

Evaluation of Nargess Khodabakhshi's
Dissertation, *Oil Fashion and Modernization: A History of Fashion and Dress in Iran, 1941-1979*
submitted by Babak Elahi

Account of the Dissertation

The dissertation provides a historiographic and ethnographic analysis of Iranian fashion and dress in the context of Pahlavi era modernization, and the impacts of the dynamic political economy of oil as it impacted middle-class wealth, culture, and politics. It further examines ideological, conceptual, cultural, and rhetorical struggles over representation of the self and national identity through developments in fashion from the late Qajar era through the post-1979 period, with particular emphasis given to the period between 1941 and 1979.

Methodological Approach

The methodology combines qualitative ethnographic interviews, including both in-person and social media interactions, with magazine analysis, and visual analysis within a historical context. This combination of historiographical critique and qualitative social science methodology takes on an inductive (rather than deductive) approach. In other words, Khodabakhshi examines a rich body of evidence, and draws conclusions based on that preponderance of evidentiary material. Rather than beginning with theory which is then applied to texts, Khodabakhshi begins with the argument that there really are no reliable studies of fashion and dress in Iran. What does exist is, in fact, limited by its ideological frame. Thus, beginning with a theoretical frame would risk reproducing the ideological limits of previous commentary on clothing—much of it coming out of political commentary or academic bias against focusing on fashion.

Contextualization

As the Khodabakhshi argues, the dissertation fills the gap in fashion studies of Iran between a Western approach to fashion in terms of consumption or class on the one hand, and colonial or postcolonial readings that, nevertheless, continue to rely on Orientalist binaries, or to misread or mis-contextualize the indigenous approaches to dress on the other. Relying on an interdisciplinary approach, the author successfully links her analysis to pre-revolutionary studies of dress and garments in Iranian literature. She also links her own study to Katouzian's concept of Iran as a "short-term society," that is, a society marked by rupture rather than continuity. This cultural discontinuity, the dissertation argues, is a fruitful theoretical area of exploring both Iran and fashion, and how fashion and oil modernization clashed and combined to produce a perplexing historical moment through Mohamad Reza Pahlavi's (also interrupted) reign, and into the post-revolutionary era. In this sense, the dissertation contributes to several areas at once—Iranian modernization, postcolonial fashion studies, gender and class analysis of Iran, digital cultures and nostalgia, and more.

While I respect Khodabakhshi's inductive approach—beginning with evidence and moving to concepts and theories—I still think a bit more could be done to set up not so much a theoretical framework as a set of theoretic tools and conceptual conversations. However, this reframing need not be done for the purpose of approving the dissertation, which I am wholly in support of. Rather, these recommendations might help in revising the dissertation for submission to a university press as a manuscript.

This conceptual contextualization might include steps such as complicating the term "ideology," perhaps by drawing more from Barthes's notion of "Mythologies." This need for further context could also include engaging with contemporary scholars ranging from Amy Motlagh's ideas in *Burying the Beloved* to the work of Michael Warner and others on the public sphere, and Siamdoust's work on Iranian

popular music and the revolution. Warner's concept of publics and counterpublics would be particularly useful (especially in chapter 4). In addition, I think Janice Radway's work on women readership of romance novels might be a useful way to frame the dissertation's analysis of women's fashion magazines. Simadoust's work in particular could be helpful in linking fashion culture with pop music culture.

Summarizing Assessment

Chapter 1

The first chapter lays out the disciplinary and historiographic stakes of the project quite convincingly. Khodabakhshi provides a thorough literature survey. What is most impressive about this survey is that it links this project on Iranian fashion to broader debates over fashion studies outside the west. It also successfully identifies the gaps in this literature, as well as the need for a study of Iran specifically. The section on method and methodology is also more than mere housekeeping or context setting—it points to the ways that this study innovates upon earlier fashion studies, explains the need for certain approaches to the material, and acknowledges the limiting factors of the work. Ultimately, the introductory chapter is structured as a call-and-response. The literature survey identifies gaps not only in what is covered in international fashion studies, but also how non-western fashions are approached. This call to fill a gap in the research is met with the response of the section on methodology, which identifies ethnography, visual analysis, and historiography as the approaches being deployed here. These methods are much more inductive than deductive as noted above. This section argues that traditional approaches that focus on industry or consumption, or that rely on existing ideological or even theoretical binaries will not suffice for a study of complex postcolonial cultures like Iran. The combination of historiographic, ethnographic, and visual analyses meet the needs of this study.

Chapter 2

The second chapter does an impressive job of historicizing tailoring and the emergence of fashion in Iran despite the paucity of secondary sources, or reliable primary sources. Despite the limited material, Khodabakhshi is able to outline a history of how cultural practices surrounding women's and men's dress were impacted by and helped shape political debates (particularly around the Constitutional Revolution). This brief history is followed by an exploration of how tailoring morphed into fashion design. I am particularly impressed by how resourceful Khodabakhshi is in her use of sources—primary, secondary, and tributary (if I might use this term to refer to literary texts). For example, she brilliantly uses Simin Daneshvar's novel, *Savushun*, as a source for understanding how the Singer sewing machine influenced tailoring, household clothing production, and colonial influences on Iranian society. Moreover, the visual examples themselves become a source not only of speculation, but of confirmation of Khodabakhshi's claims. Khodabakhshi is able to triangulate historical resources to develop a narrative of how domestic tailoring, industrial developments, the unveiling decree of 1936, and other cultural shifts worked to aid the transition from tailoring to fashion design.

Interestingly, this chapter also deals with academic interest in dress—this is an important part of several recent scholarly explorations of Iranian nationalism. These studies show how the emergence of academic disciplines of ethnography were part of the development of a kind of Persianist nationalism. It's interesting to note that archeological explorations of dress may also have been a factor in these academic developments. Other developments include the influential work of Pouri Farhoodi, whose designs for Queen Farah are emblematic of the ways in which haute couture and borrowed regional and traditional designs began to blend in complex ways.

Khodabakhshi's use of Goffman via Volonte is refreshing here as an update to the heavy reliance on Simmel and Veblen in other fashion studies. This sort of anthropological conceptual framing could be enhanced even more when the dissertation is being prepared for publication. The Goffman perspective

opens up an opportunity to explore figures like Googoosh, who is for many of us in the diaspora a touchstone of cultural co-belonging. I will mention in passing that this chapter also introduces an interesting debate and puzzle of terminology for “Iranian clothing.” How should we refer to indigenous clothing of Iranian ethnic and subethnic groups? I suspect the debate here is similar to that in discussions of Iranian music where terms like “sonnati” (national), “asil” (authentic), and “....” (traditional) are debated, along with questions such as using terms like Persian as opposed to Iranian. I would also suspect there’s the question of whether Iranian traditional clothing might be related to other national and regional dress such as Turkish, Afghan, Arab, and other traditions. The chapter briefly goes into this in relation to the ‘aba. The chapter’s discussion of the chador is particularly interesting partly because it is so undramatic in this dissertation. In that sense, the routineness with which the chador is presented in relation to other forms of dress avoids needless dramatization.

Chapter 3

The third chapter opens with an interesting historiographical discussion of the paucity of historical accounts of the Persepolis celebration of 1971. This is an excellent point. While the event loomed large culturally for Iranians at home and abroad, it seems to occupy nothing more than a footnote or, at best, a passing refrain in historical accounts. This historiographical point then sets us up for a reading of the event through visual artifacts. I wonder if interview data could be used here—I distinctly remember seeing the event on TV in England as a 6-year-old child. I suspect that Khodabakhshi’s informants would have similar memories and could, perhaps, shed light on these issues.

Again, for a later stage of developing this dissertation into a book proposal, I would recommend consulting Zia-Ebrahimi’s *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*. Zia-Ebrahimi provides a reading of Iranian nationalist discourse that places it squarely within Aryanism. If nothing else, this source might help frame the event theoretically. Reza Zia-Ebrahimi does, in fact, discuss the parade in Chapter 8 of his book. Parts of this chapter might have benefitted from a clearer theoretical grounding. I wonder if Barthes’s concept of secondary signification in “Mythologies” might be useful here.

Chapter 4

This chapter explores “Iranian fashion media,” focusing in particular on women’s magazines. The analyses of *Zan-e Rouz* and *Ettelaat-e Banovan* provide an important historicizing and conceptualizing of gendered bodies in Iran in the Mohamad Reza Pahlavi era (from the 1950s to the ’79 revolution). While I continue to see the value of the inductive (evidence first, concepts to follow) approach, I also think that more can be done to frame the discussion in this chapter.

I recommend moving more of the theoretical material to the beginning of the chapter. (This might be a disciplinary difference. As a literary scholar and humanist, I work deductively by starting with the theory and moving on to the analysis of the evidence.) Perhaps the ethnographic, anthropological, and historiographic approach being used here could be helped with earlier hybrid approaches to theoretical vs. ethnographic approaches. I would strongly recommend consulting Janice Radway’s work on women’s reading of Romance novels as a form of resistance. Along with Stuart Hall’s complication of clunky old Marxist approaches, Radway’s reading of literature can help frame Khodabakhshi’s approach to women’s magazines. As Radway argued about Romance novels, Khodabakhshi argues that Iranian women’s production and consumption of fashion magazines was not a frivolous consumer pastime, but, rather, a form of radical resistance to the policing of bodies.

The work of Stuart Hall and Roland Barthes help ground this chapter in existing debates, but this material comes too late in this chapter. The work of Roland Barthes on the fashion system is useful, but I would say including a reference to Barthes’ “Mythologies” might make the theoretical framing stronger.

This is especially the case because one of the arguments Khodabakhshi makes throughout the work is that some ideologies present themselves as natural or invisible.

Chapter 5

Chapter Five moves from women's magazines of the late Pahlavi era to diasporic as well as domestic digital discourse on dress of the post-revolutionary era.

However, the chapter reads like two separate chapters. First, the section on Ale Ahmad, Shariati, and Mottahari could be linked to Khodabakhshi's discussion of academia and ideology in Chapter 2. Moreover, I think some terms and ideas could be more fully theorized earlier in the chapter. I very much like and agree with the idea that academic institutionalized Iranian studies have neglected (though perhaps are not necessarily hostile to) studying fashion. However, I do think there are scholars within Iranian studies who are examining popular culture through music, dance, magazines, etc. A good example here, as I've already mentioned, is Siamdoust's work. The fact that fashion (as opposed to ethnic dress or the veil) isn't among the pop cultural phenomenon being given academic attention is interesting. Khodabakhshi seems to suggest that this neglect is an outgrowth of the ideological hostility against modern fashion from the likes of Shariati, Ale Ahmad, and Mottahari. I see the possible link here, but find the argument to be disjointed. Much of this work has already been accomplished in Chapter 2, and so I wonder if it is better to move some of this material to that chapter.

One other way to consider this chapter is to significantly shorten the first part, and focus it more on setting up a theoretical framework for the second part. This condensing of part one (partly by moving some of the material to chapter 2), could open up space for more theoretical framing. One scholar who might help with this theorizing is Amy Motlagh. Though she doesn't deal directly with fashion, Motlagh does explore how gender was modernized in her book *Burying the Beloved*.

What I imagine is starting out the chapter with a discussion of how both within and outside Iran internet users seem to be nostalgic for fashion trends of the pre-1979 era. Then, at some point, the chapter could "cut away" to a historical and theoretical "flashback," as it were, to consider what internet users might be nostalgic for, and how that nostalgia works rhetorically to revise (reimagine) the past either in a utopian way or as a discursive strategy that can serve current agitation against the Islamic Republic's status quo, as well as the status quo within institutionalized academic approaches to Iranian popular culture (which, I agree, is sorely lacking in its attention to fashion).

The second section on digital nostalgia for pre-revolutionary fashion among both internal and diasporic groups is fascinating and useful, but it is somewhat watered down because of the long set-up in part one of the chapter. Moreover, there seems to be an elision between online and in-person cultures that is unconvincing in its current form (I have noted this in the margins of the text and can share this with Khodabakhshi. This needs to be explained better and argued more convincingly. Moreover, the distinction between academia and online groups is somewhat an apples-and-oranges comparison. One useful theoretical view might be to consider the idea of the public sphere, especially Michael Warner's concept of "publics and counterpublics."

Finally, in terms of the primary evidence, the texts presented are left mostly unanalyzed and untheorized. Long quotes are presented from online sources, but these quotes are not analyzed sufficiently—they are left to speak for themselves. The restructuring I recommend above would open up space for a more detailed rhetorical analysis of quotes presented toward the end of this chapter. The last section of the chapter ought to be moved closer to the beginning to provide fuller theoretical grounding.

Conclusion

Conclusion: The conclusion summarizes the dissertation. As the section on original contribution to knowledge suggests, this dissertation is a much-needed foray into discussing fashion in Iran.

Several Stylistic Suggestions

Khodabakshi relies extensively on the introductory/transitional phrase, “Due to this.” Often, what is covered in the previous sentence is too complex to be summed up in the word “this” as a transition. And, in any case, the transitional phrase seems clunky. Also, Khodabakhshi tends to use “shah” without a definite article: Check usage. The word “content” doesn’t take on an “s” for plural. In other places, some sentences seem incomplete or confusing in some way. Finally: “composed” vs. “comprised”: Check usage.

Grade

While I think this dissertation is “very good,” I still think it can be better, and can be improved especially for the purpose of submitting it to a university press for publication. I do not recommend or require extensive revision at this point. Some changes can be made. Given the excellent contribution to both fashion studies and Iranian studies, this is a strong dissertation from a resourceful scholar. I suspect the study will be appealing to university presses.

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Dissertation Appraisal for Mag. art. Nargess Khodabakhshi (0870015)
Oil Fashion and Modernization: A History of Fashion and Dress in Iran, 1941-1979

Scientific relevance and topicality

This historiography of fashion and clothing cultures before the Islamic revolution is a long-awaited, most timely, excellent contribution to Iranian history as well as to the field of global and Middle East fashion studies. Based on rich source material as multi-sited oral history interviews, images, media and magazines, Khodabakhshi's dissertation is of high scientific relevance, as it represents the first comprehensive monograph on fashion discourses and dress practices from the era of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979) including a social media study on the role of fashion as driver for the collective memories of the Iranian Diaspora. In Iran fashion and dress practices are highly political and timely issues. Today, after being arrested for supposedly wearing a hijab "improperly", Mahsa Amini died (9/2022) in the custody of the Iranian morality police. After following protests that demanded an end of the mandatory hijab, an ongoing national revolt evolved. Khodabakhshi's thesis provides an understanding of the historical and social background of the long histories of the protest movements on dress, fashion and gender regulations in Iran, from the abolishment of women's veils and chadors in 1936 by Reza Shah – in parallel to the secular reforms of Atatürk – to the implementation of compulsory hijab by the Mullah regime in 1980.

Content and structure

Khodabakhshi structures her work clearly into five chapters, each highlighting a different facet of the history of fashion and dress in Iran (1941-1979). Chapter 1 outlines the state of research, research questions and methods. Chapter 2 covers an historical overview on dress, fashion and clothing cultures in modern Iran. This is followed by the analysis of debates and performances (Persepolis parade 1971) on national fashion and dress in chapter 3 that also reflects on the creation of an Iranian imperial couture during the 1970s oil boom. While chapter 4 highlights Iranian 'fashion' images, gender and media analysis in the period 1941-1979, chapter 5 outlines how contemporary Iranian diasporan communities revitalize fashion images from the Pahlavi era on social media as part of memory cultures, nostalgia and imaginaries for future politics of liberation. The thesis concludes with the headline 'The present in the mirror of the past', presenting a summary of the findings of each chapter (1-5). In doing so, Khodabakhshi once again highlights the connections between historic debates on fashion and dress during the Pahlavi Era and contemporary discussions about fashion in Iran. Finally, Khodabakhshi closes with Walter Benjamin's concept of history, assigning fashion the role of the 'tiger's leap' (288). The bibliography (289-324) is followed by an extensive appendix of 200 pages of source material (1-3).

Development of topic and (argumentative) structure

Khodabakhshi analyzes the history of fashion and clothing in the Pahlavi era under the perspective of "Oil Fashion and Modernization". Providing an excellent in-depth introduction to the triad of oil, fashion and modernization, she defines her subject matter very well. In doing so, she spans a wide historical and thematic scope. This ranges from the intellectual debates on modernity and futurism in 18th century's Iran, which conceptualized fashion as a European "time-based" concept of completion (Aboutalb-e Esfahni), to the denial and condemnation of Western dress practices by Shiite clerics (Kermani 1856) in the mid-19th century. It further connects the colonial endeavor of the Anglo-

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Perisan Oil Company (APOC est. 1890s) and its modernization strategies to the importance of modern fashion for nationalist agendas in 20th century Iran.

Departing from a postcolonial, de-orientalizing viewpoint Khodabakhshi emphasizes that Fashion Studies on Middle Eastern cultures should be done from a meta-terminological perspective. Terms as as fashion, garment, clothing, costume, regional costume are also set in relation to Farsi terminology (see: 5).

Current state of research and literature review

The literature review starts from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and highlights contemporary fashion theory based on postcolonial critique, de-orientalizing, decolonizing and so-called non-Western concepts (Craik 1994; Kawamura 2006/2015; Niessen, Lehkowich, and Jones 2005; Gaugele and Titton 2019). Khodabakhshi emphasizes that besides Balasescu's (2007) comparative study on Paris and Tehran there is a large research gap in fashion studies on and from the Iran. She mentions major Farsi work on Iranian costume, fashion and textiles history (Ziapour 1965) and online sources of its 'fragmented discourse' as on *Encyclopedia Iranica*, *Women's world on Qajar*, or multimedia platforms as *Abdan:Retold*. However, scholarly journal articles as e.g. from *Iranian Studies* on Dress Codes and Nation-Building (Cheabi 1993) or from the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* focusing on gender, sexuality, and women's studies (e.g. Zahedi 2007) are not part of the scope. Khodabakhshi primarily addresses critical research on Orientalism in fashion studies (Geczy 20213), on Arab dress practices (El-Guindi 2003), studies on Moroccan (Jansen 2015) and Uzbek (Mentges/Shamukhitdinova 2013) fashion cultures, as well as on global Muslim fashion (Tarlo 2010; Lewis 2013; van Rojen 2012). At the same time Khodabakhshi critically points out that colonialist, orientalist and islamophobic mindsets are still perpetuated in the work of fashion scholars, as e.g., by Moors (2013) or Vinken (2013).

Research method(s) and presentation of the research question(s)

Presenting her research question in the introduction, Khodabakhshi further outlines additional questions in chapter 1 (29-32). Emphasizing the importance of a precise methodological approach, for her dissertation Khodabakhshi methodologically entangles fashion historiography, ethnography and visual/material culture analysis (see: chapter 1, part III. 32-50). In doing so, she aims to identify the central narratives and themes of the source materials (see: Ossman 2002; Tarlo 2010; Jansen 2015; Lewis 2013) and applies triangulation to analyze multiple datasets in relation to the research question (49). Khodabakhshi's empirical data are based on qualitative multi-sited interviews with contemporary witnesses and experts of Iranian fashion, textiles and design, film and photography, art and culture, business and politics. Further data has been collected through ethnographic research, creating narrative everyday situations through crafting and yarning (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010) together with interview partners (47). Based on Ritchie et al.'s (2016) methodology, Khodabakhshi analyzes Farsi women's magazines (Ritchie et al. 2016). Furthermore, she applies visual culture analysis and digital ethnography (Pink 2016) to investigate image material from private archives, online databases and social media (40).

Access to sources, materials, and research fields

First of all, it is necessary, to highlight and to highly appreciate Khodabakhshi's outstanding commitment, longstanding dedication and mindfulness in collecting and dealing with very sensitive research data. Her access to fieldwork and source material was complicated by the Islamic Republic's censorship measures so that official organizations such as state art universities and the National Library in Tehran have partially prevented her access to source material from the Pahlavi era (50).

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While searching for private sources and buying magazines at the black market, interviewees had been concerned about possible consequences from the Iranian authorities, dealing with subjects the Islamic Republic categorizes as critical. Consequently, some interviews, Khodabakhshi (51) states, are characterized by “disquiet and conservatism” caused by the fear of repression: “Such self-imposed censorship (known as *khod sansouri*) among local and diasporic authors is one of the main reasons for the lack of fashion literature in Iran.” (50)

All source materials are described very precisely and in detail. The “Notes on Interviews” section briefly exposes the biographies of the contemporary witnesses from Tehran, Vienna, and Paris (39-42). The section on magazine analysis describes the Farsi women's magazines *Ettelaat-e Banovan* and *Zan-e Rouz*, Khodabakhshi accessed in paper and digitally (44- 46). The section on visual analysis describes the broad collections of historical images from private and online collections that ranges from photography, video footage, Farsi movies, postcards, illustrations, to material objects from private fashion collections (46-50). Furthermore, Khodabakhshi studied personal web pages, social media accounts, and online archives of the Iranian diaspora, such as Harvard University's Oral History Project (1920-1980) (38). Moreover, she set up a social media platform (Pinterest) for Iranian fashion history and finally created an own remarkable archive of more than 1,000 objects, as photos, videos and documents, vintage magazines, postcards, wedding invitation, stamps und fashion items as shoes, bags, clutches, and garments.

At the same time Khodabakhshi is aware that her material corpus is limited to the life of Tehran's Muslim Farsi-speaking middle class and that her reconstruction of Iranian fashion/clothing history 1941-1979 did not take voices from other social groups, or minorities into account (35).

It is also an excellent achievement of the dissertation, that Khodabakhshi has included an impressive 170 double pages appendix of her Farsi interview transcripts to the work (see: appendix 3) and thus makes it available for further researchers.

The interpretation/discussion/analysis/evaluation of the results

Based on grounded theory, the interpretation and discussion of the results is organized in four main chapters (2-5). Rich in detail, each chapter focusses on different aspect of the fashion and dress system in Iran (1941-1979).

Following Kawamura's (2004) definition of fashion as an “institutionalized system” (59), **chapter 2** traces this development from the establishment of tailoring to design education (Farah Pahlavi Univeristy 1965) (75) and to the emergence of a modern consumer culture with department stores as Kourosh in parallel to bazaar economies, based on Iran's rising mass production in small and medium sized workshops (87). The chapter also stresses how much innovations in tailoring had been formed on the one hand by Russian, European and Jewish immigrants and refugees (63), and by colonial activities from the Singer Company in the Middle East on the other, who sold sewing machines to the support of the British against the Pahlavi state (61-62). Later the production of synthetic fiber at the Polyacryl Iranian Company (PIC), had been pushed by US-investment due to the significance of the oil industry (91-93). Reconstructing fashion history, Khodabakhshi on the one hand emphasizes the rising influence of French Fashion as well as the attention of international fashion media as Vogue (1969) for Tehran's emerging fashion boutique culture, its own fashion scene (82) and upcoming fashion influencers (99). On the other hand, she describes the introduction of paramilitary uniforms for the masses as well as the popularity of chadors and fashionable aba(ya)s in pre-revolutionary Iran (113). Finally, Khodabakhshi supplements her reconstruction of the Iranian dress and fashion system with a historical timeline (1800-1979) (see: appendix 1).

Chapter 3 deals with the role of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and Queen and Empress Farah Pahlavi in creating public images and bodies of the Iranian nation state. Here the results are mostly compared to Iranian Studies, dealing with the political and economic conditions at the time (Milani 2008, 2013; Katouzian 2013; Amanat 2017). Khodabakhshi discusses the 1971's four-day ceremony at the Persepolis archeological site as a significant cultural moment of cultural history narration, a Hollywood epics and “a modern manifesto for Iranian costume and fashion history” (128), reenacting the master narrative of the ‘great civilizations’, introduced by Western (costume) historiographies since the 1800s. Performing a linear narrative of Iran's imperial history from the Achaemenian (550-330 B.C.) to the modern Pahlavi dynast, the Shah performed Persia's ancient heritage, to expand his domestic claims to autocratic power as well as his visions to take over as the Middle East's superpower (129). Employing Parisian stylists and Italian and French designers as Valentino or Lanvin, Queen Farah Pahlavi personally has supervised the selection of clothing and textiles during the celebrations. While the performance of the national body at the Persepolis Parade largely drew on the power of historic uniforms, it was the role of the Queen to foster Imperial Couture with the idea of Iranian dress based on local handicraft, fabric and pattern (144). She enabled different actors to investigate Iranian crafts and textiles and to shape a debate on the importance of handmade arts and culture within Pahlavi politics (151). Khodabakhshi shows that while Farsi periodicals introduced the queen as a patron of culture through her devotion to Iranian styles, magazines as *Life*, *Elle* or *Vogue* admired her Western sense of fashion. Western media even staged a beauty competition between Queen Farah and Jacqueline Kennedy parallel to their husbands's alliance and the US-Iranian power relations (140).

Chapter 4 examines the history and discourses of Iranian dress illustrations, fashion photography, and women's magazines. These evaluations are linked to theories and studies of fashion and de-orientalization (Gezy 2013), postcolonialism (Hall 1996), Iranian Cinema (Sadr 2006), Iranian Women and Lifestyle Magazines (Najmabadi 2005; Kashani-Sabet 2006; Shahidi 2007; Balasescu 2007; Milani 2008; Sadjed 2012, Karimi 2013; Kosahri and Tafresi 2017), and to women's history and feminisms (Hoodfar 1999; Amin 2001; Fazaeli 2016). The first section tells about Iranian fashion media, including artistic illustrations, photography and fashion photography. By the example of two issues of *Vogue* – one in the 1920s and another in 12/1969 dedicated to “Persia” and “mode” - it also addresses the long history of the Orientalist gaze of Western fashion magazines (180). Especially worth highlighting are the parts based on the knowledge of contemporary witnesses, as photographer Kamyar Sadr who was commissioned to take photographs of members of different ethnic groups and their regional lifestyles for several official publications during the 1970s (172). The second part on Women's Magazines as media and mediators of fashion, focuses on two major women's magazines, *Zan-e Rouz* (est. 1964) and 1970s *Ettelaat-e Banovan* (192 ff.), produced by Kayhan and Ettelaat, the two largest press companies at the time, who had been even organizer of the Miss Iran pageant. In the final section Khodabakhshi reflects on the importance of the mentioned magazines as documents of women's history (206) and a mirror of secular and leftist feminist discourse (207). Following the cultural studies concept of ‘hegemony through style’, as Hebdige 1979 suggested in reference to Hall), she comes to the conclusion that it was the magazines' intentions to normalize Western styles with Iranian fits for middle class women (216). With the plaidoyer to analyze Iranian women - and fashion magazines once again through the lens of Roland Barthes semiological magazine analysis, Khodabakhshi closes the chapter (218).

Since the first section of **chapter 5** reflects patriarchal views on gendered bodies and fashions in modern Iran and to the question of how both local and global dialogs flowed into the 1979 revolution to shape the post-revolutionary state's gender and fashion policies (223), it does not seem entirely conclusive why this important debate, narrated with recourse to the 18th century, however, has been subsumed under the heading "Digital Fashion Memoires". In case of the thesis' publication I therefore suggest to dedicate this content a separate chapter, that complements and follows the magazine analysis. However, it is very insightful to get to know about the ongoing struggle between feminist movements, mandatory unveiling in 1936 (225) and Islamic religious forces claiming stricter control up to the female body (224) up to the legal implementation of the compulsory concealment in post-revolutionary Iran. Khodabakhshi reports a broad diversity of anti-fashion discourses, protest styles and groups in 1970's Iran opposition. These span from Marxists and Fadayeys to Mojaheds and from Hippie styles (Hipigari) and Mao-tees to hijabs and chadorihas, new fashionable chador designs (244). She mentions the critique of Shiite sociologist and social reformer Ali Shariati on Farsi Women Magazines Zan-e Rouz and Ettelatt-e Banovan (237) and how arguments of clerics as Ayatollah Ali Motahhari, a scholar of Ayatollah Khomeini, met with those of socialists as Ale-Ahmad, both warring about an identity crisis of women, caused by the policies of westernizing the Iranian society (235). This discursive amalgam already laid out the fundamental ideology for the dress politics after the Islamic revolution.

Finally, part II analyzes the Digital Fashion Memoires of today's Iranian diaspora. To this end, Khodabakhshi studies social media accounts on facebook, including nostalgic community sites such as Amireh and Tehran-e Parirooz with postings on 1960s/70s fashion and lifestyles, and also on instagram as for example profiles by Cafenostal, Fatibigg, or Khiabune. The Iranian diaspora, Khodabakhshi states, uses fashion and dress for the creation of a collective memory of their cultural and religious identity after the 1979 revolution. Precisely the extreme contrast between the liberal fashion cultures before 1979 and the Islamic dress policies since then, has made 1960s/70s fashion the apt material for collective nostalgia of a different, better and more liberated time. Khodabakhshi points out that this plays a particularly important role for the second generation of the Iranian Diaspora, with bloggers as the Ajam Media Collective, who create a 'generational nostalgia' where fashion is associated with it a 'revolutionary mood'. It is a remarkable achievement of the thesis that it does not end with a fashion historiography, but rather expounds how the digital era revitalizes fashion from the Pahlavi era for the formation of a collective memory and bond of the Iranian diaspora.

Scientific reasoning

As described above, the work is based on oral history interviews with contemporary witnesses and an intensive longtime research of source material, analyzed from the perspectives of Fashion Studies, Fashion History, Iranian Studies and Diaspora and Postcolonial Studies. Using the method of triangulation, Khodabakhshi has very well managed to reconstruct central topoi and narratives of an Iranian history of fashion and clothing. Khodabakhshi has described her results very carefully and presented them in an understandable and comprehensible manner. The interplay of source work, interviews with contemporary witnesses and the contextualization of the results in the field of scholarly debate works very well. This provides an interesting prism of "Alter Histories" that interweaves many perspectives: everyday history, production and economic history, gender, media and image history, fashion actors, designers, photographers, boutique operators, as well as consumers. The thesis concludes under the headline 'The present in the mirror of the past' with a summary of the findings of each chapter (1-5).

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Once again connections between historic debates on fashion and dress during the Pahlavi era and the fashion discourse in the Iranian diaspora are highlighted. Finally, Khodabakhshi not only closes with a discussion on the limitation of her scope of research (284-286) and her original contribution of knowledge (286-287), but also with an end note. Here she relates the 'revolutionary mood' that fashion and dress from Pahlavi era has created for the Diaspora to Walter Benjamin's concept of history, appointing fashion as the 'tiger's leap' (288). Regarding the clarity and stringency of the concept of oil fashion, as it is coined in the title and the introduction of the thesis, it could have been bundled more strongly and sociographically consolidated in the final statement again. Right here it might have been related to the expansion of the modern bourgeoisie in the Middle East during the oil boom era, and the fact that the thesis itself has been an investigation of the expanding Iranian middle classes (and elites) at that time.

One strand of argument that is not elaborated conclusively in the work is the reflection of the topic in its relations to conditions of coloniality, more precisely in respect to the neocolonial forces during the era of the cold war in the Middle East with a massive support to establish pro-Western dictatorial rule. Since Iran in 1906 was the first country in the Middle East to win a constitution, the overthrow of Mossadegh as prime minister in 1953 in favor of a U.S./UK-backed expansion of the Shah's autocracy, marked the final end of it. Therefore, conclusions of the thesis such as of the Shah's Persepolis parade as an "anti-colonial attitude" (128) are not comprehensible. Other shortcomings of the thesis are also closely linked to the terms and conditions of coloniality within a fashion studies perspective. Thus, over the past decade, the discipline itself has evolved from non-Western to decolonial perspectives, conducting global histories of fashion through the of decolonizing, decentralizing and deorientalizing lenses as well as through an historical and contemporary analysis of colonial power. Since the work primarily argues with the terminology of a non-Western fashion history, it would be important to reflect on this terminology from the state of current discourses as e.g. Cheang/De Greef/Yoko 2021. Minor errors, such as the fact that fashion studies as a field did not establish in the 1960s (223) but in the 1980s, or lacking references for indirect quotations (e.g. footnote 593), or quotations taken directly from the work and thought of other scholars (e.g. footnote 323), should also be corrected/added.

Language and linguistic level/comprehensibility

The work is written very clearly, compact and reasonable at a good linguistic level.

Bibliography and list of sources

The thesis includes a detailed 25-page bibliography of cited Iranian and English literature on history, culture, urbanism, gender studies of Iran, studies of the Iranian diaspora, as well as literature in English and German from the field of fashion studies (289-314). Furthermore, it contains a source list of the journals and online databases studied (314-315), a list of the contemporary witnesses interviewed (315-316), a list of figures (216- 324), and an appendix (1) of the historical timeline for an overview of the historiography (325). It must be emphasized commendably that appendix 2 contains the original German texts translated into English by the author from the field of fashion studies, postcolonial studies, qualitative research methodology (326-327) and that appendix 3 documents 170 double pages of Farsi interview transcripts, available for further research.

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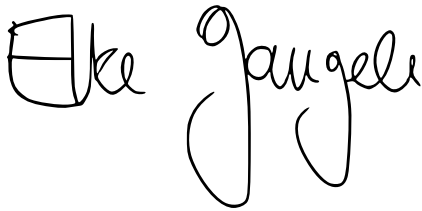
Comprehensibility/ conclusiveness/originality

This well-grounded, skillfully assembled and comprehensive historiography of Iranian fashion and dress is an important original contribution to fundamental research in the field of fashion studies, that will certainly draw international interest. Introducing the concept of oil fashion, Khodabakhshi coins a new term for her field of Middle Eastern (Fashion) Studies. I therefore recommend to published the work both as a monograph in the field of Fashion Studies as well as various separate articles for peer reviewed journals. Some subchapters of the work (e.g. 2 part III, 4 part I and II, 5 part I and II) might be extended independently and submitted to peer reviewed journals, in the field of Iranian Studies and journals as e.g. *Fashion Theory*, *International Journal of Fashion Studies* or *Middle East Women's Studies*. I am sure that these publications will meet with very strong international scholarly interest.

Summary and Overall Assessment

As outlined above, Khodabakhshi's historiography of fashion and clothing cultures (1941-1979) is an internationally long-awaited, highly topical, outstanding contribution to the field of global and Middle Eastern fashion studies and the first comprehensive foundational study on fashion discourses and dress practices in this field.

Therefore, I unreservedly evaluate Nargess Khodabakhshi's excellent work with a very good (1).



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