90.

As mentioned above, persons who died because of their beliefs can be described as martyrs. Akhlaghi characterises the protagonists of *By an Eye Witness* via specific symbolic elements and the use of the colours green, white and red, as martyrs.

Blood and thus, the colour red is usually in both, in Christianity and in Shia Islam, for obvious reasons perceived as a symbol of warriors and martyrdom.[306] Staci Gem Scheiwiller designates the colour red as "indexical to the spilt blood of martyrs in Shi´a (sic!) religious narratives such as […] Imam Hossein."[307] David Cook, who draws attention to the fact, that there is no good study of symbols of martyrdom in Islam, understands blood as a self-evident, primary symbol of the martyr, that signifies expiation for Muslims´s sins.[308] Also in representations of the Crucifixion of Jesus, blood is visible and Catholic priest are dressed in red garments during Lent and at memorial days for specific martyrs.[309] Red, either blood, or other items, are, not only often used by Akhlaghi in order to highlight the protagonists, as mentioned in chapter four, but also to declare them as martyrs. This can be seen for example, in the bloodstains on the shirts of the shot students (*Fig.6*), the blood on Farrokhzad´s head and hands (*Fig.7*), the red flowers, that are affixed to Pesyan´s gun carriage (*Fig.2*), or the red blossom, lying next to Eshghi´s head (*Fig.3*).

White is another colour through which Akhlaghi attributes the figures of *By an Eye Witness* as martyrs. A number of protagonists, for example, Yazdi (*Fig.4*) and Jazani (*Fig.12*) wear white shirts; furthermore, Arani is covered by a white shroud (*Fig.5*) and Mosaddegh´s body is hidden in a white body bag (*Fig.8*). White, according to David Cook, is next to red, an equally important colour of Islamic martyrdom, as dead bodies were often wrapped in white winding sheets.[310] Maria Alvanou states, that white, especially white flowers -that also frame Pesyan´s photograph (*Fig.2*), are visible in the background of *Taleghani* (*Fig.15*) and one is pinned on Ahmadi-Oskuie´s shirt (*Fig.11*)- can be understood as symbols of purity and martyrdom in a Muslim religious context, as they indicate the way to paradise.[311] R. and R. Sheperd mention, that white roses also symbolise martyrdom in a Catholic context,[312] and Eva Heller observed; that white is even understood in the Christian-influenced parts of the world, as a symbol of

306Peter Chelkowski/Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (London, 2000): 302; Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

307Staci Gem Scheiwiller, *Mirrors with Memories: Nineteenth-Century and Qajar Imagery in Contemporary Iranian Photography* (Saarbrücken, 2011): 66.

308David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge, 2007): 117.

309Heller, *Wie Farben wirken*: 54-57; Sheperd/Sheperd, *1000 Symbols*: 151.

310Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*: 117.

311Maria Alvanou, "Symbolisms of Basic Islamic Imagery in Jihadi Propaganda," *Italian Team for Security, Terroristic Issues & Managing Emergencies* (sine anno). Accessed December 4, 2015: http://www.itstime.it/Approfondimenti/Symbolisms%20of%20basic%20islamic%20imagery.pdf.

312Sheperd/Sheperd, *1000 Symbols*: 261.

death and burial garments, due to its lack of all colours. Furthermore, white is understood as a colour of victims and innocents.[313]

Moreover, as mentioned above, some elements in the images are highlighted via the use of the colour green, examples are the plants in *Ahmadi-Oskuie* (*Fig.11*) and *Taleghani* (*Fig.15*), as well as the green blanket, that covers Takhti´s body (*Fig.9*). Green is not a typical colour, that is linked to martyrdom, but rather to Islam, as it is believed, that it was the Prophet´s favourite colour,[314] and represents the Muslim proclamation of faith.[315] It is furthermore connected to paradise, spiritual refreshment, renewal and knowledge. Also the martyrs and saints in paradise wear green, according to Sheperd and Sheperd.[316] Moreover, Elizabeth L. Rauh states, that green is "associated with the prophetic family and especially Imam Huseyn (sic!),"[317] the main martyr of Shia Islam, as in Shiite passion plays, in which the Battle of Kerbala is re-enacted, Hossein´s followers are dressed in green garments.[318] In a Christian context green is connected to the resurrection.[319] Green was moreover, the colour, used by the opposing candidate to Ahmadinejad, Mir Hossein Musawi (Mir Ḥosayn Musavi) (b.1942), in his electoral campaign, and as a consequence of that, later by the protesters of the Green Movement in 2009. In addition green is seen as a symbol of justice, freedom and hope.[320] Green is the colour of spring, which is the first season of the year, and thus, the colour can be interpreted as renewing after a time of shortage; and hope, that a time of austerity is over.[321]

Thus, Akhlaghi´s choice of stressing many elements, close to the protagonists of *By an Eye Witness* via the use of white and red, colours that in Islam and Christianity are associated with martyrdom, could be interpreted as a declaration, that the persons depicted were martyrs. With the use of green, Akhlaghi adds the colour of Hossein and martyrs in paradise, but green is at the same time a symbol of the protesters in 2009, who died in the streets of Tehran, hoping and fighting for justice and fair elections. Thus, Akhlaghi selected with her choice of colours -for highlighting specific elements in *By an Eye Witness*,- red, white and green, the colours of the Iranian flag. This could mean; the protagonists in *By an Eye Witness* were like the protesters of 2009 martyrs, who died while fighting for a better life in Iran.

313Heller, *Wie Farben wirken*: 90 and 147-151.
314Ibid.: 73.
315Alvanou, "Symbolisms of Basic Islamic Imagery in Jihadi Propaganda."
316 Sheperd/Sheperd, *1000 Symbols*: 343.
317Elizabeth L. Rauh, "Thirty Years Later: Iranian Visual Culture from the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Presidential Protests," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 1322-1323.
318Ibid.: 1329-1330. Hossein and the battle of Kerbala are discussed in detail below.
319Heller, *Wie Farben wirken*: 75.
320Tallin Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art* (London, 2014): 249-250; Davood N. Rahni, "Iran Flag: A National Historical Perspective," *Payvand* (March 28, 2010). Accessed November 12, 2015: http://www.payvand.com/news/10/mar/1252.html.
321Rauh, "Thirty Years Later:" 1322-1323.

Moreover, other symbols of martyrdom are detectable in *By an Eye Witness,* for example, the already mentioned white and red roses, that surround Pesyan´s photograph (*Fig.2*). According to Maria Alvanou "flowers symbolize both martyrdom and paradise" in Islam.[322] And she states, that all kinds of red flowers can be a symbol of martyrdom. The heap of flowers on Pesyan´s gun carriage, the plants on the trolley in the foreground on the right-hand side of *Ahmadi-Oskuie* (*Fig.11*) and the variety of blossoms, that are arranged around Eshghi´s pool (*Fig.3*) can be understood in this context.[323] Moreover, Akhlaghi included a purely Christian symbol of martyrdom in her series, as the palm tree in the right-hand background of Taleghani´s house is a typical attribute of Christian martyrs (*Fig.15*).[324] Also, the surah on the open page of the Qu´ran on Taleghani´s coffin refers to both, his death, as well as to tragic deaths of martyrs in general, and was consciously selected by Akhlaghi.[325]

Another category of symbolic elements of martyrdom, does not directly originate from religious narratives, but is rather a part of the everyday Iranian martyr cult. An example are the green and red bandeaus of the soldiers in the battlefield of Majnoon-island (*Fig.16*), that were actually worn during the Iran-Iraq war. Red signalled membership of the Basij (basij) militia, that consisted of young volunteers, who were prepared to die as martyrs. The revolutionary guards, called Pasadaran (pāṣadārān), wore green bandeaus.[326] Even nowadays photographs of martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war are present in Tehran´s daily life, as they are displayed in mosques, shops, public buildings and other locations. Furthermore, the government shows its ambitious concern, to prevent people from forgetting them by installing an enormous number of martyrs´ posters all over the city every year, around the anniversary of the beginning of the war.

Summed up, Akhlaghi indicates the status of her protagonists as martyrs via the symbolic elements colours, plants, a surah and the reference to photographs of war losses.

b) Symbolic Elements, Referring to the Protagonists´ Biographies

Akhlaghi does not only include symbolic elements, that refer to the martyrdom of the main figures, but also items, that point to the protagonists´ personal biographies. These are local indications, actual photographs, objects and persons of the lives of the main figures.

322Alvanou, "Symbolisms of Basic Islamic Imagery in Jihadi Propaganda."
323Ibid.
324Sheperd/Sheperd, *1000 Symbols*: 240.
325Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 9.
326Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988* (Oxford, 2002): 62.

The first group includes elements, like the typical Iranian bread *Nan Barbari* (Nān Barbari), that a witness of Ahmadi-Oskuie´s shooting (*Fig.11*), who is standing on the right-hand side in a door frame, holds in his hands, or the rain gutter, that is very distinctive to Tehran, towards the right of Farrokhzad´s body (*Fig.7*). These symbols indicate, that the location of most scenes is clearly in Iran, the country, where all protagonists were born.

Secondly, more specific references to the individuals are detectable, through real pictures of the figures depicted. This is visible in the actual photographs of Pesyan (*Fig.2*) and Taleghani (*Fig.15*) as part of their mourning ceremonies, although their presentation could also be understood as a reference to martyrdom. Maria Alvanou states, that it is common in Islamic martyr-worship to show the photograph of a martyr in "an oval or round" frame, as it is the case in *Pesyan*.[327]

The third group consists of objects of the lives of the protagonists. Books, like those next to Farrokhzad (*Fig.7*) and Sales (*Fig.17*), are connected to their biographies as a poet, a director, respectively. The photograph of Anton Chekhov on the left side of Sales´ flat, is also a biographical indication, because Sales was mainly inspired by Chekhov, as he made clear in an interview, by saying, "My culture is Chekhov. I have no intention of letting go of Chekhov, he is too current."[328] Furthermore, Akhlaghi explained why she displayed the two film-posters on the walls of the kitchenette, "[...] I put some posters of Shahid Sales´ previous movies, because he was in love with cinema, and he couldn´t make any movies when he was overseas in US and a few only in Germany. So that was his past, that´s why I put them there."[329] Akhlaghi did not only include items, that refer to the artworks, produced by the main characters, into the scenes, but also objects of their personal lives. Examples are Takhti´s last will in the hands of the white-haired man, prominent in the foreground (*Fig.9*), and whiskey bottles in the kitchenette and on the side table in Sales´ flat as an indication of his heavy alcohol abuse (*Fig.17*). In Eshghi´s yard, a purple-rose, patterned rug is hanging from the right balcony, a tree grows in the middle, and a bicycle is leaning on the left wall (*Fig.3*). Akhlaghi said, she used these elements, because she read, that Eshghi visited a friend on a bicycle and sat with his lover on a Persian rug under a tree, the night before he was killed. She included these items "because all these things could help to understand the character of

327Alvanou, "Symbolisms of Basic Islamic Imagery in Jihadi Propaganda."
328Mahmoud Haghighat et alii, "Itinerary: 1944-1983: Interviews with Sohrab Shahid Sales," *Discourse* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 169.
329Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 10.

Eshghi."[330] Eshghi´s lover is depicted at the very moment of discovering the dying poet on the floor. Her arms are stretched to the side, and her mouth is open, apparently letting out a yell. She is part of the fourth group, that includes persons, who belong to the lives and deaths of the main figures. Another reference of a character´s private life is Hamid Ashraf in the shooting scene of Marzieh Ahmadi-Oskuie (*Fig.11*). He is running beneath the right wall of the house, next to Akhlagi, who tries to push him to the side. Akhlaghi presumes, that Oskuie and Ashraf, both members of the *Fedain* movement, were a couple, as it was very dangerous and completely unusual within the organisation, to attend conspirative meetings of other comrades. But Ashraf did that, in order to save Ahmadi-Oskuie´s life.[331]

As described in chapter four, Akhlaghi tried to find actors who looked similar to the person they were playing, thus the artist also worked with actual photographs of Ashraf, in order to reconstruct his appearance as lifelike as possible. She did the same in the representation of the events in Baghe-Shah (*Fig.1*). The Cossack with the eye-catching fur-hat on the right side, behind the photographer is influenced by an actual portrait photograph of the Russian Cossack Colonel Liakhoff, the leader of the brigade, who was responsible for the executions, and hence, the deaths, of Sur-Esrafil and al-Motekallemin in 1908 (*Fig.77*). Comparable in both images are his full beard and moustache, the black uniform with V-neck, the round medallion and the choker. Also, the golden pattern with round elements on his shoulder blades and the fringes are identical. Like in the original portrait, taken by an unknown photographer, Liakhoff in *Fig.1* carries his sword diagonally on the right side of his body. Akhlaghi also adopts his gesture, holding the right hand behind his back and the left hand on his front side. Even the position of his head, slightly leaned to the left is comparable. Another example for the presence of human beings as reference to the biography of the main characters is the depiction of Ayatollah Zanjani (Zanjāni) in the mourning ceremonies of Mosaddegh (*Fig.8*) and Taleghani (*Fig.15*).[332] The cleric was actually present at the funeral services of both men. Akhlaghi indicates this in *By an Eye Witness,* as she hired the same actor, who wears the same clothes in the two scenes. His black turban, black garment and brown coat are identical, only his full beard has turned grey, and his face is more crinkled in the mourning ceremony of Taleghani. As he died twenty-two years later than Mosaddegh, Akhlaghi depicted the natural process of ageing of Ayatollah Zanjani.[333]

330Ibid.: 7.
331Ibid.
332Azadeh Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness* (Tehran, 2013): 24. Cited after Mohammad Torkaman, *In Memory of Dr. Sahabi: Symbol of Virtue and Social Manner* (Tehran, 1998): 120.
333Rezaian, "Unique Photography Project Gets Strong Reception in Iran."

Via the symbolic elements, referring to the biographies of the protagonists, Akhlaghi indicates, that the pictures are not about anybody´s death, but about these specific Iranian freedom-fighters, whose lives should be better understood through the inclusion of the biographical references.

c) Anachronistic Elements

Some symbolic elements within *By an Eye Witness* do not fit in the time-context of the depicted scenes, and thus, can be called anachronistic.

Examples are the two images hanging on the wall behind Takhti´s corpse (*Fig.8*), these are Émile-Auguste Carolus Duran´s *L´Assassine* (1866), on the right-hand side, and Pieter Brueghel´s *Winter* (1565) on the left hand-side of Takhti´s bed. Although Akhlaghi is fully aware, that paintings of this kind would definitely not have hung in a hotel room in Tehran in 1967, she decided to include them in the photograph. The first, that shows a mourning scene for a killed person, because of its reference to martyrdom, and the second due to the artist´s personal admiration for Pieter Brueghel.[334]

Another anachronistic element can be found in *Ashraf* (*Fig.13*), where the soldiers are dressed in uniforms of different eras. Akhlaghi told Carol Off in an interview, that she "manipulated history" in this image, as the officers in the background next to the bookshelf wear uniforms of the time of the coup d´ etat 1953, in the courtyard those of the Iranian Revolution 1979 and in the foreground, left of the garden door those of today´s Iran, which were also worn during the Green Movement in 2009.[335] Namwar/Pannasch suggest, that the inclusion of these uniforms is an accusation of the methods of today´s government in Iran.[336] In any case, Akhlaghi indicates, that the events of 1953, 1979 and 2009 are related, and that the governmental forces resort to violence against protesters was repeated again and again.

The most striking anachronistic element, that also received a lot of attention from my interview partners in Tehran, is the artist´s self-depiction in every image, wearing clothes of today´s Iran, namely a black dress and a red headscarf. As discussed above, black can be a symbol of mourning and red of martyrdom. The artist´s garments distinguish her from the other people in the images, who are usually dressed in contemporary costumes. She interprets

334Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 9-10.

335Claire Off, "Staging Death in Iran: Photographer Re-creates Scenes of Historical Infamy," *CBC*, Audio (April 17, 2014): Minute 4:11-4:31. Accessed December 5, 2015: http://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/thursday-amanda-todd-arrest-marionville-mayor-super-rat-poison-and-more-1.2903845/staging-death-in-iran-photographer-re-creates-scenes-of-historical-infamy-1.2903850.

336Namwar/Pannasch, "Die Kunst des Attentats:" 19.

herself as a "time-traveller," who is "looking on the scene as a witness."[337] Thus, Akhlaghi´s self-representation is both, an anachronistic element and an act of witnessing, that will be discussed in the next subsection.

d) The Act of Witnessing

Azadeh Akhlaghi is present in every image of the series. As she is not the main figure of the photographs, in most pictures, the artist is not located in the centre of the composition, but a "marginal note;"[338] a passive bystander and silent witness, somewhere on the side or in the back, looking sad and afflicted. She is stepping out of a door in the right-hand background into Eshghi´s yard (*Fig.3*), leaning against a wall, next to three spectators of Pesyans´s funeral parade on the left-hand side (*Fig.2*), or staring with the other women at Arani´s dead body (*Fig.5*). Her self-representation is remarkable in the following two photographs, as it differs from the other images. In *Ashraf* (*Fig.13*), Akhlaghi shows herself not inside the image, but through a mirror next to the garden door, that reflects a scene from outside the photograph. She is also not depicted within the frame during the execution of Jazani. Only the red headscarf is lying, as a symbol of her presence or absence, in the left foreground (*Fig.12*).[339] Akhlaghi told me, that she decided not to include herself in the latter image, as she simply could not have been present at the shooting at Evin Hills.[340] Thus, this is also an indication, that some events in history were not witnessed.

In two photographs, the artist changes her role from a passive witness to an active agent. She is running towards Farrokhzad, who is lying on the street (*Fig.7*) and trying to push Ashraf to the side, in order to prevent him from running in the line of fire, next to the wall right-hand of *Ahmadi-Oskuie* (*Fig.11*). When I asked Akhlaghi what the reason for the active self-representation in these two photographs was, she answered, that she tried to show herself, how she really would have acted at the moment depicted. As she is only a human being, in most cases, she would have been afraid of the bloody and cruel events, and would have stayed in the background. But in the pictures, where she shows herself active, she really had been. In *Farrokhzad* (*Fig.7*), this is because there is no danger, no murderers are around. Furthermore, the artist feels a deep connection to the poet, as she started reading her poetry at a very young age, so if Akhlaghi had been present at her accident, she said, she could not have stood still, but would have run towards her, although Farrokhzad was nearly dead. In *Ahmadi-Oskuie*

337Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran:" 111.
338Omar Calabrese, *Die Geschichte des Selbstporträts* (Munich, 2006): 49.
339Possible reasons for this mode of depiction will be discussed in the subsection 5.2 c.
340Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

(*Fig.11*) Akhlaghi tries to push Ashraf to the side, as it is too late to help Ahmadi-Oskuie anyway, she is already dying, and the artist said, she would have tried to prevent Ashraf of placing himself in danger.[341] Nonetheless, these two images are an exception, usually Akhlaghi does not depict herself as an active agent, but as a passive witness. John Durham Peters writes in his essay *Witnessing* (2001):

> "To witness thus has two faces: the passive one of seeing and the active one of saying […] What one has seen authorizes what one says: an active witness first must have been a passive one. Herein lies the fragility of witnessing: the difficult juncture between experience and discourse."[342]

Saleh Najafi (Ṣāleḥ Najafi), an Iranian philosopher, who held a lecture on *By an Eye Witness* during the exhibition in Mohsen gallery in 2013, described Akhlaghi as either "actively passive" or "passively active."[343] Akhlaghi unites the two faces of witnessing in *By an Eye Witness;* she is active and passive at the same time. She sees the scenes in the background, but at the same time she speaks of them via her photographs. Of course, Akhlaghi is too young, to have seen most of the events depicted in *By an Eye Witness* literally with her own eyes. According to Hamid Dabashi, Akhlaghi "has not in fact seen" these events, "but is condemned to remember."[344] Paradoxically, no one has seen the deaths shown in the series, as no public images of them are available. Furthermore, many Iranians know about those deaths, although they are not part of the official history, and hence, the protagonists were not spoken about openly.[345] Their deaths were somehow "public secrets, everyone knows."[346] Akhlaghi knows about the lives of her main figures and remembers them, thus she has not literally, but metaphorically seen their deaths. Or, that is to say, in Dabashi´s words "[...] she must remember things that the invisible snapshot has cast upon her visual memory."[347] With the narration of the deaths in the photographs of *By an Eye Witness* Akhlaghi leaves her passive face of seeing and changes it to the active one of saying. However, for different reasons, before the creation of *By an Eye Witness*, no one had dared to abandon the passive part of seeing or knowing, and had talked about the deaths openly and actively.

Via her self-depiction, Akhlaghi also refers to the fact, that she has metaphorically, but not literally seen the deaths and still remembers them. But not only, Akhlaghi has not forgotten these events; she is, according to Ehsan Rasoulof a representative of her generation, that was

341Ibid.
342John Durham Peters, "Witnessing," *Media Culture & Society* 23, no. 6 (January 2001): 709-710.
343Personal Interview of Saleh Najafi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
344Hamdi Dabashi, "Remembrance of Things Past," in: Azadeh Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness* (Tehran, 2013): 51.
345Personal Interview of Saleh Najafi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
346Dabashi, "Remembrance of Things Past:" 51-52.
347Ibid.: 51-52.

born during or shortly before or after the Iranian Revolution 1979, the *Burnt Generation*, as mentioned in chapter three. Although, these events happened before their birth, many of them are aware of those deaths, and they know about Iran before the Islamic Republic. Thus Akhlaghi´s self-depiction was "To explain our sensitivity, our respect to people who lost their lives for us."[348] The deaths and thus the failures of the protagonists of *By an Eye Witness*, shaped the conditions under which Iranians, and Akhlaghi´s generation, which is the first generation, that grew up in the Islamic Republic, have to live today. Thus, her presence, wearing a black dress and a burgundy scarf, could also be interpreted as the result of the failures of the protagonists. If they had succeeded, the conditions of living in Iran might be different. Akhlaghi seems to accuse not only the protagonists, but also herself and her generation in general, when she says, "I wanted to show that we all were not present. We could not stop time and prevent the deaths of those people."[349] Thus, Saleh Najafi thinks, that via her self-representation Akhlaghi expresses the wish, that she could have altered history, but at the same time indicates through her presence, that she, like all other Iranians simply could not, as the persons **are** dead.[350] Dabashi interprets her appearance in a similar way, when he writes that Akhlaghi´s self-representation indicates, she "[…] wants to have been there, where the history of her people was happening […]. The photographer is horrorful (sic!), apprehensive, wishing she could have been there, and stopped the clock, as the tragedy was about to happen, to prevent it from happening. But it has."[351]

Susan Sontag states, that every picture has an author and represents the view of someone.[352] This is another aspect of Akhlaghis self-representation, as she indicates via this element, that the photographs are constructs of her own imagination, it is her view, and thus her version or interpretation of history. According to Najafi, Akhlaghi´s presence within the photographs distinguishes them from so-called documentary films like Steven Spielberg´s *Schindlers List* (1993). Through her self-anachronism, Akhlaghi does not pretend, that *By an Eye Witness* is a historical documentary, but she signifies that it has **not** happened exactly like depicted.[353] Akhlaghi summed up the meaning of her self-representation in an interview with Golnaz Fakhari "I wanted to focus on the fact that all these frames are from my own perspective – the artist´s view. The truth could not be exactly what is shown in these images, and I could never

348Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 37-38.
349Namwar/Pannasch, "Die Kunst des Attentats:" 19. Translated from German by the author.
350Personal Interview of Saleh Najafi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
351Dabashi, "Remembrance of Things Past:" 51.
352Sontag, *Das Leiden anderer betrachten* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008): 40.
353Personal Interview of Saleh Najafi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

reach the whole truth. I wanted to emphasise my own presence as a representative of the next generation in the images."[354]

Considering that Akhlaghi was also present in her former photograph-series *Me as Preferred by Others* (*Fig.78*) and as she will include herself in her next project, her self-portrayal could be seen to serve as a signature or an evidence of authorship.[355] The inclusion of the artist within the picture has a long tradition, in art history. Akhlaghi knows that, and refers to this tradition in particular, when she depicts herself in a mirror, wearing a red hejab (*Fig.13*). Also Jan van Eyck portrayed himself with a red turban in a mirror, as the witness to the *Arnolfini-Betrothal* (*Fig.79*). The meaning of this and other references to paintings and photographs will be discussed in the next subsection.

But it is not only, Akhlaghi, who bears witness to the ongoing events depicted in *By an Eye Witness*. The three men on the left roof, who look down, onto the moribund Eshghi (*Fig.3*), the people, who are standing in a triangular shape in the hall in front of Takhti´s hotel room (*Fig.9*) and the passer-bys on the street, as well as the woman, who is looking out of a window on the right side in the shooting of Marzieh Ahmadi-Oskuie (*Fig.11*), to name just three examples, do not have an active part in the events, but are spectators or witnesses.

Moreover, in some images, photographers with cameras, are depicted. Namely in *Sur-Esrafil/al-Motekallemin* in the right-hand foreground (*Fig.1*), *Pesyan* in the right-hand background next to the horse (*Fig.2*), *Mosaddegh* in the right hand foreground (*Fig.8*) and *Takhti* right next to the corpse (*Fig.9*). In every picture, the camera is subjected towards the dead person, respectively the Constitutionalists in *Fig.1*.

Like Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980), Susan Sontag and Christian Metz also state parallels between photography and death. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) Susan Sontag points to the fact, that a photographic image is the trace of something or someone that or who actually existed in front of the camera. Thus, a photograph can be a realistic visual memory of a beloved dead friend or relative, as it depicts the person truer to life than a painting, for example.[356] Metz indicates in his article *Photography and Fetish* (1985), that photography and death, both are ultimate and silent and even compares the act of taking a photo to the shot of a gun.[357] Also Andreas Elter makes a connection between pulling the trigger of a gun, and shooting a picture. Furthermore, he underlines the parallels between guns

354Fakari, "Iranian Photographer Azadeh Akhlaghi Revives History Through Staged Images–Interview."
355Calabrese, *Die Geschichte des Selbstporträts*: 52-54; Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
356Sontag, *Das Leiden anderer betrachten*: 31.
357Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," *October* 34 (1985): 85.

and cameras, as both have a trigger, carrying straps, a viewfinder and a zoom function as well as a magazine.[358]

Akhlaghi shot pictures of usurping deaths by using a medium, that is surrounded by an aura of violence itself. This means; she could not have chosen a better medium, as photography is the most transgressing and brutal in a metaphorical sense.

The artist told me, that she did not think of this relation between cameras and weapons, but wanted to show with the incorporation of cameras, the presence of a photographer at the actual deaths. Her aim was to underline, that images of the dead persons exist, but these pictures are somewhere in closed archives and not familiar to the Iranian people.[359]

Thus, the photographers with cameras indicate that the deaths were actually witnessed, and in some cases even visually captured, although no publicly accessible photographs are available of the scenes of *By an Eye Witness*. An exception is *Sur-Esrafil/al-Motekallemin,* here Akhlaghi refers to an image, that was taken of the prisoners in Baghe-Shah, that was also published in Europe and Iran (*Fig.80*). She recreates the scene of the making of the image.

The photographer in the right foreground who makes a gesture towards the prisoners in *Sur-Esrafil/al-Motekallemin (Fig.1)* requires further discussion, as his scrubby, white hair is similar to a portrait of the famous photographer of Qajar-times, Antoin Sevruguin (*Fig.81*). The position of the photographer within *Sur-Esrafil/al-Motekallemin* is the adoption of an image, showing an important event within Iranian history, taken by Sevruguin; namely the hanging of Naser al-Din Shah´s assassin in 1896 (*Fig.82*). Here, Sevruguin depicts himself with his assistant via a shadow in the right foreground. Like in *Fig.1* a camera on a tripod is visible. Sevruguin wears a hat in both pictures and the gesture of his hands is the same, the right up, the left down. Basically, there was no need for Sevruguin to include himself in the picture, if his only purpose was, to document an important event of Iranian history. But, according to Navab, via his self-representation, he writes his own story in Iranian history and claims that he is Iranian.[360] Also, Akhlaghi refers with her self- depiction in *By an Eye Witness* to **her** Iranian past. In contrast to Akhlaghi, Sevrugin was literally and physically present in the depicted hanging. Navab states “He was there as witness and interpreter, saying through his photographs: Do not forget that I was there at that moment, at that turbulent time in Iran's history.”[361] Akhlaghi was not in Baghe-Shah when Sur-e-Esrafil and al-Motekallemin, who

358Andreas Elter, “Tod eines Kameramannes: Fotografen und Kameraleute zwischen den Fronten,” in: *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder: 1949 bis heute*, Gerhard Paul, ed., (Göttingen, 2008): 452.

359Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 9.

360Aphrodite Désirée Navab, “To Be or not to Be an Orientalist?: The Ambivalent Art of Antoin Sevruguin,” *Iranian Studies* 35, no. 1-3: 135-139.

361Ibid.: 135-139.

fought against the ruling Shah, were killed. Sevruguin really saw the events he photographed with his own eyes and was actually present, Akhlaghi, on the other hand, is witnessing what she metaphorically remembers. Nevertheless, both are parts of their own photographs. But their message via the self-representation is different. While Sevruguin is claiming what he sees and adds himself to history, Akhlaghi expresses, that she depicts her interpretation of history, the wish to go back in time to her national past to alter history. Furthermore, she shows herself as the result of the death of the protagonists and one could also read a gentle accusation of the main figures for dying, but also of the Iranian people in general, for not preventing these deaths. Moreover, Akhlaghi indicates through her presence, that *By an Eye Witness* does not consist of documentary photographs and that she is the inventor of these images. Hence, the symbolic elements of the act of witnessing in *By an Eye Witness* are the following: the artist herself, other spectators like passer-bys or mourners and photographers with cameras. Furthermore, one should also not forget, that the viewers in front of Akhlaghi´s photographs are witnesses as well. They are witnessing not only the depicted death scenes; but also the witnesses inside the photographs, who are again witnessing the death.

Returning to Sheperd´s and Sheperd´s above cited statement, Akhlaghi chose symbols and colours of martyrdom from a Shia Islamic, as well as a Christian cultural context and thus considered both in *By an Eye Witness*. As especially colours, but also other items can have more than one interpretation, their meaning is to be defined as "loose." The same is true for Akhlaghi´s anachronistic elements, like the different uniforms of the soldiers and her self-representation - as discussed above, where different possible interpretations were suggested. The symbolic elements, referring to the biographies of the protagonists on the other hand are more "concrete facts and definite statements,"[362] as they clearly indicate, who the person depicted was.

### 5.2 Deciphering Quotations of Visual References: Painting and Photojournalism

This subsection examines Akhlaghi´s visual references in *By an Eye Witness*. Her first and main source were novels, especially Lev Tolstoj´s *War and Peace* (1869), as she explained in an interview with Rex Butler,

> "I am very interested in populated settings; how to bring a relatively large number of characters into one shot [...]. I think the best source to learn from is Russian literature [...] Just recall […] *War and Peace.* Through a careful reading […], one can learn extremely valuable lessons about how to manage a similar situation in photography."[363]

362Sheperd/Sheperd, *1000 Symbols:* 10-11.
363Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran:" 109.

Furthermore, the artist told me and Butler, that her second inspiration for the narrative structures of the photographs was cinema, for example, works by Federico Fellini (1920-1993).[364] Images were Akhlaghi´s third reference. Susan Sontag compares photographs with written quotations, as both are easy to understand and to remember. Everyone has hundreds of photographs, that can be recalled immediately in one´s memory.[365] Akhlaghi makes use of this pictorial memory in *By an Eye Witness*, where she quotes paintings and photographs, namely historical European painting, paintings by the Iranian painter Kamal al-Mulk (Kamāl al-Molk) (1847/8-1940) and photojournalism. She did not only copy the formal characteristics of the paintings and photographs, but was also aware of the images´ interpretations, and thus transferred the underlying meanings of the pictures to *By an Eye Witness*.[366]

Craig Owens characterises the use of visual references, which he designates *allegorical images*, in his article *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism* (1980), as a "venture into proscribed territory."[367] I understand the function of Akhlaghi´s quotations equal to Owen´s description of *allegorical images.* Thus, each reference in *By an Eye Witness* "becomes something other (allos=other+agoreuei=to speak)," because Akhlaghi "adds another meaning to the image."[368] This means, "one text is read through another," and therefore, the strategy of image-making can be called an allegorical structure, which -and here Owens uses the same phrase, as Golshiri for characterising *By an Eye Witness*- "must be deciphered."[369]

The identification of the visual quotations is primarily based on my personal conversations with Akhlaghi, and a file of references, that I received from her. Furthermore, the artist told me, she could imagine, that she also included some citations unconsciously. Therefore, I will mention and mark some more possible quotations, that I recognised from my own pictorial memory and the study of illustrated books.[370] For the visual citations, I will also conduct an analysis of the alterations, I will discuss, how the images that served as models were adopted, and which elements were omitted or added.

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364Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran:" 109; Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 7.

365Sontag, *Das Leiden anderer betrachten*: 21.

366Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 8.

367Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67.

368Ibid.: 69.

369Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse:" 69-70; Euronews Le Mag, "Iranian Arts Now:" minute 2:03.

370Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution: 1905-1909* (Cambridge, 1910); Frederick Bohrer, ed., *Sevruguin and The Persian Image: Photographs of Iran: 1870-1930* (Washington D.C., 1999); Layla S. Diba/Maryam Ekhtiar, eds., *Royal Persian Paintings* (New York, 1998); Paul Gerhard, ed., *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder,* (Göttingen, 2008); Christiane Stukenbrock/Barbara Töpper, *1000 Meisterwerke der europäischen Malerei von 1300 bis 1850* (Königswinter, 2005); Barjesteh van Waalwijk van Doorn/Gillian M. Vogelsang-Eastwood, eds., *Sevruguin's Iran* (Tehran/Rotterdam, 1999); Ingo F. Walther, ed., *Malerei der Welt: Eine Kunstgeschichte in 900 Bildanalysen: Von der Gotik bis zur Gegenwart* (Cologne, 2003).

Akhlaghi travelled a lot and visited many museums in Europe, so she consciously referred to the artworks she had seen there. She made this fact clear in an interview with Sean O´Hagan, where she said, "I´m influenced by classical painters like Caravaggio and van Eyck."[371] Furthermore, Akhlaghi implied in an interview with Ramwar/Pannasch, that she studied approximately four hundred paintings in terms of colours, light and composition. Also Rex Butler, Pauline Eifermann, Raha Namwar/Laura Pannasch, Ali Sheikhmehdi/Forough Khabiri and Rachel Spencer indicate in their articles the influence of European historical painting in *By an Eye Witness*. But only Namwar/Pannasch detected also quotations of photojournalism, while the other authors listed, did not mention photojournalistic references at all.[372] Up to now no one has recognised parallels to Kamal al-Mulk in *By an Eye Witness*.

I can not list every single reference, and the reader should not expect a discussion of every image of the series. Rather, I analyse selected examples, that contain every subject, medium and time of the references as pars pro toto. In most pictures, Akhlaghi does not refer to one quotation only, but assembles a number of images into one photograph, and thus, creates hybrid allegories,[373] for example, in *Arani* (*Fig.5*).

a) Mourning

The photographs *Arani* (*Fig.5*) and *Shariati* (*Fig.14*) refer to images that depict scenes of lamentation. *Arani* is an assemblage of five pictorial quotations on the subject of mourning. The overall composition resembles Nicolaus Poussin´s *Extreme Unction* (1638-40) (*Fig.83*). Both images are separated into two halves. While the lower parts are crowded with people that are arranged in a line, the upper parts are nearly blank. Moreover, the semicircular arch above Arani´s deathbed can be compared to the circular moulding, which is located at the same position in the middle rear wall of Poussin´s painting.[374] The group of people, that is surrounding Arani´s body, is similar to the photographs *Mourning in Kosovo* by Georges Mérillon (1990) (*Fig.84*) and *Spanish Wake* (1951) (*Fig.85*) by W. Eugene Smith. In all three pictures a dead man lies on his back on a bed, female relatives of the deceased person, among

371O´Hagan, "Atrocities Revisted."

372Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran:" 105; Eifermann, "Seventeen Deaths;" Namwar/Pannasch, "Die Kunst des Attentats;" Sheikhmehdi/Khabiri, "Narrative Reading of Contemporary History of Iran;" Spencer, "Burnt Generation."

373According to the Oxford Dictionary, a hybrid is "A thing made by combining […] different elements. The Oxford Dictionary, "*hybrid."* Accessed November 29, 2015: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/hybrid.

374Christopher Wright, *Poussin: Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné* (London, 2007): 147.

them mothers (Arani, Mérillon, Poussin),[375] wives (Smith)[376] and sisters (Mérillon, Smith),[377] are positioned behind him and make mourning gestures. They are, for example, holding their hands in front of their mouth and stare at the dead person with facial expressions, that are either contorted with pain or shocked.

Akhlaghi omits the veils and head scarves of the women in the photographs of Mérillon and Smith, and exchanges them with hats or shows the mourners with uncovered hair.

Furthermore, Akhlaghi enlarges the scenes of *Mourning in Kosovo* and *Spanish Wake*, that in both photographs focus on the dead person and the women. Akhlaghi embeds this section in a dark mortuary with high walls in *Arani* and adds a man on the left, who is carrying another dead body away. This man seems to be adopted from *Extreme Unction,* where a servant leaves the room through an open door on the right side. Akhlaghi moves this person, slightly blurred, to the left. The blurring could be understood as a repetition of the blurred hands of the dead man´s sister in the centre of *Mourning in Kosovo*. Moreover, the man who leaves the mortuary in Qasr prison is not -like Poussin´s servant- turned to the viewer, but depicted in back view, and thus anonymous. Contrary to the photographs of Mérillon and Smith, where the faces of the men are shown with closed eyes, Arani´s face is not visible, as his whole body is covered in a white shroud, from which only one toe and one arm protrude. The invisibility of the face originates from Edvard Munch´s *At the Deathbed* (1895) (*Fig.86*), that depicts Munch´s family, among them his mother and sister, mourning the painter´s second sister at her deathbed.[378] The dead sister is faceless, and Munch painted only a white circle instead. Furthermore, Akhlaghi adopted the colours of this painting. In both images, the mourners are shown in black and the dead body in white. The surrounding walls are brown, although in *Arani* only the upper brick-part of the wall is of brown colour, and Akhlaghi adds white tiles in the lower half of the photograph. The lighting in *Arani* is inspired by Smith´s *Spanish Wake*, where its use resembles Rembrandt´s works. Also Ehsan Rasoulof said, "[...] in the work of Arani, we looked to Rembrandt´s way of lighting."[379] I could not find any images by Rembrandt in the file with quotations, that I received from Akhlaghi, but ultimately she refers to him via Smith´s photography. The background in *Spanish Wake* is completely dark, while

375Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 16. Cited after Mohammad Golbon/Yusuf Sharifi, *The Trial of the Judges* (Tehran, 1984): 220-224; World Press Photo, *Collection 1991 Photo Contest*. Accessed November 29, 2015: http://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/1991/world-press-photo-year/georges-mérillon; Fitzwilliam Museum/University of Cambridge, *Nicolaus Poussin´s Extreme Unction* (1998-2005). Accessed December 2, 2015: http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/paintinginfocus/extremeunction.html.

376Glenn G. Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith and the Photographic Essay* (Cambridge, 1992): 89.

377World Press Photo, *Collection 1991*; Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith and the Photographic Essay*: 89.

378Dieter Buchhart, "Am Totenbett," in: Klaus Albrecht Schröder/Antonia Hoeschelmann, eds., *Edvard Munch: Thema und Variation* (Ostfildern, 2003): 261.

379Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 38.

the figures in the foreground appear in a bright light, this use of a stark contrast between light and shadow, is also distinctive for Rembrandt. Poussin was also inspired by Rembrandt´s way of lighting. In *Extreme Unction* only the dying man and the figures around him are illuminated, while the rest of the image is very dark.[380] The same can be said for *Arani*, where the middle part with the women and the dead body are placed in a cone of light, while the background, and the left side, where the man, who is carrying the body out of the room, are almost completely dark.

The mourning women´s gestures in *Arani* are a mixture of quotations of all images mentioned above. The woman on the top end of Arani´s deathbed is a copy of the acolyte in the red garment in the equivalent position in *Extreme Unction.* The mourner towards her right, who is removing the cloth from Arani´s face, is also adopted from Poussin´s image, as the French painter depicts the mother of the dying men, who is cradling his head, in the same position behind him.[381] The white-haired woman in Akhlaghi´s photograph is Arani´s mother. Her facial expression of deep grief and sorrow is similar to the one of the dead man´s sister in *Mourning in Kosovo;* although Akhlaghi foregoes the very pathetic gesture of throwing the head to the chest. The clasped hands of the woman, wearing a hat on the very right of *Arani*, are a citation of *At the Deathbed*, as Munch´s living sister, who gazes directly at the viewer, holds her hands in the same way.[382] Akhlaghi changes the direction of the mourner´s gaze in her image, thus no eye-contact with the viewer is generated. The gaze of the second woman from the right in *Arani* is noteworthy. She is the only person in the photograph, who does not stare at the dead body, but at the ceiling. Although I did not receive this comparison from Akhlaghi, this posture, reminds me of Eugene Délacroix *Orphan at the Cemetery* (1823) (*Fig.87*), as both females are looking with half-open mouths and wide open-eyes towards the sky. Furthermore, their hair is slightly curled, and their facial expressions seem to be numb.

Akhlaghi selected the quotations, discussed above, because their subjects correspond with the theme of *Arani;* this is female family-members mourning at the deathbed of their son, father or brother. By using these references, Akhlaghi tries to show the relatives´ pain, caused by the loss. Some alterations, like the omission of the head scarves can be explained by Akhlaghi´s attempt to include contemporary elements to her images. Veiling was prohibited in Iran in 1940, and many women who felt uncomfortable going to the street with uncovered hair, chose a hat instead. Other modifications of the references in *By an Eye Witness* can be explained through biographical reasons. Thus, the anonymisation of Arani could be caused, not only by

380Wright, *Poussin*: 148.
381Fitwilliam Museum/University of Cambridge, *Nicolaus Poussin´s Extreme Unction.*
382Buchhart, “Am Totenbett:” 262.

citing *At the Deathbed*, but also by Arani´s disfigured face at the time of his death. He suffered from syphilis and this illness had changed his face so much, that even his own mother could not recognise his dead body any more.[383]

Two quotations, namely *Orphan at the Cemetery* and *Mourning in Kosovo,* refer to the death of national martyrs. Délacroix´ orphan is mourning her parents, who were killed in a massacre during the Greek war of independence by Ottoman soldiers on the island of Chios in 1822.[384] Mérillon´s photograph shows an ethnic-Albanian, who was killed by a Serb during a protest for the independence of Kosovo.[385] Thus, he, like the orphan´s parents, died as a national martyr, fighting for the independence of his country. The same can be said about Arani, who was imprisoned and finally died in jail, because he criticised the then-ruling Shah and was fighting for a change in Iran.

The quotation of Munch´s *At the Deathbed* seems to have another message. *Arani* is not the only image of *By an Eye Witness* in which Akhlaghi cites the painter. *Shariati* (*Fig.14*) also refers to a picture by Munch, namely *The Dead Mother and The Child* (1893-94) (*Fig.88*). Shariati´s daughter, who is shown stepping down the stairs, resembles the child in front of the mother´s deathbed in Munch´s image.[386] Both girls are positioned centrally and are looking towards the viewer. The child in Munch´s painting holds its hands to its ears, but those of Shariati´s daughter are in motion, approximately at the height of her chest. The two girls seem to be unnoticed by the other mourners and thus, are left alone with their grief. Akhlaghi transfers the dead mother from the middle ground in Munch´s painting to the left foreground in *By an Eye Witness* and turns her into Shariati. Like the mother, he is lying on his back with eyes closed, not in a bed, but in a wheelchair. The wheelchair is, like Arani´s covered face, a biographical indication, as an eyewitness´ account states, that Shariati´s dead body was transported to a hospital in a wheelchair.[387]

The two images by Munch, mentioned here, depict the deaths of the painters´mother and sister. Munch was actually present at his sister´s death. According to Dieter Buchhart,

Munch´s paintings could either be understood as memorial pictures for his family members, or as a kind of cure, in order to process these traumatic experiences. In other words, Munch

383Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 16. Cited after Mohammad Golbon/Yusuf Sharifi, *The Trial of the Judges* (Tehran, 1984): 220-224.

384Tom Prideaux, *Delacroix und seine Zeit: 1789-1863* (Amsterdam, 1971): 11.

385Mary Panzer, *Things as they are. Photojournalism in Context Since 1955* (London, 2005): 238.

386The girl, descending the stairs reminded me of Gerhard Richter´s painting *Ema. Nude Descending a Staircase* (1965). However, Akhlaghi told me, that this was not a reference.

387 Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 39. Cited after Pouran Shariati Razavi, *A Scheme of a Life* (Tehran, 1997): 242-244.

tried to provide his own therapy through painting and thus facing the deaths of his relatives again.[388] Akhlaghi was not actually present at the deaths of Arani and Shariati, but as discussed above, has metaphorically seen them. Thus, these references could be interpreted, as a therapy, with the aim of coming to terms with the tragic losses of the heroes of Iranian history by talking about them through photography.

On the other hand, also the photographs in *By an Eye Witness* could function like Munch´s paintings as memorial images. Akhlaghi told me, that she was afraid that the people, she is depicting in the series could be forgotten, and one of her aims was, to bring them back into the memories of the people in Iran.[389] As one interpretation does not exclude the other, I assume, that both aspects are part of *By an Eye Witness*.

Akhlaghi chose the six references discussed above, mainly, because she wanted to show the relative´s, especially the mothers´, sorrow over the dead sons. Also children, who lost their fathers are addressed. Arani and Shariati were not only national martyrs, who should not be forgotten, but also human beings, husbands, sons and fathers. Another aspect, that is communicated via the visual references of mourning, is that, of a therapy of tragic losses, by facing them again on images.

b) Martyrdom

In other visual quotations in the series, it is not the act of mourning, but the subject of national and religious martyrdom, that is addressed. The references to these paintings and photographs also convey an underlying meaning.

**1.b National martyrdom**

In the Oxford Dictionary "national" is defined as "Relating to a characteristic of a nation; common to a whole nation"[390] and a martyr is, as defined in chapter four a person, who is killed because of his or her beliefs, from which he or she did not want to refrain. Thus, national martyrs, are persons that were killed because of their beliefs, that concern a specific nation, from which they did not want to refrain. Usually these ideas and beliefs were not endorsed by the ruling authorities. Akhlaghi refers to European and Iranian paintings and photographs of national martyrs in *By an Eye Witness*. Of the latter medium, the quotations are taken from images, that were shot during the Iranian Revolution 1979, the Green

388Buchhart, "Am Totenbett:" 261-262.
389Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
390Oxford University Press, "national", in: *Oxford Dictionaries* (2015). Accessed December 7, 2015: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/national.

Movement 2009 or at incidents, that occurred outside of Iran. Citations of painting are mostly adopted from historical European art. I will discuss at least one reference of each medium and subject with the images of *Eshghi* (*Fig.3*), *Razavi/Ghandchi/Bozorgnia* (*Fig.6*), *Ashraf* (*Fig.13*) and *Jazani* (*Fig.12*). According to Namwar/Pannasch, the latter comprises a "significant reminiscence"[391] to a picture of a 19th century national martyr, namely Francisco Goya´s painting *The 3rd of May 1808* (1814) (*Fig.89*). Like *Jazani*, it shows two groups of men, facing each other, while the group on the right is about to shoot the other one. The insurgents of *The 3rd May* were killed in the middle of the night, while Jazani and his comrades are shot in broad daylight. Therefore, there was no reason for Akhlaghi to quote the eye-catching, rectangular lamp of Goya´s painting in her photograph. By using this element, Goya directs the light, which is clearly inspired by Caravaggio, that it creates the effect, of the central figure emerging from the shadow.[392] Akhlaghi however, highlights Jazani not through the light, but by his highest position within the image, that he holds due to his raised arms. His depiction has a likeness to the central figure in *The 3rd May.* Both men´s arms are outstretched, and they will be shot in the next moment; other parallels are the white shirts and the position in-between dead bodies that are scattered on the ground. Their body posture is based on the pictorial formula of Christ on the Cross. Goya additionally underlines this iconography through a stigma on the palm of the man´s right hand. Akhlaghi by contrast omits this detail. Furthermore, she minimises the group of the people to be shot in Goya´s image and foregoes the depiction of the persons, who are pushed to the execution from right in *Fig.89*.

The posture of the feet of the group to the right is nearly identical in both images. One foot is stretched straight back; the other one goes one step forward and the knee is bent. In Goya´s image, the executioners are located in the very shadow and turn their faces away from the viewer. Due to the repeating shoulder straps, belts, coats and the uniform chacos, the four men appear homogeneous and anonymous.[393] Akhlaghi on the other hand, shows the executioners with more individual features, as she foregoes uniform clothing and also depicts their traits. The SAVAK-executor, towards the right in the foreground wears a black suit and no headgear, the killer next to him, however, is clothed in an olive-green uniform with a canopy. Thus, the executors are more individualised than in Goya´s image.

While the victims of *The 3rd May* are depicted with wide-open eyes, or hold their hands in front of their faces, the *Tudeh*-members seem to be stoically calm. Furthermore, Goya gives the captives a face, in *Jazani* however, the two dead bodies in the foreground on the left are

391Namwar/Pannasch, "Die Kunst des Attentats:" 19.
392Fred Licht, *Goya: Die Geburt der Moderne* (Munich, 2001): 168-172.
393Ibid.: 168-172.

positioned so, that their faces are not visible to the viewer.

Akhlaghi´s most striking addition to *The 3rdMay* are the blindfolds of the group on the left. They remind one of another work by Goya, namely the capricho *And there is no help/Y no hay remedio* (1810-14) (*Fig.90*) and Jahangir Razmi´s (Jahāngir Razmi) Pulitzer-price winning photograph *Firing Squad*, taken during the Iranian Revolution in 1979 (*Fig.91*). Like *Jazani* also these two images show an execution in a barren landscape. In Goya´s capricho, gun barrels are pointed in the right foreground towards a man, who is handcuffed to a pile of wood with eyes bound. Razmi´s image shows a composition, similar to Goya´s *3rd May*, as executers with drawn rifles and captives are separated into two groups, that are facing each other. The executors of *Firing Squad* are depicted in a perching position, thus, Akhlaghi does not quote them in the shooting of *Jazani*, but she cites a number of the victims. The posture of the second man on the left in Razmi´s photograph is almost identical with the one of the prisoner on the right, next to Jazani. Both figures are shown at the moment of being shot and falling to the ground. Their arms are outstretched in front of their bodies, and their knees are bent forwards, thus, it seems like they are in a sitting position. The gesture of the man on the very right of Razmi´s image is repeated in the man on the very left of Akhlaghi´s photograph. Both persons are standing upright, apparently awaiting their deaths in stoic ease and dignity. Their right hands are placed on their chests, and Akhlaghi even adopts the white bandage, that is wrapped around the hand of the victim in Razmi´s image. Here too, all victims are blindfolded, like Jazani and his comrades. The blindfolds are not depicted on *The 3rd May*, but can be traced back to Goya´s capricho, Razmi´s image, and historical events. An eyewitness´ account of the so-called "SAVAK butcher" Hossein Tehrani (Ḥosayn Tehrāni), who was present at Jazani´s execution, states, that he remembers, that the prisoners´ handcuffs and blindfolds were burnt after the shooting.[394] Also Akhlaghi´s reduction in numbers of prisoners, compared to *The 3rd May*, is due to historical events. As Jazani was executed in 1975, together with eight other comrades, the group on the left in *Fig.12* consists of nine, instead of eleven like on *The 3rd May*, persons only.[395]

The captives in Akhlaghi´s photograph are shown less individualised than in *The 3rd May* through the addition of the blindfolds. This reminds of the depiction of Arani (*Fig.5*), whose representation contains, compared to the references, also fewer personal features. Nevertheless, the victims, Taghi Arani and Bijan Jazani, are named in the images´ titles anyway. Therefore, it is obvious, who the dead or dying figure is, and there is no urgent

394Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 34. Cited after *Ettela´at Daily* (April 20, 1975): 1.
395Ibid.:1.

necessity of depicting them with individual characteristics.

On the other hand, the group on the right in *Jazani* is portrayed less uniform than the one in *The 3rd May*. Furthermore, in the catalogue, of *By an Eye Witness*, all names of the execution squad´s members are listed.[396] Thus, it seems, Akhlaghi focuses more than Goya on an accusation of the murderers.

The two references by Goya (*Figs.89-90*) show the execution of patriotic Spaniards, who fought against the French occupation army. The Spanish painter stylised the unknown insurgent with the raised arms in *The 3rd* May, that shows a scene on the hill of Príncipe Pío in Madrid,[397] iconographically as the figure of Christ on the Cross. Like Jesus, who had to die for the further destiny of Christianity, the Spanish patriot also died not only as a martyr, but in Robert Hughes words, as "Pseudo-Christ" for the further history of Spain.[398] When Akhlaghi transfers this pictorial formula of the Spanish rebel from Príncipe Pío in Madrid as Bijan Jazani to the hills of Evin in Tehran, she conveys also this underlying meaning. The message of the reference is therefore, that like Jesus and the Spanish´ insurgent´s martyrdom, Jazani´s martyrdom was also necessary for the further history of Iran.

Ali Sheikhmehdi and Forough Khabiri indicate in their text *Narrative Reading of Contemporary History of Iran: A Case Study of Azadeh Akhlaghi´s Staged Photos* (2015) correctly the reference of Jazani´s gesture to Goya´s *The 3rd May.* But, I can not follow them, when they suggest that because of his raised arms, Akhlaghi wanted to depict Jazani´s "submission but the viewer infers Jazani´s resistance."[399] Firstly, Akhlaghi´s main goal was not to show submission, but **via** this reference the necessity of some deaths for the further history of the country. Secondly, Sheikhmedi/Khabiri do not explain where they get their idea from, that Jazani is depicted as a resistant man. I can only assume, that they identify themselves with the viewer, as mentioned in their text. But generally speaking I am a viewer as well, and I do not see any notice of resistance. What would be the grounds of Jazanis resistance? His comrades are already dead and he too will be dead within the next few seconds, it is too late for resistance. Thus, I can explain Sheikhmehdi/Khabiri´statement only due to a lack of allegorical reading - although they noticed the reference correctly.

The concept of the composition in *Jazani* is a mixture of fiction and historical facts. And it interweaves many references, including the accounts of eyewitnesses, a capricho by Goya, a photograph by Jahangir Razmi and Goya´s painting of the events of *The 3rd May 1808*.

396Ibid.: 1.
397Thomas Hugh, *Goya: The Third of May 1808* (New York, 1973): 24-29.
398Robert Hughes, *Goya* (Munich, 2004): 334-335.
399Sheikhmehdi/Khabiri, "Narrative Reading of Contemporary History of Iran:" 9.

Although an executor remembers, that "We had them sit on the ground in a row, blindfolded and handcuffed,"[400] Akhlaghi decided, that Jazani and his comrades die in a standing position in *By an Eye Witness*. She omits the handcuffs in order to depict Jazani as reference to *The 3rd May*, but adds blindfolds to the prisoners eyes, because of the historical events and as a reference to Goya´s capricho and a photograph by Razmi. Especially the latter image requires further discussion; it shows the execution of Kurds in Kurdistan´s capital, Sanandaj, by soldiers, loyal to the Islamic faction of the revolutionary forces. In the early days of the Iranian Revolution, the Islamic clerics were afraid, that the Kurds could declare independence. In order to discourage them from these ambitions, this show trial was staged where eleven Kurdish men were sentenced to death for being "counter-revolutionary."[401]

Moreover, a number of other pictorial citations of photographs of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 can be detected within *By an Eye Witness*. Here, I will briefly discuss two more references to this event in *Razavi/Ghandchi/Bozorgnia* (*Fig.6*).

The student in the right-hand foreground, who is jumping over a dead body, is a quotation of a frequently published photograph by Kaveh Golestan, taken in the streets in Tehran during a protest in the course of the Iranian Revolution (*Fig.18*). Like the man´s on this photograph, both hands of the student in *By an Eye Witness* are raised. The palms, that are directed towards the viewer are blood-smeared, their mouths are slightly open and their faces show expressions in-between panic and fright. Akhlaghi even copies details, like the small white bloodless spots in the middle of the palms and the watch on the left forearm. Another citation of a photograph by Golestan, shot during a demonstration in 1979 (*Fig.92*) are the two students who are colliding in the rush of the ongoing events on the left-hand side in *Razavi/Ghandchi/Bozorgnia.* In Golestan´s and Akhlaghi´s photographs, the two persons are shown in an identical arrangement, that at first sight, could be misinterpreted as two persons, who are hugging each other. The anterior man is depicted in back view; over his left shoulder the head of the posterior man can be seen, who is looking toward the viewer. His mouth is wide open and apparently letting out a yell.

Before discussing Akhlaghi´s reasons for citing photographs of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, I will demonstrate with two examples, that there are also references to photographs of protesters, that were killed in demonstrations during the Green Movement 2009 in *By an Eye*

400Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 34. Cited after "Tehrani: The SAVAK Butcher confesses," *Ettela´at Daily* (May 22, 1979): 3.

401Joshua Prager, "A Chilling Photograph´s Hidden History," *The Wall Street Journal* (December 2, 2006). Accessed November 26, 2015: http://www.wsj.com/public/article/SB116499510215538266-w6oLtTyb6LO2glORvqxTV1PwiTM_20061211.html?mod=blogs. Razmi´s identity was kept secret until 2006 in order or to protect him from the consequences for taking this picture.

*Witness*.[402] These two images were taken by unknown photographers and circulated on the internet afterwards. As they show very violent and bloody scenes, many editors obviously did not want to confront their readers with such images, and thus, they were seldom published in newspapers.[403] The representation of the wounded student, who lies in front of the stairs in *Razavi/Ghandchi/Bozorgnia* is inspired by a photograph of a victim of the 2009 protest, who was shot by the Basij militia[404] (*Fig.93*). Both men are lying on their back, their eyes are closed, and they stretch one foot and one arm diagonally from their bodies. Behind them kneels a man, who is obviously discovering and mourning the dead person. He looks at the corpse, and also his arms are stretched toward the dead man´s body. Akhlaghi lowers the hands of this person slightly, compared to the image of 2009. According to Akhlaghi, a photograph of Mostafa Ghanian (Moṣtafā Ḡaniān) (*Fig.94*), who was shot during the Green Movement by government forces, served as a quotation for the image of Ashraf[405] (*Fig.13*). In this picture, a female person is placed in the very background, behind the door frame. She lies, like Ghanian on her back on the floor. The most striking difference between the references of 2009 and Akhlaghi´s adoptions is the depiction of blood. While the heads of the members of the Green Movement are covered with blood, or they even lie in red pools of blood, Akhlaghi shows only small bloodstains, and thus, makes her images less gory. For instance, she copied just the bloodstains on the shirt from the victim of the Green Movement (*Fig.93*) and adds them to the cardiac region of the student, who is lying in front of the stairs in the image of *Razavi/Ghandchi/Bozorgnia* (*Fig.6*). Moreover, Akhlaghi does not show blood at all on the corpse of the dead woman in the image of Ashraf, discussed above. Generally speaking, in the whole series, Akhlaghi uses only as much blood as is necessary for depicting violent events and does not try to create sanguinary photographs.

Now the question arises, why Akhlaghi refers to the Iranian Revolution 1979 and the Green Movement 2009 in a series, that was first exhibited in 2013. The repressions, violence and killings of the events of 1979 and 2009 have counterparts in the earlier history of the country. If someone who lives in Iran had produced staged photographs of freedom fighters, who died during the Iranian Revolution 1979, the Green Movement 2009 or even in today´s Iran, the person would probably have problems right now. It is impossible to criticise these events, but it is possible to criticise events within Iranian history, that happened before 1979.

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402For further information of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Green Movement in 2009 see chapter two.

403This is also the reason, why I do not have a proper source for these images, nevertheless, they are part of the series and it is important to include them in this discussion.

404*Iran Politics Club*. Accessed November 27, 2015: http://iranpoliticsclub.net/photos/2009protest-inside1/.

405International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, *Killed and Detained Since 12 June* (September 2, 2009). Accessed November 27, 2015: http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/06/list.

Akhlaghi does not only quote images from Iranian photojournalism, but also cites photojournalistic images, that were taken in Europe and North America, in *By an Eye Witness*. Eshghi and his lover, for instance (*Fig.3*), is a hybrid, created from two references of this genre. Namely, the image of the dead Benno Ohnesorg, taken by Jürgen Henschel in Berlin/Germany in 1967[406] (*Fig.95*) and John Filo´s photograph of the Kent State Shooting, which happened in 1970 at Kent University in Ohio/USA[407] (*Fig.96*). Only the basic composition, that is, a living woman, placed behind a dying man, whose head lies in his own blood, is adopted from the image of Benno Ohnesorg. Akhlaghi omits minor details like the banner, that is placed on the left of Ohnesorg´s head. More parallels to the photograph of Eshghi can be detected in the image of the Kent State Shooting, as both pictures show a woman with long, black hair, who is discovering a dead or dying man. Like Eshghi, also the shot student, Jeffrey Miller, lies on his stomach on the ground.[408] Behind him kneels a young woman whose arms, are, like the one of Eshghi´s lover, stretched from her body to the side, the women´s mouths are open, apparently letting out a yell.

While in the photographs of Ohnesorg and Miller the murderers are not in the image, Akhlaghi adds the two killers, that were hired by Reza Khan. They are depicted on the left side of *Eshghi*, where a servant prevents them from fleeing. If Sheikhmehdi/Khabiri had taken a closer look of the image, or had just read the text in the catalogue of *By an Eye Witness*, that accompanies *Eshghi*, they would not have written "Two people are trying to prevent someone from escaping."[409] The inclusion of two killers and the placement of the dying Eshghi in a yard traces back to an eyewitness´ account: "Eshghi comes down to the yard […] There are two strangers […] Suddenly he [Eshghi] feels the pain in his heart. The second has shot him from behind his back."[410] The other persons inside the yard, the pool and the overbold jars, are Akhlaghi´s own additions.[411]

Like the pictorial quotations discussed above, the references to the images of Benno Ohnesorg and the Kent State Shooting are also only understandable in their historical context. In 1970,

406Marion G. Müller, "Der Tod des Benno Ohnesorg: Ein Foto als Initialzündung einer politischen Bewegung," in: Gerhard Paul, ed., *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder: 1949 bis heute* (Göttingen, 2008): 338.

407Namwar/Pannasch, "Die Kunst des Attentats:" 19.

408CNN.com, "Photographer John Filo discusses his Famous Kent State Photograph and the Events of May 4 1970," *CNN.com* (May 4, 2000). Accessed July 20, 2015: http://edition.cnn.com/COMMUNITY/transcripts/2000/5/4/filo/.

409Sheikhmehdi/Khabiri, "Narrative Reading of Contemporary History of Iran:" 5.

410 Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness*: 12. Cited after Mohammad Ali Sepanly, *Four Freedom Poets: Study on Poets of Patriotism and Democracy in Iran* (Tehran, 1990): 204-208.

411Akhlaghi mentioned, that the three people on the roof on the left side of the image originate from a poem by Eshghi, who look down on him dying from above, but do not go down to help him.

the then US-president Richard Nixon, announced during the Vietnam War, the invasion of US-troops in Cambodia. This declaration was followed by heavy protests at American universities. One of those demonstrations was held at the Kent State University, where the armed National Guard opened fire to the peaceful protest and killed four students, among them Jeffrey Miller on *Fig.96*.[412] Benno Ohnesorg on the other hand, was killed in a demonstration against the persecutions of dissidents in Iran, during a visit of Mohammad Reza Shah in Berlin in 1967. Akhlaghi cites the overall composition of Benno Ohnesorg a second time in *By an Eye Witness.* The dead student who is lying in front of the stairs in the image of *Razavi/Ghandchi/Bozorgnia* (*Fig.6*)*,* is not only a reference to the photograph of the Green Movement 2009 (*Fig.93*), discussed above, but to Benno Ohnesorg as well. Like, the German protester, the Iranian student´s dead body is also lying on his back, and another person is placed behind him.

Until 2009, it was believed, that Benno Ohnesorg was murdered by a German policeman[413] and thus, he became the martyr of the youth movement of 1968 in Europe, while the victims of the Kent State Shooting were declared as the martyrs of the anti-Vietnam War protesters in the USA.[414] Also Mirzadeh Eshghi was -like Benno Ohnesorg and Jeffery Miller- killed by governmental authorities, because he protested against these. Thus, all three images show persons, who were politically active against the officials and fought -in their understanding- for justice. One could interpret Akhlaghi´s chosen references as a reminder, not to accept the actual situation, but to become politically engaged and to put up resistance against the suppression and dictatorial regimes, like the one of Reza Khan and others, who are in power right now.[415]

The photograph of Mirzadeh Eshghi is a hybrid of Akhlaghi´s own imagination and the images of Benno Ohnesorg and the Kent State Shooting. Furthermore, I recognise a third, probably unconscious, pictorial reference to the Iranian painter Kamal al-Molk in *Eshghi*. This reference belongs not to national, but to religious martyrdom.

412John Fitzgerald O´Hara, "Kent State/May 4 and Postwar Memory," *American Quarterly* 58 (2006): 302.
413Aly Götz, "Der Fall Kurras: Wir haben uns alle geirrt," *Die Zeit* (May 28, 2009). Accessed online November 27, 2015: http://www.zeit.de/2009/23/68er-Bewegung.
414Müller, "Der Tod des Benno Ohnesorg:" 342; O´Hara, "Kent State/May 4 and Postwar Memory:" 301.
415Müller, "Der Tod des Benno Ohnesorg:" 342.

**2.b Religious martyrdom**

According to the Oxford Dictionary the term "religious" means; "Relating to or believing in a religion."[416] Thus, religious martyrs, are persons that were killed because of their religious believes.

I argue, that the main composition of *Eshghi* (*Fig.3*) is an unconscious reference of Akhlaghi to the painting of the famous Taziyah (Taʿziyah) stage of Takiyah Dawlat (Takiyah Dovlat) in Tehran by Kamal al-Molk (*Fig.97*).

The round pool next to Eshghi is comparable to the circle in the middle of Kamal al-Molk's painting. Moreover, the architecture with a frontal façade and adjoining buildings on the left and right side is similar. Both pictures show round arches, in *Eshghi* on the façade and in *Fig.98* in the main iwan of the building. Spectators look down to the stage from the roof of Takiyah Dawlat, and also in *Fig. 3* three men stand on the rooftop and watch the scene in the courtyard.

Furthermore, Babak Rahimi points out that the architecture of Takiyah Dawlat was distinctive because of it's circular space and removable tent, through which it could be turned into an open-air arena,[417] similar to a courtyard.

Takiyahs were used for staging Taziyah passion plays. These plays origin in the martyrdom of the grandson of Prophet Mohammad, Imam Hossein (Ḥosayn) (626-680) in 680 A.D. Hossein refused to swear allegiance to the Umayyad[418] Caliph Yazid (Yazid) I. (680-81). As a result of that, he had to leave his native city Medina and tried to flee to Kufa. But Yazid besieged Hossein and his army near Kerbala. After ten days they had killed Hossein and his men and took women and children captive.[419] One way of mourning Hossein´s death are Taziyah performances, which show a battle between good (Hossein) and evil (Yazid I.). These passion plays theatrically re-stage the martyrdom of Hossein, who had to die for the further destiny of Shia Islam, and thus became the most important Shia martyr. Other characteristics of Taziyah are the interaction of the audience with the actors and the presence of the director on stage. Thus, the audience knows all the time, that Taziyah is not real, but only a play.[420]

Akhlaghi created with her unconscious appropriation of Takiyah Dawlat´s architecture a Takiyah for Mirzadeh Eshghi. In *Eshghi*, only three, and thus fewer spectators, than in the

416Oxford University Press, "religious," in: *Oxford Dictionaries* (2015). Accessed December 9, 2015: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/religious.

417Babak Rahimi, "Takkiyeh Dowlat: The Qajar Theater State," in: Staci Gem Scheiwiller, ed., *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representation of Iranian Identity* (London/New York, 2013): 57-58.

418The Umayyads were the first Islamicate dynasty, that reigned from 661 until 750 A.D.

419Peter Chelkowski, "Popular Arts: Patronage and Piety," in: Layla S. Diba/Maryam Ekhtiar, eds., *Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch: 1785-1925* (NewYork, 1998): 91.

420 Rahimi, "Takkiyeh Dowlat:" 55-56 and 66-67; Hamid Dabashi, "Ta´ziyeh as Theatre of Protest," *The Drama Review* 49 (2005): 93-95.

painting by Kamal al Molk are present - but the poet is unlike Hossein not the main martyr of Shia Islam. The woman and the boy in front of the façade in the background could symbolise the interacting audience, while the dying Esghi and his lover, as well as the three men left of the pool function as actors. Eshghi takes up Hossein's place, while the two gunmen serve as a metaphor for Yazid´s I.. soldiers. Reza Khan, who initiated Eshghi's assassination would be equivalent to Yazid I. As the director is always on stage in Taziyah performances, the audience know, that the actors are only playing. Also, Akhlaghi depicts herself in the picture of Mirzadeh Eshghi; her presence makes clear that the photographs are not historical documents, but staged events of the past.

Furthermore, *By an Eye Witness* and Taziyah plays are not entirely fictional, but trace back to real events. Hossein was, like Eshghi and many protagonists of *By an Eye Witness*, murdered. Like Hossein's death in Taziyah, their tragedies are re-acted, but they will never be like the realistic events. As on the Taziyah stage, *By an Eye Witness* also combines realistic and fictional elements. Hamid Dabashi´s words on Taziyah are thus also valid for *By an Eye Witness*: "There is a historical memory (the actual events of Karbala in the year 60/680) (sic!) in ta´ziyeh (sic!) to which its performing drama refers, but to which it is not dramatically obliged."[421] Also, Akhlaghi refers in her pictures to historical events of Iran´s past, but she does not try to stage them in a documentary or realistic fashion.[422] Dabashi states, that the main aspect of Taziyah is the absence of justice, and therefore a need for it. "Ta´ziyeh (sic!) remembers and re-enacts a battle between revolutionaries and a [...] political power." The same can be said about *By an Eye Witness,* as I have discussed above with the example of Mirzadeh Eshghi, who had to die for criticising the political activities of Reza Khan.[423] Moreover, Dabashi refers in the catalogue of *By an Eye Witness* to the events of Kerbala, as he describes all photographs of the series as "variations on the theme of Ta´ziyeh (sic!)."[424] With this interpretation *By an Eye Witness* as a whole could be understood as a modern Taziyah play. Like Hossein was martyred in the name of Shia Islam, the protagonists in *By an Eye Witness* were martyred for Iran.

421 The battle of Kerbala took of course not place in 60, but in 61. Dabashi here again states, like with the birth-year of Akhlaghi a wrong date. See: H. Lammens, "al-Ḥusain," in: M. Th. Houtsma et alii, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam: Volume III* (Leiden et alii, 1987): 339.

422 Dabashi, "Ta´ziyeh as Theatre of Protest:" 93-95.

423 Ibid: 91-99.

424 Dabashi, "Remembrance of Things Past:" 50.

While I see only one visual reference to Hossein, the principal martyr of Shia Islam, in *By an Eye Witness*, I argue, that the main stations of the Passion of Christ, or in other words, the suffering of the main martyr of Christianity, are present throughout the whole series. These are not in a chronological order in *By an Eye Witness*, but I will list them here in the following sequence: Last Supper, Crucifixion, Jesus as the Man of Sorrows, The Lamentation Over the Dead Body, The Pietá and The Entombment. What is missing in *By an Eye Witness*, are the last stations of the salvation history, namely the Resurrection and the Ascension.

The twelve women, who are strung frontal behind Arani´s stretcher (*Fig.5*), remind me of the twelve apostles, who are sitting, together with Jesus, parallel behind a table in Leonardo da Vinci´s *Last Supper* (1495) (*Fig.42*). Akhlaghi omits the depiction of Jesus or rather, exchanges him with Arani, who lies dead on the stretcher in the mortuary of Qasr prison. Da Vinci emphasises the apostles hands via gestures, and also Akhlaghi directs through her use of lighting the focus on the hands of the women, who are gesticulating as well. The second and third woman from the right in *Arani* are a direct quotation from *The Last Supper*, as they put together their heads in the same manner, like the two apostles left of Jesus.[425] While the apostles are looking and gesticulating in different directions, eleven of the women stare at Arani´s dead body. The twelfth person is, as discussed above, probably a quotation of Delacroix´ *Orphan at the Cemetery* (*Fig.87*).

One reference to the Crucifixion, namely Bijan Jazani (*Fig.12*), that is as quote of the central martyr of Goya´s *The 3rd May* (*Fig.89*), that again is a reference to Christ on the Cross, has already been analysed. Moreover, there is another citation of the Crucifixion of Christ in *By an Eye Witness*. Hamid Ashraf (*Fig.13*) is lying between books in the central foreground of the photograph. His posture is almost identical to the one of St. Peter in Caravaggio´s *The Crucifixion of St. Peter* (1601) (*Fig.98*). Both men are lying on their back and their eyes are open. One arm, Ashraf´s right, and Peter´s left, are bent and stretched away from the body, also the two men´s knees are bent. Ashraf and Peter are lying in a slight inclination, and thus, their heads tend to the side. Peter´s left hand is pierced by a nail. As in the depiction of Jazani, whose model also shows a stigma on the palm, Akhlaghi also omits this detail in the image of Ashraf. Light from the garden door illuminates Ashraf, it thus, makes him the central figure of the composition. Highlighting elements within an image through light is a typical characteristic in Caravaggio´s works, which he also uses in *The Crucifixion of St. Peter.* Analogue to Christ, Peter also died as a martyr on the cross. Because of the white hair and beard as well as the furrowed forehead, Sonja Lechner interprets Caravaggio´s depiction of

425Marco Rosci, *Leonardo da Vinci* (Wiesbaden, 1976): 109-111.

Peter as the successor of Christ, and thus, makes a reference to the history of salvation.[426]
The man next to Ashraf, whose head rests on a reversed, red armchair also refers to the Passion of Christ. His arrangement is a quote from Jacques-Louis David´s painting *The Death of Marat* (1793) (*Fig.70*), which was painted a couple of months after Marat´s assassination.[427] Analogue to Marat´s arm, the one of the *Fedain* fighter dangles to the floor. Both men´s eyes are closed, and their heads are turned horizontally to the right, towards the viewer. While Marat´s head is sunken back in the bathtub, the *Fedain* fighter is bent forward and lies on the chair. Like Marat, who holds a letter in his hand, the hand of Ashraf´s comrade also lies on a piece of paper. Moreover, the wound under Marat´s collarbone is repeated in *By an Eye Witness*. The *Fedain* fighter, who is unlike Marat not naked, wears a white shirt, on the back, of which, at approximately same height as on Marat´s body, a bloodstain is visible. Also the iconography of *The Death of Marat* is based on depictions of the dead Jesus. Dorothy Johnson reminds Marat´s wound of Christ as Man of Sorrows and of martyr saints.[428] Gisela Hopp indicates, that the drapery of the cloth and the bathtub, that is transformed into a stretcher, is similar to Pietá-representations. Thus, the underlying formula of the picture compares the death of Marat to the death of Christ.[429] Moreover, Eshghi and his lover (*Fig.3*), whose depiction is a hybrid of the two photographs of the Kent State Shooting (*Fig.97*) and Benno Ohnesorg (*Fig.95*) resembles the Pietá motive. Marion G. Müller examines the similarity of the latter photograph to the Holy Mary, who is mourning Jesus. Her remarks can also be transferred to the image of the Kent State Shooting. She states, that the combination of a woman over an unconscious- and helpless man, at least in Europe, automatically evoke associations to the Christian motive of the Pietá.[430] Regarding this context, also the photograph of Arani (*Fig.5*), that is, as discussed above, composed of four images of mourning women behind a dead or dying man, (Mérillot, Munch, Poussin, Smith) shows similarities to the representation of a Pietá - with a multiplied mourning Mary of course. But also parallels to the Lamentation of Christ are detectable in *Arani*. One of Akhlaghi´s references for *Arani* was Munch´s *At the Deathbed,* which is described by Dieter Buchhart as "translation of Christian subjects like suffering and death into the family´s private space."[431]

426Sonja Lechner, *Nuda Veritas-Caravaggio als Aktmaler: Rezeption und Revisio von Aktdarstellungen der römischen Reifezeit* (Munich, 2006): 160.
427Namwar/Pannasch, "Die Kunst des Attentats:" 19 remind the image of Farrokhi Yazdi (*Fig.4*) of *The Death of Marat.* Disregarding the colours I can not understand this comparison.
428Dorothy Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis* (Princeton/New Jersey, 1993): 106.
429Gisela Hopp et alii., "Freiheit oder Tod: Goyas Zeitgenossen zwischen Revolution und Restauration," in: Werner Hofmann, eds., *Goya: Das Zeitalter der Revolutionen: 1789-1830* (Munich, 1980): 388-389.
430Müller, "Der Tod des Benno Ohnesorg:" 342.
431Buchhart, "Am Totenbett:" 261. Translated from German by the author.

Furthermore, the image of Arani reminds me of Andrea Mantegna´s depiction of *The Lamentation of Christ* (1480) (*Fig.99*), where women are mourning left of Jesus, who is lying on his back on a stretcher. Remarkable is the extreme contraction and Christ´s vast, wounded naked soles in the foreground. Akhlaghi does not only adopt the motive of mourning women in *By an Eye Witness*. But also the detail of the naked feet, for example, in *Jazani* (*Fig.12*). Slippers, that apparently were torn from his feet during the execution, are lying in front of the communist´s dead body on the very left of the picture, next to his bare feet. Protagonists with naked soles are also depicted in *Fig.3*, where the dying Eshghi has left one of his clogs, furthermore, in *Fig.4* and *Fig.10*, where Yazdi´s right and Behrangi´s left foot dangling without shoes, and in *Fig.5*, where Arani´s toes are visible under the white shroud. The extreme contraction and the stigmata from Mantegna´s painting are not adopted by Akhlaghi, nevertheless, she, like Mantegna, broaches the issue of Christ´s martyrdom.[432]
The last step of the Passion of Christ, that is shown in *By an Eye Witness* is The Entombment, as Samad Behrangi, who is torn out of the Aras river correlates with this pictorial type. Four men are bent over Behrangi´s death body, that lies at the back; his face is turned towards the sky; his left foot dangles into the water. This posture, can be compared, for example, to Raffael´s painting of *The Entombment* (1507) (*Fig.100*).

References to martyrdom in *By an Eye Witness* are extracted from Shia Islam, the Passion of Christ and national histories. The martyrs died as part of a religious or national history of salvation. Their deaths were crucial events in the early days of the particular religions and nations, and thus, had effects and were necessary for their further developments. Jesus´ death freed the Christian community from their sins and reconciled them with god, while Hossein´s death is the base of a martyr cult in Shia Islam. According to Kohlberg, Hossein "has traditionally been regarded as having sacrificed himself in order to receive the Prophet´s religion and save it from destruction or; yet he has also been seen […] to be emulated for his willingness to fight for justice against all odds."[433] He and his men had the choice to surrender and thus, to live in injustice, but they rather opted for sacrificing themselves while fighting for justice, than living in injustice.
Thus, it is believed, that the dissolution of both men was somehow necessary for the further history and development of the religions.
Also, the deaths of national martyrs shaped history, for example, the martyrs of the Spanish

432Stukenbrock/Töpper, *1000 Meisterwerke der europäischen Malerei von 1300 bis 1850*: 585.
433E. Kohlberg, "Shahīd," in: E. Bosworth et alii, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: Volume IX,* (Leiden, 1997): 205.

revolution were necessary for the further development of Spain. Without the revolution and the death of the insurgents, the French invaders would have stayed in Spain and thus, the country would not have become independent. Hence, the iconography of the Passion of Christ was often adopted to history paintings, and based on these, again by Akhlaghi in *By an Eye Witnes*s. Via the references to national and religious martyrdom Akhlaghi might have had the same intention of the function of those kinds of images like Susan Sontag, who writes, that viewers of photographs that show martyrs, should be exhorted and encouraged through the ideal strength of their beliefs and souls.[434]

c) Witnessing

Not related to the subject of martyrdom, but to the act of witnessing is the above already mentioned reference to Jan van Eyck. Like Akhlaghi, who portrays herself more or less hidden in every image of the series, wearing a burgundy head scarf, the Flemish painter also places himself as a silent witness with a wine-red turban in the background of the events, depicted by him. One example is the so-called *Rolin-Madonna* (1435) (*Fig.101*), where he shows himself again, wearing a wine-red turban as a rear-view figure behind the columns, looking at the river.

The most obvious quote of van Eyck´s self-depiction in *By an Eye Witness* can be detected in *Ashraf* (*Fig.13*). Akhlaghi includes herself in this image, diagonally left, behind the man whose head rests on the red armchair, in the mirror in the corner of the room left of the garden door. Van Eyck did something very similar, when he showed himself in the convex mirror on the rear wall of the *Arnolfini Betrothal* (1434) (*Fig.80*). Analogue to his wine-red turban, Akhlaghi wears a burgundy head scarf. Like van Eyck, she does not depict herself in the image, but appears via a mirror from the exterior of the pictorial space. Above the mirror in the *Arnolfini Betrothal* is written, “Johannes de Eyck fuit hic” (Jan van Eyck was here). Thus, van Eyck does not emphasise his function as a painter, but as a witness.[435] Saleh Najafi suggested, that this reference makes Akhlaghi´s appearance within the images very ambiguous. He stated, that a betrothal should not take place in a bedroom, but in a more festive location.[436] Furthermore, it is not even entirely clear, if the person in the mirror is actually van Eyck, and it is also opaque, what is depicted on this image. Does it actually show a wedding, like the former title of the work for a few hundred years suggested, or rather, a

434Sontag, *Das Leiden anderer betrachten*: 50.
435Walther, *Malerei der Welt*: 123.
436Personal Interview of Saleh Najafi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.

betrothal, like the current state of research favours?[437] I do not want to answer these questions in this MA-thesis, but what Najafi wanted to tell me, was: through the quotation of an ambiguous image by van Eyck, Akhlaghis appearance also becomes ambiguous and a question arises: What is she doing in the image?[438]

A second ambiguous reference to the act of witnessing is Akhlaghi´s head scarf in the photograph of Bijan Jazani (*Fig.12*). As mentioned above, this is the only image of *By an Eye Witness*, in which Akhlaghi is not present herself. Her representative, the red hejab lies in the left middle-ground of the photograph. This position can be traced back to Goya´s *The 3rd May*, as here, a shadow is visible on the left edge. Up to now it is not fully researched, what it represents. Thomas Hugh, who again refers to the Swedish art historian Folke Nordstrom, assumes, that it is a shaded depiction of the Holy Mary, who stands as "silent witness" of the happenings on the side. Unfortunately, he does not explain her function in more detail. It remains unclear, if she is suffering with the insurgents or should indicate, that the depicted injustice won´t remain unpunished.[439] But through the red head scarf, Akhlaghi adopts the role of the Holy Mary and her function as a silent witness.

Akhlaghi´s self-depiction as a witness has already been discussed above, it is a symbol and a reference at the same time. She underlines the importance of her symbolic character via the references and her function of a witness of the scenes. Nonetheless she is an anachronistic element, and the only indication, that the scenes depicted did not happen as shown on her photographs.

Summed up, via Akhlaghi´s references to earlier works of painting and photojournalism, she, like Owens stated, "ventures into proscribed territory." Through these citations *By an Eye Witness* can be read, and meaning is added to Akhlaghi´s project via them. But their interpretation is not exactly the same as in the initial image, in the context of today´s Iran, it becomes something other, thus, the hybrid allegories must be deciphered, not only through symbolic elements, but also through visual references, that communicate the need for mourning the martyrs of the nation, about which has not been spoken publicly and openly up to now, but whose deaths are somehow in the memories of people in Iran, and thus witnessed in a metaphorical sense.

437Edwin Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal* (Berkeley et alii, 1994): 1-13 and 95-131.
438Personal Interview of Saleh Najafi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
439Hugh, *Goya*: 12-24.

## 6. Interpreting *By an Eye Witness*

The staged photographs of Azadeh Akhlaghi´s photograph series *By an Eye Witness*, that depict scenes of deaths of Iranian freedom fighters of the 20th century, are hybrids. The images contain visual quotations of other paintings and photographs, that were produced between the 15th century and 2009. Akhlaghi often assembles a number of pictorial citations from different times and media in one photograph. Moreover, she appends her own additions and, partially anachronistic, symbolic elements that refer like the visual citations, to the subjects of mourning, martyrdom and witnessing. The artist also includes indications, that clearly point to the biographies of the depicted figures. In certain images, she worked with contemporary photographs in order to show specific details as realistically as possible. Thus, the photographs of *By an Eye Witness* are a mixture of actual and fictional elements. To make clear, that the pictures are not solely of documentary character, the artist includes herself in every image as a witness to the death. In formal terms, the long shots are characterised by straight lines, elaborate use of lighting, shadows and blurring as well as dark tones, while bright or strong colours are only used to accentuate specific elements. The photographs have a number of details. Despite their violent content, Akhlaghi did not create gory pictures, and often omits wounds and blood from her visual references in her photographs. Rather, the images of *By an Eye Witness* emanate a certain calmness and tranquillity, produced by pathetic gestures. The possibilities of interpreting the series are multi-layered, six aspects are listed below.

### 6.1 *By an Eye Witness* as a Chance to Remember and Mourn the Protagonists

*By an Eye Witness* is a work of art, that should create the possibility of remembering and mourning Iranian freedom fighters of all political fractions and walks of live, who died mainly between the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) and Iranian Revolution (1978-1979), together and publicly. This happened for the first time in Iranian history at the exhibition of the series in 2013 in Tehran, where Mohsen gallery served not only as an exhibition space but also as a graveyard. People came to the gallery not only for the sake of art, but also to mourn the freedom fighters depicted on the images. A crucial point of *By an Eye Witness* is, that Akhlaghi talks about deaths, that were not part of the official history, although, nonetheless, Iranians knew of those open secrets. Furthermore, it was not only not talked about the deaths, but moreover, unlike Neda Agha-Soltan´s death, no publicly accessible photographs of the incidents, shown in *By an Eye Witness* exist. Images were taken of some scenes that are depicted there, but today, they are locked in archives. The existence of such photographs is

indicated by the inclusion of a photographer with a camera as part of the respective images. Akhlaghi addresses the subject of mourning via symbolic elements that are associated with grief and sorrow, namely the use of dark colours, the black dress she is wearing; and the visual citations of paintings and photographs on the subject of mourning. Examples are *Spanish Wake* (Smith) (*Fig.85*), *At the Deathbed* (Munch) (*Fig.86*) and *Extreme Unction* (Poussin) (*Fig.83*). She stresses with these references in particular, that the dead persons, who are primarily men, in *By an Eye Witness* were not only freedom fighters, but also human beings. They were fathers, sons and husbands who should be mourned and remembered in Akhlaghi´s memorial images, as they died as martyrs because they did not want to refrain from their believes - for Iran´s future.

### 6.2 *By an Eye Witness* as a Declaration of Martyrs

The notion of martyrs is already addressed in the project´s title, as the word "martyr," derives in English and Persian from the term "witness." Especially the Islamic understanding of martyrs is quite broad, and this spectrum is also invoked in *By an Eye Witness*, where Akhlaghi shows different types of martyrs: those of the battlefield (*Bakeri Fig.16*), those who passed away because of diseases (*Arani Fig.5*), those who were killed in accidents (*Farrokhzad Fig.7*), those who died far from home (*Sales Fig.17*) or those who experienced a natural death (*Mosaddegh Fig.8*), to list only a few. Akhlaghi furthermore, declares their status as martyrs via symbolic elements and pictorial references. These are red and white items, two colours which are associated with martyrdom in Islam, placed close to the main figures; blood, flowers, a palm-tree, a surah with the content of martyrdom and visual elements of contemporary Iranian martyr´s propaganda. Even so also visual quotations from other works of art, like *The 3rd of May* (Goya) (*Fig.89*), *Kent State Shooting* (Filo) (*Fig.96*), *Takiyah Dawlat* (Kamal al-Molk) (*Fig.97*) and various images, depicting scenes from the Passion of Christ (Da Vinci, Caravaggio, Raffael...) (*Fig.42, Fig.98, Fig.100*) refer to national and religious martyrdom. With the adoption of specific pictorial citations, Akhlaghi not only transferred their formal elements to *By an Eye Witness*, but also their underlying meaning. That is to say, Hossein, Jesus and national freedom fighters, like the Spanish insurgent in *The 3rd May* or the protesting student of the *Kent State Shooting* died as religious or national martyrs for the further history of a specific religion, or country. Their deaths had effects and were necessary for the development within the religion or country. And, they preferred fighting for justice, rather than living in injustice. Via Akhlaghi´s choice of these quotations, the same can be applied to the protagonists of *By an Eye Witness*. Ehsan Rasoulof

confirmed this pictorial statement during an interview, when he explained that the series is "about people who lost their lives because of Iran´s future. Somehow we wanted to honour them again as they are a very important part of our current lives."[440]

6.3 *By an Eye Witness* as a Modern Taziyah Play with a Repetitive and Global Aspect

Of particular relevance is the connection to Taziyah in *Eshghi* (*Fig.3*). This was not a conscious choice by Akhlaghi, but aside from the formal similarities to Kamal al-Molk´s painting, there are also conceptual parallels between *By an Eye Witness* and Taziyah. Both are not entire fictional, but trace back to actual events, which are re-enacted by combining real and fictional elements. As the director is always on stage, the audience knows, that they see only constructed incidents from the past that do not have a solely documentary character. Furthermore, the overall-concept of Taziyah, that is the depiction of a fight for justice in a situation of injustice, is equivalent to *By an Eye Witness*. The colour green is associated with Hossein, thus, in modern Taziyah plays, the actor who performs Hossein is dressed in green garments. As green is used for stressing particular elements in *By an Eye Witness*, and due to the conceptual similarities, this could be understood not only as a reference to the specific historical Hossein, who died in Kerbala, but also generally to his role as a fighter for justice in a situation of injustice. Hossein and Yazid I. are interchangeable, according to the situation. For example, Mirzadeh Eshghi and Reza Khan, Bijan Jazani and Mohammad Reza Shah, Jesus and Pontius Pilatus, Jeffrey Miller and Richard Nixon. Also the Kurds at Sanandaj airport (*Fig.91*) and Mostafa Ghanian (*Fig.94*) have their equivalent Yazid I.

The tragedy of Hossein and the deaths in *By an Eye Witness* are repetitive events. A fact, that Akhlaghi makes clear, via the depiction of soldiers with three different kinds of uniforms in Ashraf (*Fig.13*), one could read out of this juxtaposition, that the treatment of people who are not in accordance with the ruling power in Iran in 1953, 1979, 2009 and today is similar. Also via her references to other images, she draws attention to issues that were repeated again and again, not only in the history of Iran, but also elsewhere. The composition of a 19th century painting, like *The 3rd May*, can be adapted to a series, produced in 2012 and still depicts the current situation, people are still shot because of their attempts to gain freedom. These notions also shaped the artist´s idea for the production of *By an Eye Witness*, when she saw pictures of the deaths of the Green Movement 2009 and the Arab Spring 2010. With her visual references to such incidents, that happened worldwide (*Benno Ohnesorg, Fig.95 Kent State Shooting Fig.96*) and also centuries ago (*The 3rd May Fig.89, The Death of*

440Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 37.

*Marat Fig.70*) and her combination of symbolic elements of Christianity (palm tree, flowers, colours) and Islam (surah, flowers, colours), Akhlaghi indicates that fighting for justice in a situation of injustice is a global, timeless and non religious-affiliated phenomenon. A statement by Ehsan Rasoulof underlines this claim

> "Although they [the protagonists] died hundred, fifty, eighty years ago, we can understand them still right now, we can find similarities to other activists in the world and even right now. […] I think it is about the current situation of everybody in the world who is seeking for liberty even in USA, even in Europe, even in North Korea."[441]

Moreover, the catalogue´s bilingualism indicates this global aspect, and Akhlaghi said, that she thinks "we share the same tragedies of the history of the world. Every nation had the same tragedies. It is our turn now in the Middle East to have so many brutal happenings […] But […] less than fifty years ago it happened in Germany and in many other countries."[442]

Akhlaghi additionally addresses this repetitious character by citing photojournalistic image of the Iranian Revolution 1979 (*Fig.18, Fig.92*) and the Green Movement 2009 (*Fig.93, Fig.94*). Due to political restrictions in Iran, she was unable to stage deaths, that happened during these events, but Akhlaghi includes them through visual quotations. Via the frequent use of the colour green in order to stress particular elements of the photographs, she refers not only to Hossein´s death, but also to the Green Movement 2009. Moreover, by the combination of highlighting protagonists with items in white, red and green, it seems, that Akhlaghi declares the victims of 2009 as martyrs, as white and red are colours, associated with martyrdom and green with the fight for justice and the Green Movement.

Moreover, Hamid Severi interprets *By an Eye Witness* in his essay *Mapping Iranian Contemporary Art* (2015) as basis which should help the audience to imagine other deaths, that could not be shown in Akhlaghi´s series because of the political restrictions and states, that Akhlaghi foresees similar events in the future.[443] Also Hamid Dabashi indicates the current aspect of the images, writing,"What you see here is what we see everyday."[444] Rasoulof states "Looking at the photos, sometimes I see myself undecided, not knowing I am facing toward the past or standing at the threshold of the future. These photos stand just on the borderline […] between history and future, yesterday and tomorrow."[445] In addition, Akhlaghi herself draws attention to this repetition, by saying, "I wanted to point out the repetitive tragedies that we as Iranians have experienced throughout the 20th century. Most of the

441Ibid.: 37.
442Personal Interview of Azadeh Akhlaghi with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 3.
443Hamid Severi, "Mapping Iranian Contemporary Art," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Contemporary Art From The Middle East* (London, 2015): 82-83.
444Hamdi Dabashi, "Remembrance of Things Past," in: Azadeh Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness* (Tehran, 2013): 51.
445Azadeh Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness* (Tehran, 2013): 53.

depicted deaths [...] are not the only example of their kind, but are merely part of a brutal cycle we have always been subject to."[446] Here another parallel to Taziyah can be detected, as Susan Sontag mentions, that, although Iranians have seen these passion plays many times, Taziyah still evokes grief among the audience each time again, **because** they have seen Hossein´s martyrdom many times before.[447] Maybe Akhlaghi wanted to show seventeen examples of the many killings and deaths within Iranian history. Considering this aspect, the addition of blindfolds to Goya´s *3rd May,* compared to *Jazani* can be explained. The victims in the latter are thus depicted much more anonymised than the insurgents in Goya´s painting, also Arani is shown less individual than in the visual references, that served as a model for his image, to name just two examples. Susan Sontag´s words on Goya´s *Desastres de la Guerra* (1810-1820) series can also be applied to *By an Eye Witness*. As such the cruelties, done by French soldiers to Spanish rebels happened not in every detail as depicted by Goya. However, that the victims did not exactly look like on the etching, does not lessen the value of the artwork. Goya´s images are a synthesis. Their message is, that **such** things happened.[448]

### 6.4 *By an Eye Witness* as an Encouragement to Act Like the Protagonists

On the other hand, Akhlaghi also tried to indicate, who these persons, she shows were and alters some of her visual references due to historical facts. For example, she minimises the group of the victims in *Jazani* compared to *The 3rd May* or depicts the mourning women in Arani without head scarves. Via the symbolic elements of local indications, actual photographs, objects and persons of the protagonist´s private lives, Akhlaghi makes clear, that she is mourning not anybody, but exactly the freedom fighter depicted, and she wants to tell the viewer of their lives, deaths and their motives of fighting for justice. Through that way, it seems, Akhlaghi tries to encourage people to do the same and shake up Iranians, via showing them their bloody past, and the martyrs, who had to die for the country.

Ironically, this mobilisation-strategy is identical to the one of the Iranian government, that also depicts themes like self-sacrifice, resistance and martyrdom,[449] preferably either of Hossein or of martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war on the posters and murals, all over Tehran, in order to motivate people to follow their examples. The martyrs´ portraits are placed so dominant in the city, that it is impossible to forget the war and, those, who lost their lives for the country.[450]

446Rex Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran," *Art Collector* 70 (Winter 2014): 111.
447Susan Sontag, *Das Leiden anderer betrachten* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008): 96-97.
448Ibid.: 56.
449Abdolmajid Hosseini-Rad, "The Impact of Shiite and Revolutionary Beliefs on Contemporary Iranian Art," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Amidst Shadow and Light* (Hong Kong, 2011): 214.
450Aydin Aghdashloo, "The Revolutionary Art in Iran: Variety of Forms," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed.,

These figurative images are a mean of communication with the public, in order to influence and mobilise the masses,[451] that has its roots in the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, where Khomeini compared the suffering of the Iranian nation to the one of Hossein, and "employed a leitmotif of blood and suffering." Via this, he tried to encourage people to support him and his fraction, boost the morale of the revolutionary fighters, and the Iranian soldiers.[452] Hossein served as idol for the volunteers, to die like him, to prefer to die, rather than to live under the tyranny of the enemy.[453]

Like the Iranians should take the martyrs on Tehran´s walls as example for fighting for the Islamic Republic, the viewers of *By an Eye Witness* should take the persons depicted as an example to fight themselves as Hossein did, for justice and freedom. Unlike the martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war, most of the freedom fighters of *By an Eye Witness* were not remembered publicly, and were even not part of the official history. Akhlaghi made an attempt to change this via her series and, like the official martyrs, she wanted them not to be forgotten. Analogue to the murals and posters on Tehran´s walls, she did not only produce art for art´s sake, but also tried to convey a message via *By an Eye Witness*. This approach succeeded, as the reactions on the series in general, and at the opening at Mohsen gallery in March 2013, where Akhlaghi reached due to her characters a broader audience, than the art-interested people only, in particular, showed. Of course, the content of Akhlaghi´s message, which I interpret as the encouragement to fight against a situation of injustice in a contemporary sense, is quite the opposite, of what the murals and posters on Tehran´s wall communicate. But the core, that is the motivation of people to fight for Iran, via showing martyrdom and self-sacrifice, that resembles the tragedy of Hossein, is the same. Akhlaghi also addresses this similarity visually, when she includes elements, typically associated with the governmental-martyrs-cult in *Bakeri* (*Fig.16*).

### 6.5 *By an Eye Witness* as Akhlaghi´s Version of History

Another crucial element of *By an Eye Witness,* that is already indicated in the title, is Akhlaghi´s self-depiction as a witness in every image. In reference to Van Eyck, wearing similar clothes and placing herself like the Flemish painter as a marginal note in the background, she emphasises her role as a witness. As the quote of Van Eyck´s self-depiction in the *Arnolfini Betrothal* (*Fig.80*), which is a very ambiguous image, Akhlaghi´s self-

*Amidst Shadow and Light* (Hong Kong, 2011): 209.

451Hosseini-Rad, "The Impact of Shiite and Revolutionary Beliefs on Contemporary Iranian Art:" 213.

452Peter Chelkoswski, "Posters of Revolution and War," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Amidst Shadow and Light* (Hong Kong, 2011): 190-201.

453 Hosseini-Rad, "The Impact of Shiite and Revolutionary Beliefs on Contemporary Iranian Art:" 216.

representation becomes ambiguous too. She is an anachronistic element, that does not fit into the times of the scenes of the images. The artist´s role as testifier has an active and a passive side. First, a witness has to see an incident passively, before he or she can talk about it actively. Akhlaghi has not literally seen these deaths, but as they are open secrets, many Iranians know about them and thus, have seen them metaphorically. With her self-depiction, she also indicates, that she is giving testimony to her passive metaphorical seeing, now made active by depicting these incidents in *By an Eye Witness*. However, at the same time, she communicates through her self-depiction, that these are her versions and interpretations of history and not photographs with a solely documentary approach. The artist is wearing clothes of today´s Iran, and thus she could symbolise, that the failure of the main figures is the reason for the political and social situation in today´s Iran. As a representative of her generation, Akhlaghi is part of the result of her protagonist´s failure because of their death. But her self-representation can also be seen as an indication, that Akhlaghi´s generation feels guilty for not having prevented the deaths of the persons depicted. So many people had and have to die for the country. Also Dabashi states, that the series "evokes a hidden guilt, a Shi´i (sic!) guilt-as if we killed them, as if we should have been there."[454]On the other hand, via the alterations of pictorial references, Akhlaghi also blames the actual murderers for having killed the protagonists. The executors in *Jazani* are much more individualised than in the model of *The 3rd May* and Akhlaghi adds the murderers to the composition of *Eshghi*, where the references (*Benno Ohnesorg*, *Kent State Shooting*) only show the victim and the discovering woman.

### 6.6 *By an Eye Witness* as a Trauma-Therapy

Moreover, *By an Eye Witness* could serve as therapy to process these traumatic experiences, by facing them again, as Akhlaghi indicates via her citation of *At the Deathbed* in *Arani.* Also Sontag states, that photographs can serve as shock therapies,[455] and Dabashi assumes that Akhlaghi´s generation has a "post-traumatic stress syndrome," of which the photographs of *By an Eye Witness* are "visible signs."[456] This stress syndrome is not only caused by the Iran-Iraq war, during which Akhlaghi and her generation grew up, but also by the suppressed parts of history, which are not talked about, and thus are historical traumas. Michael S. Roth addresses historical traumas in his two essays *Trauma, Representation and Historical Consciousness* and *Trauma: A Dystopia of the Spirit*, both published in 2012. He states, that a historical trauma is an event in the past, that is repressed, and thus not properly part of the

454Dabashi, "Remembrance of Things Past:" 50.
455Sontag, *Das Leiden anderer betrachten*: 21.
456Dabashi, "Remembrance of Things Past:" 51.

historical consciousness.[457] In other words, that are also Sigmund Freud´s terms, a historical trauma is an unfinished quality of relationships to the past, that have not been dealt with,[458] and have not been left behind successfully, therefore the trauma has effects on the present.[459] Thus, one has to come to terms with the pressing issues of history, that do not simply disappear, and therefore can be the source for difficulties in the present.[460] In *By an Eye Witness*, the deaths of Iran´s freedom fighters are the traumas, that were not forgotten, but of which nothing was said for such a long time due to the political situation. Thus, they were somehow unfinished and affect the present. The protagonists of *By an Eye Witness* could have changed things in Iran, and therefore could have altered Iran´s history. If they had not died, the situation in the country might be different right now.

Akhlaghi and her generation, who are the traumatised group, might have grown up under different circumstances. One of the main problems of a historical trauma, in the present is, that the traumatised group is vulnerable and starts to imitate the behaviour of the "healthier group."[461] This can be seen in the whole history of Iran. The fact, that people were killed for their believes, if they were not in accordance to the ruling power, were repeated again and again in the last century in Iran. Also, when, the suppressed, this is the traumatised, group, came to power they repeated their own traumas again, as they had not left them behind successfully. During the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasty freedom fighters were killed, the same happened after 1979, the same happens today. Those, who fought for the end of the Qajar monarchy, continued suppressing political opponents, like Pesyan or Eshghi. The religious people, who were subdued during the Pahlavi era, also killed their political opponents after the Iranian Revolution, and still today political dissidents are shot on the street, as the incidents of 2009 show.

Another aspect of the trauma is the creation of identity, as the traumatised group, that is Akhlaghi´s generation in Iran, becomes isolated. The trauma is something that only they have experienced, and distinguishes them from the others.[462] As the catalogue and the captures of the images of *By an Eye Witness* are in Persian and English, Akhlaghi does not only address the traumatised group, but also those, who are excluded from it. The message for them is, that they should not look away from this community, that has suffered a collective trauma.

457Michael S. Roth, "Trauma, Representation and Historical Consciousness," in: Michael S. Roth, ed., *Memory, Trauma, and History* (New York, 2012): 77-80.
458Ibid.: 81-82.
459Ibid.: 80.
460Ibid.: 77.
461Ibid.: 78-79.
462Michael S. Roth, "Trauma: A Dystopia of Spirit," in: Michael S. Roth, ed., *Memory, Trauma, and History* (New York, 2012): 92.

Therefore, Akhlaghi´s self-representation could also be understood as an example of the traumatised group, but she also witnessed the past for the purpose of the present and gives a testimony among others for therapeutic reasons, that is to talk about the trauma, and to come to terms with the past. As mentioned above, her self-representation is also an indication, that the content of the image is her view on history. It is not important to tell the truth exactly, much more important is the healing power of talking about the events. Before *By an Eye Witness*, there was a "conspiracy of silence" about the occurrences, created by the Iranian authorities. But Akhlaghi has broken this silence and narrates the trauma.[463]

Freud also suggested, that one should get over a psychological wound in memory by talking about it, it is necessary to situate oneself in relation to the past, but not reconstruct the actual event. This is actually what Akhlaghi does, when she tries to get over the tragic deaths of Iran´s past by showing what has caused the trauma and thus, talks about deaths, that were previously not spoken of, but that were still remembered. But she does not try to reconstruct the events how they really were, but alters the situation, and adds the anachronistic and symbolic elements, and therefore also relates them to the present. She is aware, that the past affects the present. According to Freud, there are two main questions in dealing with the past: firstly, how is the unfinished event, that is related to the present serving desires, and secondly, how does serving these desires make it impossible to serve others. In the context of *By an Eye Witness*, Akhlaghi served these first desires of mourning and talking about the deaths. Now, as mourning is possible and the repetitive circle has been addressed publicly, it is possible to think about the second question. Before, those events were unfinished, and people were not in a position to deal with the future without addressing history and it seemed futile to improve live in Iran and thinking about how to interrupt the cycle, but now this could be possible, as some might have come to terms with the past.

But facing the trauma is painful, although the traumatic past already existed unconsciously in the present via flashbacks and anxiety. Akhlaghi´s integration of the past in the present - what she did, when she showed her series in a gallery in 2013, is also a threat. It is not only painful for the memory, but it is crucial, that Akhlaghi broke the silence of the traumatic past, and thus destroyed its aura.[464] Roth even speaks of the "banalization (sic!) of a trauma through narrative pleasure[465] and states "The quality that makes an experience traumatic is lost in telling."[466] According to him, a "successful" representation of a trauma seems to some people

463Ibid.: 92.
464Roth, "Trauma, Representation and Historical Consciousness:" 82.
465Roth, "Trauma: A Dystopia of Spirit:" 92.
466Roth, "Trauma, Representation and Historical Consciousness:" 82-83.

like a trivialisation or betrayal, as trauma is supposed to be beyond representation, as this points to its distinctiveness.[467] Furthermore, if a trauma is narrated, it is impossible to forget it, and many people have chosen to forget, or rather, as traumatic experiences are too intense to be forgotten, to suppress it and not to talk about it, as it is easier to live in the present without dealing with the unfinished business of the past, even if it is always present unconsciously.[468] But after the show of *By an Eye Witness* and the public reports in newspapers and magazines about the series, those deaths could not be suppressed any more. Akhlaghi forces the viewers of *By an Eye Witness* to face their traumas again. Here, I see the one of the reasons of the harsh and negative critique, that *By an Eye Witness* partly earned in Iran, as narrating a trauma can be felt not only as a cure, but also as a betrayal and a sacrilege, or in the worst case as a renewed act of violence.[469] Thus, the criticism was not only about the images itself. The statement, that *By an Eye Witness* is void of any content, or the refusal to talk to me about Akhlaghi´s project by a few people may have their reasons in the trauma, people were simply not ready to be confronted with their past, or it was so painful, that the reaction was a complete ignorance or complete negation of its content, as it would have been too painful to face the content, namely the traumas of the past.[470]

Summed up, I interpret *By an Eye Witness* as a photographic series, that is about mourning Iranian freedom fighters, who fought for justice and preferred to die, rather than to live in injustice. Thus, they died as martyrs for the future of Iran. These deaths were repetitive and still occur today, looking at the current situation they presumably will also continue. Akhlaghi wants to encourage people to do the same as the protagonists depicted, and shake up Iranians in order to become active. But such incidents also happened and happen elsewhere. Another crucial point is, that Akhlaghi is the first person who talks publicly about those deaths, that were historical open secrets before the creation of *By an Eye Witness*. She addresses this trauma in order to come to terms with her past and to break the repetitive cycle of violence. Facing one´s own historical traumas can be a painful process, where I see one of the reason for the partly negative criticism of the series in Iran. Moreover, Akhlaghi deals with the guilt, that she and other Iranians feel, because they could not prevent those deaths, and also not the deaths of the martyrs of the Green Movement in 2009. Thus, *By an Eye Witness* is also a kind of a therapy, to process these traumatic events, by facing them again on photographs. Or, as

467Roth, "Trauma: A Dystopia of Spirit:" 92.
468Roth, "Trauma, Representation and Historical Consciousness:" 82-83.
469Ibid.: 82-83.
470Ibid.: 84-85.

Saleh Najafi, described it: The camera in *By an Eye Witness*, served as a catalyst,[471] where according to Hamid Dabashi "history, memory and trauma all come together."[472]

Returning to Susan Sontag´s words, which I cited in the first chapter: *By an Eye Witness* was produced to pay attention to the past, and to remind people of the deaths of the freedom fighters, in order not to forget them. But I do not agree with Sontag, when she states that photographs "can not be more." Those of *By an Eye Witness* can, as I discussed above. They can serve as a therapy, with the purpose of coming to terms with historical traumas. But Sontag is right, when she states, that of cruelties should help to reflect and to learn, as it is important to reflect on one´s own past, and not to suppress it, in order to learn for the future, to prevent such incidents, like depicted in Akhlaghi´s series from happening again. Sontag´s question "Who caused what the picture shows?" and "Who is responsible," should be altered in the context of *By an Eye Witness* into "What caused what the pictures show?" and "What is responsible?" Also here, the answer is directly related to the historical trauma, or rather, it actually **is** the historical trauma, as the traumatised group started to imitate the behaviour of the "healthier group," and thus produced new historical traumas among other people, and thus, created a new traumatised group. Therefore, the question "Is it excusable?" can not be answered fully, the traumatised group used to be a victim before, and just repeats, what it had itself experienced. Whether or not it is an excuse is up to the reader. Sontag´s last question "Was it inevitable?" is to be answered in the context of Iran´s history, probably with a no. Because, as discussed above, all those deaths were somehow necessary for Iran´s future and development. Without the deaths of the protagonists of *By an Eye Witness*, the situation in Iran might be different now.

## 7. Contextualisation of *By an Eye Witness* within Staged Photography in Tehran

The main topics and interpretations of *By an Eye Witness* have already been summarised in chapter six. This chapter only attempts to contextualise Akhlaghi´s series within staged photography in Tehran.

471Personal Interview of Saleh Najafi with the Author, Tehran, 2015.
472Dabashi, "Remembrance of Things Past:" 50.

a) Technique

- Staged Photography: Although I demonstrated in chapter three how complicated it can be, to decide whether an image is staged or not, it can be said with certainty, that *By an Eye Witness* is staged photography, because Akhlaghi did not have any intention to depict the world in a realistic way. She constructed the images only for the purpose of being photographed. They are neither authentic nor real and, without her idea, the series would not have existed at all. This idea of staging photographs is, compared to the past, currently very popular in Tehran, especially among the *Burnt Generation*, of which Akhlaghi is part of. When Akhlaghi started with the production of *By an Eye Witness* in 2009, the concept of staged photography and the term itself were already established and known in Iran. The increase of the popularity of the medium is, among other factors, connected to the political situation, especially after 2009, that made it safer for artists to produce their own imagined worlds, rather than to document the riots on the streets. Also, Akhlaghi developed her idea for the project following the Green Movement in 2009, as discussed in chapter four.
- Cinematography: As shown in chapter three, Akhlaghi is not the first artist, who works with cinematography -Gohar Dashti (*Today´s Life and War Fig.49*) introduced it in 2008 to staged photography in Iran, and artists like Siamak Filizadeh (*Underground Fig.71*) and Tooraj Khamenezadeh (*Apprehension Jungle Fig.58*) created works with the means of this technique after *By an Eye Witness*. The production of these other series was of smaller expenditure, than Akhlaghis´, which is up until now the project of the biggest size, and the highest financial costs, executed with cinematography in Tehran. Moreover, Akhlaghi became known in Iran and abroad because of *By an Eye Witness*, as Ehsan Rasoulof putted it

> "Before the exhibition [of *By an Eye Witness*] she wasn´t that much famous, she was just a photographer. But after the exhibition she is THE photographer. She is the one who is trying to reproduce the most important historical parts of our nation. So in this field somehow she is alone, there is no other Iranian photographer who is that interested in taking such photos."[473]

473Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 39.

b) Subjects

- The Own and the National Past: I almost agree with Rasoulof´s statement, although, as discussed in chapter three, the own and national past is beside gender issues and the daily life, a popular subject among Iranian staged photographers. But, I do not know another staged photographer, working in Tehran, who re-creates historical events. Nonetheless, I see similarities of *By an Eye Witness* to Siamak Filizadeh´s *Underground* series. His chosen subject of the Qajar past also draws attention to the repetitive cycle of brutality within Iran´s history. Other photographers, who are dealing with the Qajar past are Shadi Ghadirian (*Qajar Fig.20*) and Arman Stepanian (*The Hidden Meaning of Photography in Iran Fig.53*), although they do not re-stage events, but include elements, that refer to the past within their photographs. The Qajar era is only addressed in three images of *By an Eye Witness* (*al-Motakallemin/Sur-Esrafil, Pesyan, Eshghi Fig.1-3*). Also the Iran-Iraq war (*Bakeri Fig.16*) plays, unlike in the works of Gohar Dashti (*Today´s Life and War Fig.49*; *Slow Decay Fig.61),* Arash Hanaei (*The Benefit of Vegetarianism Fig.84*) or Shadi Ghadirian (*Nil Nil Fig.39*; *White Square Fig.38*), only a minor role in *By an Eye Witness*.
  While the inclusion of the past is not extraordinary within staged photography in Tehran, usually photographers refer to a specific period only. This is mostly either the Qajar era, or the Iran-Iraq war, that many artists of the *Burnt Generation* experienced as a traumatising event during their childhood. What´s unique in Akhlaghi´s *By an Eye Witness,* is the long time, namely a whole century, that she shows. Also, the creation of a work in order to provide the possibility of mourning, where people came to the gallery not only for the sake of art, but to see the deaths of these people and to mourn and remember them together and publicly, as discussed in chapter four, is specific to *By an Eye Witness* within staged photography in Tehran. Dashti´s and Ghadirian´s works are examples of attempts to come to terms with the trauma of the Iran-Iraq war. But this is not the deepest root of the historical trauma, as demonstrated in chapter six, therefore, Akhlaghi is the only staged photographer in Tehran at the moment, who explores the deeper origins of this trauma. Related to the past is moreover the notion of martyrdom. This is also one of the main subjects of Filizadeh´s *Underground*, but in contrast to him, Akhlaghi includes the broad variety of kinds of Islamic martyrs, that were introduced in chapter four.

c) Visual Strategies

- The Depiction of the Self: Akhlaghi´s appearance as a witness in every picture of the series, reminds of Sadegh Tirafkan´s self inclusion in his early as well as in his late works (*The Armenians Fig.40; Temptation Fig.41*), that he also describes as witnessing. Like Akhlaghi in most pictures, he is only watching and not acting. Tirafkan, explained this appearance as a "representative of a kind of identity, nationality and a specific period of history."[474] Also Akhlaghi´s act of witnessing, that has many aspects, as discussed in the chapters five and six, can be seen as an expression of her identity, as a representative of the traumatised group mentioned in chapter six, that has to live under these circumstances in the country right now - among other things, due to the deaths of the protagonists of *By an Eye Witness*.
  But unlike some works by Tirafkan, for example, *The Armenians* or *Perspepolis I* (1995-1998) *(Fig.21)*, Akhlaghi never depicts herself with the face hidden or turned away from the viewer - a characteristic of staged photography since the beginning of the 1990s, like Irani-Sefat´s *Mandala* (*Fig.35*) shows. I do not have an ultimate explanation, neither for the popular element of a hidden face, nor the obviously strong desire, to include oneself in own pictures, that goes back to 19th century photographs by Antoin Sevruguin (*Persepolis Fig.24*), continues in the 1960s in works of Ahmad Aali (*Self-Portrait Fig.29*) and Marcos Grigrorian (*A Place to Rest Fig.30*), in the 1980s by Sadegh Tirafkan (*The Armenians Fig.40*) and in contemporary staged photography like Arman Stepanian (*Antoine & I 1919-2015 Fig.56*) and also Azadeh Akhlaghi (*Figs. 1-17*).

- Pathos: Akhlaghi foregoes a current trend within Iranian staged photography, and uses a sense of Pathos, instead of humour and irony in her images. This can be seen by comparing *By an Eye Witness* to Filizadeh´s *Underground* series, as his work inherits a number of grotesque and almost ridiculous elements, that could be interpreted as a parody of the martyr´s cult in Iran. Akhlaghi on the other hand, rather creates images that are -like the martyrs´s propaganda shown on Tehran´s walls, as discussed in chapter six- full of Pathos. This means, she appropriates a governmental strategy of mass communication, although her message is a different one.

474Shahrooz Nazari, "Interview with Sadegh Tirafkan," in: Homa Art Gallery, ed., *Sadegh Tirafkan: Initial Steps* (Tehran, 2013): 17-18.

- Metaphors, Allegories and Symbols: Akhlaghi´s use of metaphors, allegories and symbols is characteristic for staged photography, produced in Tehran at the moment, as shown in chapter three. Other examples are Ghadirian´s *Qajar* or Filizadeh´s *Underground*, who include, like Akhlaghi elements with a significant meaning into their works. The same can be said about the mixture of actual and fictional elements and the idea of juxtaposing at first sight, unrelated elements, past and present, history and fiction - also executed by Akhlaghi. This goes back to the 1960s and 1970s of Iranian fine art photography and works by Ahmad Aali (*Self-Portrait)* or Kaveh Golestan (*Az Div o Dad Fig.31*). It is furthermore typical within staged photography in Tehran, that artists seem not to refer to real events at first sight, but actually make a reference on a deeper level via symbols, allegories and metaphors; examples are Filizadeh´s *Underground* and Dashti´s *Volcano* (*Fig.63*). Also, *By an Eye Witness* refers not only to these seventeen deaths depicted, but also speaks of current deaths in Iran and elsewhere.

- References to Other Staged Photographers: As mentioned in chapter three, an influence of American photographers like Gregory Crewdson and Jeff Wall, but also of Iranian staged photographers, who life abroad, like Shirin Neshat or Mitra Tabrizian can be detected in staged photography, that is produced in Tehran today. In Akhlaghi´s case, it is difficult to state one direct influence by another photographer. Her cinematographic approach and her appropriation of historical European painting is comparable to Jeff Wall. But, what distinguishes her work from his, is, that *By an Eye Witness* is a mixture of references of European painting, photojournalistic images, taken in- and outside of Iran and partial Iranian painting. This mixture of those three sources makes her work unique. Nonetheless, I strongly suggest to investigate Jeff Wall´s influence on her work further, also because she said in an interview "I have also followed the works of some of the great staged photographers, such as Jeff Wall [...]"[475] and Ehsan Rasoulof told me, when I asked him, to which other works of art he would compare *By an Eye Witness* "[...] maybe Jeff Wall […] I just remember of Jeff Wall, I think his works were very important for her and me and the guys who participated in the project."[476]

475Rex Butler, "An Eye Witness in Iran," *Art Collector* 70 (Winter 2014): 109.
476Personal Interview of Ehsan Rasoulof with the Author, Tehran, 2015: 39.

- References to Historical European Art: are, as discussed in chapter five, a visual strategy of *By an Eye Witness*. These quotations in general go back to the late 19th century photographs as the example of Sevruguin´s *Interior in Gulistan Palace* (*Fig.26*), discussed in chapter three, shows. While I do not know any example of the inclusion of European paintings in the 1960s and 1970s, they are again detectable in works by Tirafkan, like *Temptation* in the early 2000s. Today, not only Akhlaghi includes quotations of historical European art, but also artists like Khamenezadeh in *Apprehension Jungle* and Filizadeh in *Underground* do this.

- References to Historical Iranian Art: Antoin Sevruguin is present in *Sur-Esrafil/al-Motakallemin* (*Fig.1*), one of the few examples where Akhlaghi refers to Iranian photo history. Not many Iranian staged photographers do this, but to mention are Arman Stepanian´s inclusion of Qajar photographs, for example in *1919-2015 Antoine & I* and Filizadeh´s and Ghadirian´s usage of photographs of the Qajar past in *Underground* and *Qajar*.

Summed up, it is remarkable that *By an Eye Witness* thematically covers a whole century of Iranian history, whereas other staged photographers in Tehran mostly address a shorter period. Also, the visual strategy, namely the hybridity, which fuses references of different media is unique. Akhlaghi´s use of the technique of cinematography is by now widespread in Tehran, nevertheless, the extent of the production, as well as the financial expenditure, is extraordinary.

While I was writing the last pages of this thesis, the news came in, that the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran was set on fire after the execution of the Shiite cleric Nimr Baqir l-Nimr (Nimr Bāqer al-Nimr) (1959-2016), probably ordered by the Saudi Arabian government. Iran ´s religious leader Ayataollah Chamenei (Ḵāmeneʾi) immediately declared him as a "martyr,"[477] and further said: "This oppressed cleric did not encourage people to join an armed movement, nor did he engage in secret plotting, and he only voiced public criticism ... based on religious fervour." [478] Nimr fought like the protagonists of *By an Eye Witness* for freedom according to his understanding, for justice in a situation of injustice, as he criticised the Saudi Royal family for the repression of the Shia community in Saudia Arabia, and was imprisoned and executed for this.[479] Photographs of his execution have not appeared yet in public domain. When not understood only as an Iranian phenomenon, al-Nimr´s death could also be part of *By an Eye Witnes*s. Freedom fighters are still murdered, and therefore devoted to martyrs. The repetitive cycle of violence continues, as there are still historical traumas, that have not been dealt with,[480] not only in Iran, but all around the world.

477BBC News, "Iran: Saudi´s Face ´Divine Revenge´ for Executing al-Nimr," *BBC News* (January 3, 2016). Accessed January 5, 2016: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35216694.

478Martin Chulov, "Saudia Arabia Cuts Diplomatic Ties with Iran after the Execution of a Cleric," *The Guardian* (January 4, 2016). Accessed January 5, 2016: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/03/saudi-arabia-cuts-diplomatic-ties-with-iran-after-nimr-execution.

479BBC News, "Iran: Saudi´s Face ´Divine Revenge´ for Executing al-Nimr."

480These are also not rare within Saudi-Arabian history, also the now ruling royal family, can be seen as traumatised group, that repeats the behaviour of the healthier group. For more details see Ulrike Freitag, "Einleitung: Ein Königreich im Wandel?" in: Ulrike Freitag, ed., Suadi-Arabien: Ein Königreich im Wandel? (Paderborn et alii, 2010): 16-28.

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## 9. Abstract in English

The aim of this thesis is the placement of the photograph series *By an Eye Witness* (2009-2012) by Azadeh Akhlaghi (b.1978), in which the artist restages deaths of Iranian freedom fighters, within the context of staged photography in Tehran.

To this day no publications on staged photograph in Iran were available. Therefore, I try to reconstruct the medium´s history, by using interviews of members of Tehran´s art scene, primary sources as well as secondary literature. Staged photography started in Tehran at the beginning of the 1990s at the latest. Since then an increasing popularity of the medium is detectable. The reasons for this are not only political and economical, but also due to more widespread access to internet and the effects of globalisation.

The analysis of *By an Eye Witness* is executed through interviews with the artist, and other people involved in the project; as well as by applying descriptive methods. One characteristic of the series is its hybridity. The pictures fuse references to photojournalistic images, European and Iranian painting, Akhlaghi´s own additions, indications on the biographies of the dead individuals, and symbolic elements, that, like the visual quotations, refer to the themes of mourning, martyrdom and witnessing.
There are a number of ways, in which *By an Eye Witness* could be interpreted. In this thesis, the following aspects are discussed: remembrance and mourning the dead freedom fighters; the declaration of martyrs; the life of the protagonists as examples; the artist´s version of history; the visualisation of history as trauma therapy; and *By an Eye Witness* as a modern, global, repetitive Taziyah passion play.

It is remarkable that *By an Eye Witness* thematically covers a whole century of Iranian history, whereas other staged photographers in Tehran mostly address a shorter period. Also, the visual strategy, namely the hybridity, which fuses references of different media is unique. Akhlaghi´s use of the technique of cinematography is by now widespread in Tehran, nevertheless, the extent of the production, as well as the financial expenditure, are of a unique scale.

## 10. Abstract in German

Forschung zur iranischen Fotografiegeschichte weist noch viele Lücken auf. Diese Arbeit leistet einen Beitrag diese zumindest teilweise zu schließen, da sie die Fotoserie *By an Eye Witness* (2009-2012) von Azadeh Akhlaghi (geb. 1978), in der die Künstlerin Tode von iranischen Freiheitskämpfern re-inszeniert, in den Kontext der inszenierten Fotografie in Teheran einordnet.

Da es bislang noch keine Publikationen zu iranischer, inszenierter Fotografie gibt, wird, anhand von Interviews mit Akteuren der Teheraner Kunstszene, Primärquellen sowie Sekundärliteratur, der Versuch unternommen, diese zu rekonstruieren. Spätestens seit den 1990ern kann man von inszenierter Fotografie sprechen. Seitdem wird das Medium immer beliebter, die Ursachen sind nicht nur politische und wirtschaftliche, auch die Globalisierung sowie die Verbreitung des Internets sind Gründe dafür.

Die Analyse von *By an Eye Witness* erfolgt durch Interviews mit der Künstlerin und anderen in das Projekt involvierten Personen sowie mittels deskriptiver Methoden. Ein Merkmal der Serie ist ihr Hybriditätscharakter, da sie sich aus visuellen Referenzen auf fotojournalistische Bilder, europäische und iranische Malerei zusammensetzt. Zusätzlich ergänzt Akhlaghi die Fotografien um ihre eigenen Hinzufügungen, Hinweise auf die Biographien der Verstorbenen und symbolische Elemente, die, wie die visuellen Zitate, auf die Themen Trauer, Märtyrertum und Zeugenschaft Bezug nehmen.
Die Möglichkeiten der Interpretation von *By an Eye Witness* sind zahlreich. In der vorliegenden Arbeit werden folgende Aspekte diskutiert: Erinnerung an und Trauer um die Verstorbenen; Deklaration von Märtyrern; das Leben der Protagonisten als Exempel; die Geschichtsversion der Künstlerin; die Visualisierung von Geschichte als Trauma-Therapie; sowie *By an Eye Witness* als modernes, globales, repetitives Taziyah-Passionsspiel.

An *By an Eye Witness* bemerkenswert ist, dass es ein gesamtes Jahrhundert iranischer Geschichte abdeckt, während andere inszenierte Fotografen in Teheran meist eine kürzere Periode thematisieren. Ebenso die visuelle Strategie -die Hybridität-, die sich aus Referenzen auf verschiedene Medien zusammenfügt, ist außergewöhnlich. Der Einsatz der cinematographischen Technik, die Akhlaghi anwendet, ist zwar mittlerweile in Teheran verbreitet, jedoch ist in Akhlaghi´s Projekt der Umfang der Produktion sowie der finanzielle Aufwand einzigartig.

## 11. List of Cited Interviews

| **Name** | **Function for Thesis** | **Date (2015)** | **Place** | **Taped** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Azadeh Akhlaghi | Photographer | September, 7<br>September, 14<br>October, 19<br>October, 22 | Café,<br>Akhlaghi´s Office | One |
| Mina Bozorgmehr | Actress | September, 28 | Bozorgmehr´s Flat | Yes |
| Gohar Dashti | Photographer | October, 11 | Café | No |
| Jila Dejam | Photographer | September, 18 | Dejam´s Studio | No |
| Siamak Filizadeh | Photographer | October, 11 | Filizadeh´s House | Yes |
| Tooraj Khamenezadeh | Photographer | October, 3 | Kooshk Residency | No |
| Ramyar Manoucherzadeh | Photographer | October, 11 | Manoucherzadeh´s Flat | Yes |
| Laleh Mostofi | Akhlaghi´s Assistant | October, 19 | Akhlaghi´s Office | No |
| Saleh Najafi | Lecturer on *By an Eye Witness* | October, 20 | Najafi´s Flat | No |
| Nazila Nobashari | Gallery Owner | September, 10 | Aaran Gallery | Yes |
| Ehsan Rasoulof | Gallery Owner | September, 29 | Rasoulof´s Office | Yes |
| Maryam Roshanfekr | Photography Institute Owner | September, 10 | Shirin Art Gallery | Yes |
| Hamid Severi | Photo-Historian | September, 26 | Mahr-e Mehr Cultural Institute | No |
| Arman Stepanian | Photographer | October, 13 | Stepanian´s Flat | Yes |

## 12. Mode of Transliteration: Encyclopaedia Iranica

| Consonants | | | | Vowels | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ء | ʾ | ض | ż | ـَا | ā |
| ب | b | ط | ṭ | ـُو | u |
| پ | p | ظ | ẓ | ـِی | i |
| ت | t | ع | ʿ | ـَ | a |
| ث | s̱ | غ | ḡ | ـُ | o |
| ج | j | ف | f | ـِ | e |
| چ | č | ق | q | ـه | a |
| ح | ḥ | ک | k | ـَو | ow/aw |
| خ | ḵ | گ | g | ـَی | ey/ay |
| د | d | ل | l | | |
| ذ | ḏ | م | m | | |
| ر | r | ن | n | | |
| ز | z | و | v | | |
| ژ | ž | ه | h | | |
| س | s | ی | y | | |
| ش | š | | | | |
| ص | ṣ | | | | |

Source: "Transliteration," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2015. Accessed January 18, 2016: http://www.iranicaonline.org/pages/guidelines

## 13. Credits of Figures

*Fig.1*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, *By an Eye Witness* (Tehran, 2013): 9.

*Fig.2*: Ibid.: 11.

*Fig.3*: Ibid.: 13.

*Fig.4*: Ibid.: 15.

*Fig.5:* Ibid.: 17

*Fig.6*: Ibid.: 18-19.

*Fig.7*: Ibid.: 23.

*Fig.8*: Ibid.: 25.

*Fig.9*: Ibid.: 27.

*Fig.10*: Ibid.: 29.

*Fig.11*: Ibid.: 30-31.

*Fig.12*: Ibid.: 35.

*Fig.13*: Ibid.: 37.

*Fig.14*: Ibid.: 39.

*Fig.15*: Ibid.: 43.

*Fig.16*: Ibid.: 45.

*Fig.17*: Ibid.: 47.

*Fig.18:* Homepage of Kaveh Golestan Foundation, URL: http://www.kavehgolestan.org /en/#photos/album/7/61 (January 11, 2016).

*Fig.19:* Malu Halasa/Maziar Bahra, eds., *Transit Tehran: Pop, Kunst, Politik, Religion: Junges Leben in Iran*, Zurich, Satis, 2008: 207.

*Fig.20*: Homepage of Shadi Ghadirian, URL: http://shadighadirian.com/index.php?do=photography&id=9#item-5 (January 8, 2016).

*Fig.21*: TIRAFKAN Cultural Foundation, ed., *A History for the Future: Sadegh Tirafkan* (Tehran, 2015): 47.

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Fig.*23*: Ibid.: 184.

*Fig.24*: Aphrodite Désirée Navab, "To Be or not to Be an Orientalist?: The Ambivalent Art of Antoin Sevruguin," *Iranian Studies* 35, no. 1-3: 138.

*Fig.25*: Maurizio Maurini, *Velázquez*, Milan, Electa, 1997: 122.

*Fig.26*: Navab, "To Be or not to Be an Orientalist?: 138.

*Fig.27*: Parisa Damandan, *Faces of Esfahan* (Tehran, 2012): 194.

*Fig.28*: Ibid.: 10.

*Fig.29*: Ahmad Aali, *Ahmad Ali: Selection of Works 1964-2009* (Tehran, 2010): 113.

*Fig.30:* Fereshteth Daftari, "Redefining Modernism: Pluralist Art Before the 1979 Revolution," in: Fereshteh Daftari and Layla S. Diba, eds., *Iran Modern* (New York, 2013): 38.

*Fig.31*: Rose Issa, *Iranian Photgraphy Now* (Ostfildern, 2008): 79.

*Fig.32*: TIRAFKAN Cultural Foundation, ed., *A History for the Future: Sadegh Tirafkan*: 27.

*Fig.33*: Ibid.: 31.

*Fig.34:* TMOCA, *The 5th Annual Photo Exhibition of Iran* (Tehran, 1993): 31.

*Fig.35:* TMOCA, *Iran Photo Biennial (The 6th Exhibition)* (Tehran, 1994): 71.

*Fig.36:* TMOCA, *Iran Photo Biennial (The 7th Exhibition)* (Tehran, 1996): 69.

*Fig.37*: Homepage of Shadi Ghadirian, URL: http://shadighadirian.com/index.php?do=photography&id=11#item-1 (January 8, 2016).

*Fig.38*: Homepage of Shadi Ghadirian, URL: http://shadighadirian.com/index.php?do=photography&id=18#item-5 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.39*: Homepage of Shadi Ghadirian, URL: http://shadighadirian.com/index.php?do=photography&id=17#item-16 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.40*: TIRAFKAN Cultural Foundation, ed., *A History for the Future: Sadegh Tirafkan*: 60.

*Fig.41*: Ibid.: 73.

*Fig.42*: Julian Kliemann and Michael Rohlmann (eds), Wandmalerei in Italien: *Die Zeit der Hochrenaissance und des Manierismus: 1510-1600*, Munich, Hirmer, 2004: 83

*Fig.43*: TIRAFKAN Cultural Foundation, ed., *A History for the Future. Sadegh Tirafkan*: 73.

*Fig.44*: Homepage of Third Line Gallery, URL: http://www.thethirdline.com/artists/shirin-aliabadi/selected-work-details/1354/1805 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.45*: Hamid Severi, "The New Generation of Iranian Art Photographers: Approaches and Challenges," in: Hamid Keshmirshekan, ed., *Amidst Shadow and Light: Contemporary Iranian Art and Artists* (Hong Kong, 2011): 84.

*Fig.46*: Arman Stepanian.

*Fig.47*: Homepage of Tooraj Khamenezadeh, URL: http://tooraj.ir/work/cemetery-worker/ (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.48*: Homepage of Silk Road Gallery, URL: http://www.silkroadartgallery.com/?ramyar-manouchehrzadeh (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.49*: Homepage of Gohar Dashti, URL: http://gohardashti.com/?page=gallery&item=2 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.50*: Homepage of Tahmineh Monzavi, URL: http://www.tahminehmonzavi.com/ (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.51*: Homepage of Newsha Tavakolian, URL: http://www.newshatavakolian.com/#a=0&at=0&mi=2&pt=1&pi=10000&s=0&p=1 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.52*: Homepage of Newsha Tavakolian, URL: http://www.newshatavakolian.com/#a=0&at=0&mi=2&pt=1&pi=10000&s=1&p=1 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.53*: Arman Stepanian.

*Fig.54:* Homepage of Gladstone Gallery, URL: http://www.gladstonegallery.com/artist/shirin-neshat/#&panel1-4 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.55*: Arman Stepanian.

*Fig.56:* Arman Stepanian.

*Fig.57*: Homepage of Silk Road Gallery, URL: http://silkroadartgallery.com/?ali-and-ramyar (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.58*: Homepage of Tooraj Khamenezadeh, URL: http://tooraj.ir/work/apprehension-jungle/ (January 9, 2016).

Fig.59: Michael Fuhr and Daniela Kumhala (eds), Edvard Much und das Unheimliche (Exhibition Catalog), Vienna, Christian Brandstätter Verlag, 2009: 94.

*Fig.60*: Homepage of White Cube Gallery, URL: http://whitecube.com/exhibitions/gregory_crewdson_beneath_the_roses_hoxton_square_2005/ (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.61*: Homepage of Gohar Dashti, URL: http://gohardashti.com/?page=gallery&item=7 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.62*: Homepage of Loretta Lux, URL: http://www.lorettalux.de/ (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.63*: Homepage of Gohar Dashti, URL: http://gohardashti.com/?page=gallery&item=11 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.64*: Homepage of Gohar Dashti, URL: http://gohardashti.com/?page=gallery&item=12 (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.65*: Homepage of Mitra Tabrizian, URL: http://mitratabrizian.com/untitled2009.php (January 9, 2016).

*Fig.66:* Homepage of Alireza Fani, URL: http://alirezafani.com/2011-a-memorial-for-today-1/ (January 11, 2016).

*Fig.67:* Homepage of Alireza Fani, URL: http://alirezafani.com/2012-im-the-one-who/ (January 11, 2016).

*Fig. 68*: Homepage of Mitra Tabrizian, URL: http://mitratabrizian.com/border.php (January 11, 2016).

*Fig.69*: Siamak Filizadeh.

*Fig.70:* Werner Hofmann, *Das entzweite Jahrhundert: Kunst zwischen 1750-1830*, Munich, Beck, 1995: 253.

*Fig.71:* Siamak Filizadeh

*Fig.72:* Frederick Hatt, *Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1969: 87.

*Fig.73:* Siamak Filizadeh.

*Fig.74:* Staci Gem Scheiwiller, *Mirrors Of Memories* (Saarbrücken, 2011): 204.

*Fig.75:* Siamak Filizadeh.

*Fig.76:* Homepage of MOMA, URL: http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2007/jeffwall/ (January 11, 2016).

*Fig.77:* Edward G. Browne The Persian Revolution 1905-1909 (Cambridge, 1910): Fig.23.

*Fig.78:* Ibid.: Fig. 24.

*Fig.79:* Hamid Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art* (London, 2013): 276.

*Fig.80:* Homepage of The National Gallery, URL: http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/jan-van-eyck-the-arnolfini-portrait (January 11, 2016).

*Fig.81:* Barjesteh van Waalwijk van Doorn and Gillian M. Vogelsang-Eastwood, eds., S*evruguin's Iran* (Rotterdam,1999): 29.

*Fig. 82*: Navab, "To Be or not to Be an Orientalist:" 140.

*Fig.83:* Homepage of Fitzwilliam Museum, URL: http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/paintinginfocus/extremeunction.html (January 11, 2016).

*Fig. 84:* Homepage of World Press Photo, URL: http://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/1991/spot-news/georges-m%C3%A9rillon (January 11, 2016).

*Fig.85:* Homepage of Reina Sofia, URL: http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/spanish-wake (January 11, 2016).

*Fig.86:* Klaus Albrecht Schröder and Antonia Hoerschelmann, ed., *Edvard Munch. Thema und Variation* (Ostfildern, 2003): 263.

*Fig.87:* Peter Rautmann, *Eugéne Delacroix*, Munich, Hirmer, 1997: 79.

*Fig.88:* Mara-Helen Wood, ed., *Edvard Munch: The Frieze of Life*, London, National Gallery Publications, 1992: 111.

*Fig. 89:* Hofmann, *Das entzweite Jahrhundert*: 509.

*Fig.90:* UNIDAM, University of Vienna, Department of Art History, Digital Slide Library.

*Fig.91:* Homepage of Magnum Photos, URL: http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult_VPage&VBID=2K1HZOQKZRUN68 (January 11, 2016).

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*Fig.98:* Sebastian Schütze, *Caravaggio: Das vollständige Werk*, Cologne, Taschen, 2009: 119.

*Fig.99:* Wolf Stadler (ed), *Lexikon der Kunst: Malerei, Architektur, Bildhauerkunst: Volume 8,* Eggolsheim, Dörfler im Nebel, 2006: 28.

*Fig.100*: Kristina Herrmann Fiore (ed), *Raffaelllo: La Deposizione in Galleria Borghese: Il Restauro e Studio Storico-Artistici* (Exhibition Catalogue), Milan, Federico Motta, 2010: 15.

*Fig.101:* UNIDAM, University of Vienna, Department of Art History, Digital Slide Library.

## 15. List of Figures[1]

*Fig.1*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Baghe-Shah, Tehran - Jahangir Khan Sur-e-Esrafil/Nasrollah Malek-al-Motekallemin/ 24 June 1908*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 188 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.2*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Mashhad - Colonel Mohammad Taghi-Khan Pesyan/ 07 October 1921*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 167 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

1 All information available concerning the images is given in the captions. If details, like dimensions or material are not listed, they are not known by the author. This is again caused by the sparse research done.

*Fig.3*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Tehran – Mirzadeh Eshghi/ 3 July 1924*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 209 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.4*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Qasr Prison – Mohammad Farrokhi Yazdi/ 17 October 1939*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 157 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.5*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Tehran – Taghi Arani/ 4 February 1940*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 165 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.6*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Faculty of Engineering, Tehran University – Azar Shariat Razavi, Ahmad Ghandchi, Mostafa Bozorgnia/ 7 December 1953*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 267 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.7*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Tehran – Forough Farrokhzad/ 13 February 1967*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 165 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.8*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Ahmad-abad, Iran – Mohammad Mosaddegh/ 5 March 1967*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 171 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.9*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Atlantic Hotel, Tehran – Gholam Reza Takhti/ 7 January 1968*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 184 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.10*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Aras River, Iran – Samad Behrangi/ 3 September 1968*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 174 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.11*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Tehran – Marzieh Ahmadi Oskuie/ 26 September 1974*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 318 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.12*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Evin Hills, Tehran – Bijan Jazani/ 18 April 1975*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 164 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.13*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: South Mehrabad House, Tehran – Hamid Ashraf/ 29 June 1976*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 175 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

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*Fig.15*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Tehran – Mahmoud Taleghani/ 10 September 1979*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 219 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.16*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Majnoon Islands, Iraq – Mehdi Bakeri/ 14 February 1979*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 212 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

*Fig.17*: Azadeh Akhlaghi, from the Series *By an Eye Witness: Chicago – Sohrab Shahid Sales/ 1 July 1998*, 2012, Digital Print on Photo Paper, 110 x 247 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi and Mohsen Gallery.

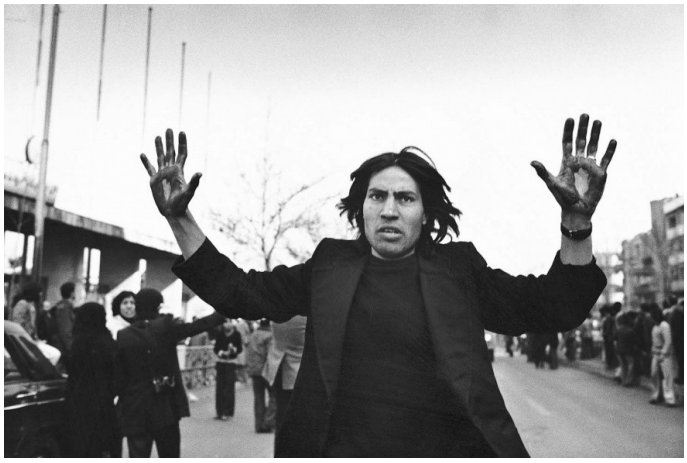

*Fig.18*: Kaveh Golestan, from the Collection *Revolution, Iran 1978-80: Hands and Blood*, Golestan Estate.

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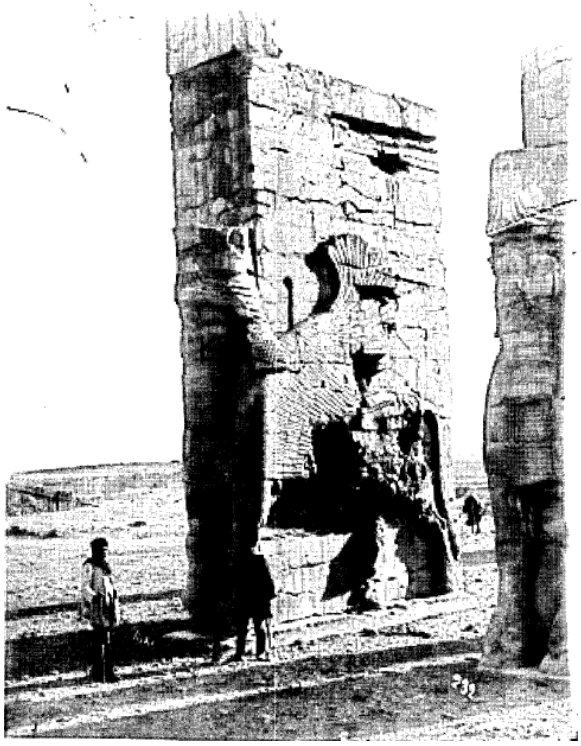

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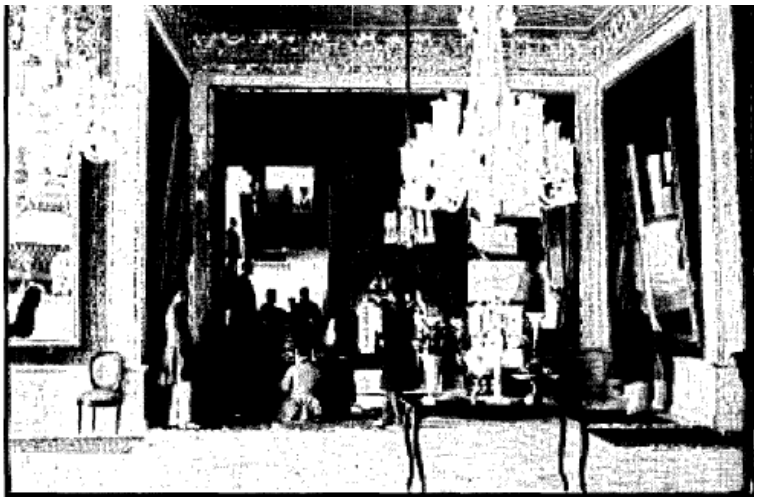

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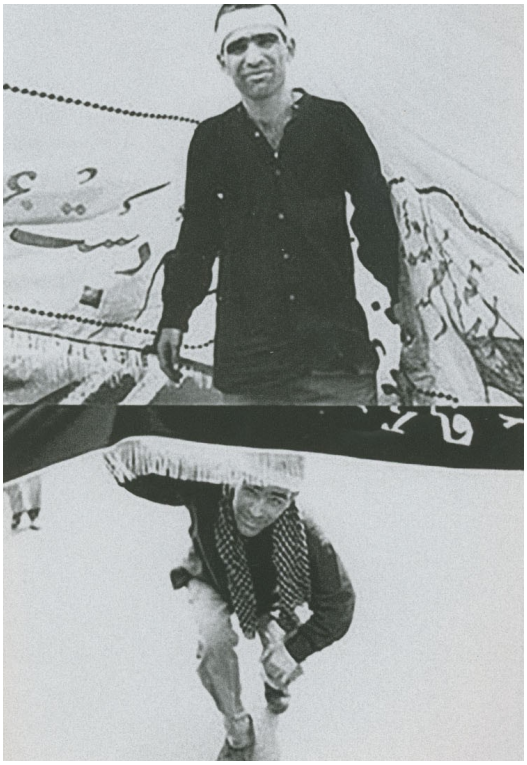

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*Fig.47*: Tooraj Khamenezadeh, from the Series *Cemetery Worker*, 2003, Digital Print on Photo Paper, Courtesy Tooraj Khamenezadeh.

*Fig.48*: Ramyar Manouchehrzadeh, from the Series *The Father*, 2003-2005, Analog Photography Digital Print, 15 x 35 cm, Courtesy Ramyar Manoucherzadeh.

*Fig.49*: Gohar Dashti, from the Series *Today´s Life and War*, 2008, C-Print, 120 x 90 cm, Courtesy Gohar Dashti.

*Fig.50*: Tahmineh Monzavi, from the Series *All About Me, nicknamed Crown Giver*, 2014, C-Print, 120 x 90 cm, Courtesy Tahmineh Monzavi.

*Fig.51*: Newsha Tavakolian, from the Series *Listen*, 2011, Archival Pigment Print, 105 x 130 cm, Courtesy Newsha Tavakolian.

*Fig.52*: Newsha Tavakolian, from the Series *Look*, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 105 x 140 cm, Courtesy Newsha Tavakolian.

*Fig.53*: Arman Stepanian, from the Series *The Hidden Meaning of Photography in Iran: Nazli*, 2010, C-Print, 100 x 70 cm, Courtesy Arman Stepanian.

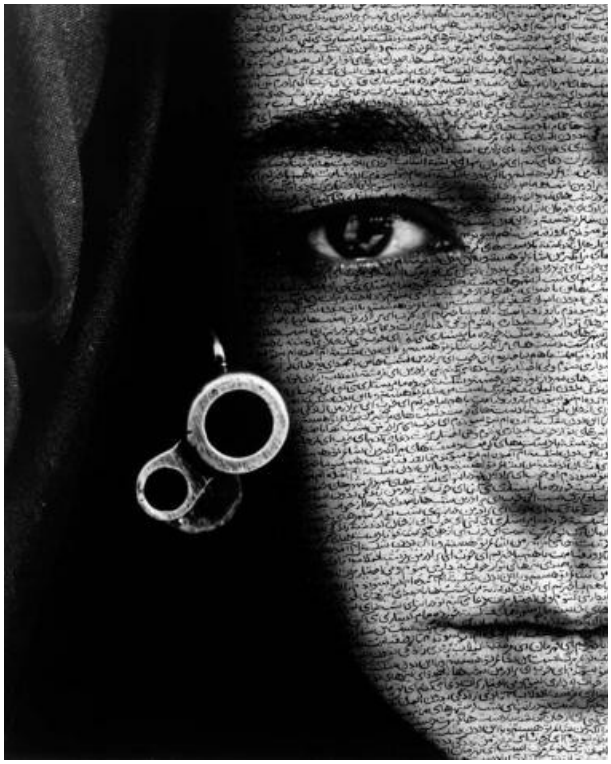

*Fig.54*: Shirin Neshat, from the Series *Women of Allah: Speechless*, 1996, Silver Gelatine Print and Ink, 36 x 28 cm, Courtesy Shirin Neshat.

*Fig.55*: Arman Stepanian, *New Version of Ghajar Photography*, 2008, C-Print, 100 x 70 cm, Courtesy Arman Stepanian.

*Fig.56*: Arman Stepanian, *1919-2005 Antoine & I*, 2015, C-Print on Photo Paper or Canvas, 100 x 70 cm, Courtesy Arman Stepanian.

*Fig.57*: Ramyar Manoucherzadeh and Ali Nadjian, from the Series *We Live in A Paradoxical Society*, 2009, C-Print, 100 x 100 cm, Courtesy Ramyar Manoucherzadeh and Ali Nadjian.

*Fig.58*: Tooraj Khamenezadeh, from the Series *Apprehension Jungle*, 2014, C-Face-Mounted Digital Print, 100 x 150 cm, Courtesy Tooraj Khamenezadeh.

*Fig.59*: Edvard Munch, *Ashes*, 1925, Oil on Canvas, 140 x 200 cm, Munch Museum Oslo.

*Fig.60*: Gregory Crewdson, From the Series *Beneath the Roses*: *Untitled*, 2003, Digital Chromogenic Print, 145 x 224 cm, Courtesy Gregory Crewdson.

*Fig.61*: Gohar Dashti, from the Series *Slow Decay*, 2010, Archival Digital Print, 100 x 150 cm, Courtesy Gohar Dashti.

*Fig.62*: Loretta Lux, *Yanan*, 2004, C-Print, 23 x 32 cm, Courtesy Loretta Lux.

*Fig.63*: Gohar Dashti, from the Series *Volcano*, 2012, Archival Digital Pigment Print, 120 x 180 cm, Courtesy Gohar Dashti.

*Fig.64*: Gohar Dashti, from the Series *Iran, Untitled*, 2013, Archival Digital Pigment Print, 100 x 80 cm, Courtesy Gohar Dashti.

*Fig.65*: Mitra Tabrizian, *Untitled*, 2009, C- Print, 107 x 307 cm, Courtesy Mitra Tabrizian.

*Fig.66*: Alireza Fani, from the Series *A Memorial for Today: #5*, 2011, Archival Print, 90 x 120 cm, Courtesy Alireza Fani.

*Fig.67*: Alireza Fani, from the Series *I´m the One Who...: Green Card*, 2012, Archival Print, 120 x 180 cm, Courtesy Alireza Fani.

*Fig.68*: Mitra Tabrizian, from the Series *Borders: The Long Wait*, 2005/06, C- Print, 122 x 152 cm, Courtesy Mitra Tabrizian.

*Fig.69*: Siamak Filizadeh, from the Series *Underground: Murder of Amir Kabir,* 2014, C-Print, 80 x 135 cm, Courtesy Siamak Filizadeh.

*Fig.70*: Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Marat*, 1793, Oil on Canvas, 165 x 128 cm, Museum of Fine Arts Brussels.

*Fig.71*: Siamak Filizadeh, from the Series *Underground: Shah Without Shroud (Kafan)*, 2014, C- Print, 130 x 130 cm, Courtesy Siamak Filizadeh.

*Fig.72*: Michelangelo Buonarotti, *Pietá*, 1499, Marble and Stone, 174 x 195 cm, St. Peter´s Basilica Rome.

*Fig.73*: Siamak Filizadeh, from the Series *Underground: The Flying Gazelle*, 2014, C-Print, 150 x 100 cm, Courtesy Siamak Filizadeh.

*Fig.74*: *Iranian Woman on a Bicycle*, mid 19th century, Courtesy Rana Javadi.

*Fig.75*: Siamak Filizadeh, from the Series *Underground: Execution*, 2014, C- Print, 222 x 138 cm, Courtesy Siamak Filizadeh.

*Fig.76*: Jeff Wall, *Picture for Women*, 1979, Silver Dry Bleach Trasnparency (Cibachrom) Aluminium Light Box, 142,5 x 204,5 cm, Courtesy Jeff Wall.

*Fig.77*: *Constitutionalists in Chains at Bagh-i-Shah*, 1908.

*Fig.78*: *Colonel V. Liakhoff*, between 1890 and 1910.

*Fig.79*: Azadeh Akhlaghi from the Series *Me as Preferred by Others*, 2007, C- Print, 60 x 80 cm, Courtesy Azadeh Akhlaghi.

*Fig.80*: Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, 1434, Oil on Oak, 82 x 60 cm, The National Gallery London.

*Fig.81*: *Antoin Sevruguin*, between 1930 and 1933, Modern Gelatine Silver Print from Original Photograph, Courtesy Emanuel Sevruguan (sic!).

*Fig.82*: Antoin Sevruguin, *The Hanging of Mirza Reza Kermani*, 1896, Albumen Print, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Myron Bementh Smith Collection.

*Fig.83*: Nicolaus Poussin, *Extreme Unction*, c. 1638-40, Oil on Canvas, 96 x 121 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum University of Cambridge.

*Fig.84*: Georges Mérillon, *Mourning in Kosovo*, 1990, C-Print, Courtesy Georges Mérillon.

*Fig.85*: Eugene W. Smith, *Spanish Wake*, 1950, Gelatin Silver Print on Paper Mounted on Paperboard, 23 x 34 cm, Museo Reina Sofia Madrid.

*Fig.86*: Edvard Munch, *At the Deathbed*, 1895, Oil on Canvas, 90 x 121 cm, Rasmus Meyers Samlinger Kunstmuseum Bergen.

*Fig.87*: Eugéne Delacroix, *Orphan at the Cemetery*, 1824, Oil on Canvas, 66 x 54 cm, Musée du Louvre Paris.

*Fig.88*: Edvard Munch, *The Dead Mother and the Child*, 1897-9, Oil on Canvas, 105 x 179 cm, Munch Museum Oslo.

*Fig.89*:Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, *The 3rd of May 1808*, 1814, Oil on Canvas, 266 x 345 cm, Prado Madrid.

*Fig.90*:Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, *Desastres de la Guerra: Y no hay Remedio*, 1810, Etching Drypoint Burin and Burnisher, 14 x 17 cm, The Metropolitan Museum New York.

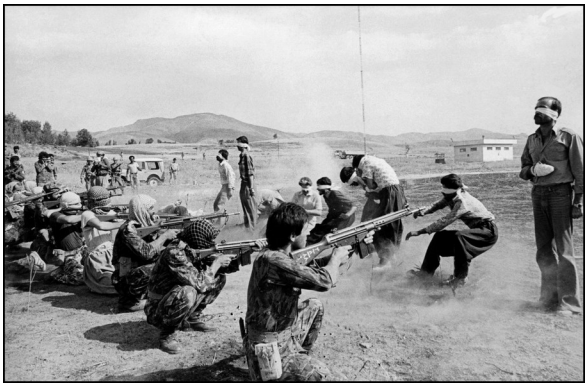

*Fig.91*: Jahangir Razmi, *Shooting at Sanandaj Airport*, 1979, Photo-Print, Courtesy of Jahangir Razmi and Magnum Photos.

*Fig.92*: Kaveh Golestan, from the Collection *Revolution, Iran 1978-80.*

*Fig.93*: *Dead Protestor of the Green Movement*, 2009.

*Fig.94*: *The Dead Mohammad Ghanian*, 2009.

*Fig.95*: Jürgen Henschel, *The Death of Benno Ohnesorg*, 1967, Photo-Print, Courtesy of Ullstein Photos.

*Fig.96*: John Filo, *Kent State Shooting*, 1970, Photo-Print, Courtesy of John Filo and AP.

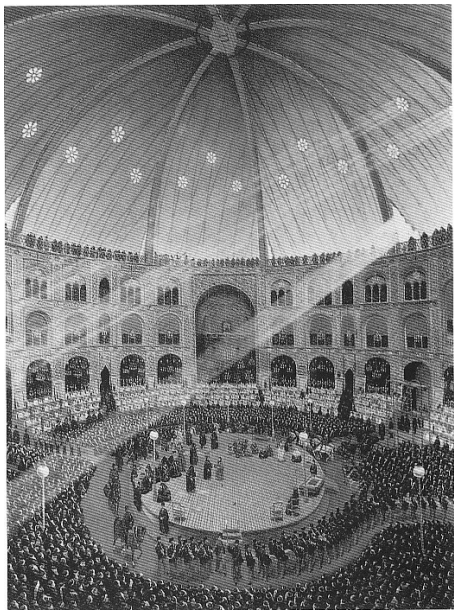

*Fig.97*: Kamal al-Molk, *Takkiyah Dowlat*, ca. 1906, Oil on Canvas, Golestan Palace Collection Tehran.

*Fig.98*: Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio, *The Crucifixion of St. Peter,* 1602, Oil on Canvas, 230 x 175 cm, Santa Maria del Popolo Rome.

*Fig.99*: Andrea Mantegna, *The Lamentation of Christ,* ca. 1501, Tempera on Canvas, 68 x 81 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera Milan.

*Fig.100*: Raffael, *The Entombement,* ca. 1507, Oil on Wood, 184 x 176 cm, Villa Borghese Rome.

*Fig.101*: Jan van Eyck, *Rolin Madonna,* 1435, Oil on Wood, 65 x 62 cm, Musée du Louvre Paris.