Original Research Article

Recognition of Several Iranian Painting Genres as Islamic Art through the Discourse of Dominant Power

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Abstract

Problem statement: Over the last 40 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always attempted to deepen the concept of "Islamic Art" in painting to exploit it for reinforcing its conceptual discourse. Hence, some painting genres have been categorized as Islamic art. Such genres may be remnants of previous centuries (Miniature, Illumination, Gol-o-Morgh, New Miniature and Qahvekhane'i paintings) or originate from sociopolitical events of the era with their idiosyncratic content and aesthetics. However, all of them have a similar representation in people's minds.

Research objective: This study aims to identify articulated predications that convey Islamic meaning according to the regime's discourse.

Research method: This study employed Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis as well as qualitative content analysis to identify all discourse elements of stated genres.

Conclusion: The findings revealed that the genres of Iranian painting, traditional painting, revolutionary painting, and '*holy defense*' painting respectively have the following predications: 1) revelatory, mystical, and epic; 2) moral, spiritual, and divine; 3) ideological, propagandistic, and justice-oriented; 4) idealistic, value-based, and resilience. The said predications are centered on the pivotal discourse of the dominant power, i.e., Shia Islam; therefore, all of them can be categorized as Islamic art. In different conceptual realms of historic–civil Islam, each of the said genres, theological–didactic Islam, ideological-sovereign Islam, and political-ideological Islam, has enriched other discourse predications and helped achieve different political goals.

Keywords: *Painting genre, Dominant discourse, Predication, Islamic Republic of Iran.*

Introduction and Problem Statement

Across different eras and cultures, there has always been a significant relationship between art and politics, especially between particular types of art and power. Artworks have always responded to the events and politics of their era (Poormand & Davari, 2012, 95). Alan Gowans, a well-known art historian, believes that art uses images and shapes on particular ideas to picture fundamental beliefs or ideals of communities, thus leading people toward new beliefs and ideas. Some visual arts have received more attention due to their

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broad popularity and states attempt to use them to show their power and to use it for their political discourse (Rahbar, Tavoosi, Afhami, Sheikhmehdi & Poormand, 2016, 210). Such a painting is crucial to the IRI founded in 1979, following artists who extensively used paintings in posters, graffiti, and murals and it was used as one of the most valuable cultural mechanisms. Today it is used as a primary cultural instrument, assuming that "different genres of this art are collected under the banner of Islamic art according to the discourse of dominant power, thus implying the title. To prove or reject this hypothesis, this paper studies the IRI discourse. A discourse is a structured body linking the concepts and values of a power regime and predications, hence giving legitimacy to some genres of art on based them (Moridi & Taghizadegan, 2012, 143). Therefore, the resulting recognition formed around Shia Islam along with the relationship among concepts, principles, and values approved by the regime can pave the way to discover the content and visual predications of specific genres of Iranian painting. In what follows, the said genres are analyzed accordingly to identify their articulation; because although each genre has its own idiosyncratic visualization style, the public does not differentiate between them. In this process, the most general conception of Islamic art is also investigated in the view of experts to reveal the conceptual context used by the IRI to give legitimacy to the said genres. However, the author does not intend to give a subsequent verdict or emphasize a particular view.

Research background

For better and deeper analysis, the research background was explored. Initially, the author limited research literature to papers discussing the relationship between the IRI discourse and different painting genres. However, it gained no results from academic or scholarly circles, particularly concerning Iranian and traditional paintings based on sociopolitical approaches. The search revealed that Iranian painting has mostly relied on a historical

approach; and that the majority of studies have focused on the overlaps, evolution, and reforms in its schools. Such works include the following: Persian Miniature (Azhand, 2013), Iranian Painting (Canby, 2008), History of Iranian Painting (Hoseini, 2012), History of Painting in Iran (Barati, 2014), and The Historical Path of Iranian Painting (Binyon, 1999). Concerning traditional painting, the majority of Iranian works in Islamic centuries are described according to Hikmat Khalede (perennial philosophy), such as "The Necessity of Islamic Art: Investigation and Critique of Traditionalist View" (Qanbari, 2016), "Aesthetics in Traditionalist Thought" (Mahoozi, 2016), "Spiritual Customs in Traditional Arts" (Saffaran, 2018), "Eternity and Art" (Avini, 1991), and "Scared Art, Principles and Values" (Burckhardt, 1990). There are more extensive studies on revolution and defense paintings, such as "Revolutionary Painting and Socially Responsible Religious Art in Iran" (Goodarzi, 2008), "Content and Form in the Paining of the First Decade of Islamic Revolution" (Tabasi and Ansari, 2006), "Iran Revolutionary Art Movement" (Eskandari, 2006), "Art of Protest, Art of Revolution" (Asadi, 2006), "Holy Defense, a Selection of Street Murals" (Latifi, 2016), "Epic Frames" (Bureau of Preserving and Propagating Holy Defense Values, 2009) and "Visual Arts Center of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2010). All said works are memoirs of painters during the revolution and Iran–Iraq War, overviewing the visual characteristics and providing descriptions and evaluations. There are also some analytical–descriptive studies with a sociological approach to the said genres, including the following: "A Study on the Influences of Ideology and Political thinking on Pictorial Elements of Revolutionary Painting" (Asadi and Nadalian), which shows how the ideological beliefs of artists affect their selection of symbols in their works. Rabiee Poursalimi and Afshar Mohajer (The Discourse Analysis of the holy Defence' Paintings during Wartime [in Comparison with Soviet War Paintings]) argue that the discourse of holy defense art is not limited to Iran–Iraq war;

rather, it reflects larger conflicts going beyond military war and frontlines. Kafshchian Moqadam (Burnt blossoms: Revolutionary Murals Movement) writes that paintings, especially murals, base their aesthetics on faith and connection to people. Although it has a borrowed structure—like other visual arts—it attempts to express the religious and national foundations of Iran in a simple manner. Hence, each of the above studies has their particular approach to the investigation of the genres in question. In contrast, this study attempts to interpret them all as the reproduction of the dominant discourse to find why they were recognized as Islamic art. Achieving this goal also reveals the necessity of the study, as the said painting genres are similar to writings that stem from the state power, with the regime attempting to bring them closer to its discourse predication to reinforce the hegemony of its discourse.

Research method

This study was conducted based on credible bibliographic and electronic sources. It used Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis theory for data analysis. They emphasize that all social realms are discourse-based, containing a wide range of lingual and non-lingual data. Accordingly, as Iranian painting has always acted as a leading visual movement in fundamental reforms of the nation, particularly in the contemporary era, it has been intensely focused on by the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic uses this art as an epistemological and cultural identity for Iranians and thoroughly uses its discourse and social potentials despite technical and quality flaws (Zangi, 2013, 1). Hence, this study focuses on a social sphere that offers discourse reading as it contains numerous visual works. Laclau and Mouffe believe that discourse is a semantic system greater than language and is not a set of rules but predications. The stated predictions join in a process to form a semantic system. Hence, to have meaning, any action or

phenomenon must be discoursed. Activities and phenomena become comprehensible when they are formed as a particular discourse. Thus, every notion must be understood based on the whole ongoing action and every action must be understood based on its particular discourse. In this view, the social world can only be understood as a discourse and has no fundamental or comprehensive truth outside it. Because the discourse features a central predication that is used to articulate other floating predications to provide a clear image and notion of the power system, thus giving hegemony to said discourse (Honari & Azarmi, 2012, 99). In this hegemonic state, the discourse establishes its desired semantic system in the people's collective consciousness (though temporarily) and achieves their satisfaction. Accordingly, this paper investigates multiple genres of Iranian painting as original art styles of the Islamic Republic to clearly understand the articulation and integration of their predications. It is centered on the core predication of the regime and in the semantic attraction territory of Islamic art.

The discourse of Islamic Republic of Iran

The Pahlavi period's modernizing problems, which resulted in fast value revisions in Iran's religious society, putting these values in jeopardy, triggered new crises in several domains. The Islamic revolution was a response to said crises and in rejection of Pahlavi values. Shia political thought offered a new discourse, which with the support of Imam Khomeini and the clergy became one of the most potent discourses, gradually establishing its concepts and symbols in a stark standoff and debate against others. This discourse emphasized idealistic, justice-oriented religious values and principles such as democracy, Islamic human rights, defending the underprivileged, Islamic community versus nationalism, republic, law, freedom, and fight against despotism, spirituality, and rationality. It was a combination of Islamic values and new forms of government (Rezaei Jafari, Aghahoseini & Alihoseini, 2019, 94), which was broader than

national borders and penetrated other Islamic nations. Hence, it led to a deep cultural–ideological conflict between Iran and the west, which also manifested in art and led to the standoff between Islamic Iranian art discourse versus western art discourse. However, due to the constant semantic conflicts among different discourses, with each attempting to maintain and reinforce its meaning by rejecting the other (Farokhi & Eftekhari, 2013, 149), the sovereign power discourse decided to support Islamic art and to expand, reinforce, and interpret it such that the outcomes manifest in a semantic hegemony over public opinion (as the best means of enforcing power). Undoubtedly, such an Islamic discourse must seek to create and empower art genres compatible with the higher nature of its norms, values, and ideals. Because whenever a discourse fails to reproduce and support its meaning-giving power as it should, it starts to decline and ultimately loses its place to a rival discourse. The rise and fall of discourses in specific situations are inevitable (ibid., 150). Hence, Islamic art was used primarily to counter western art, with the regime attempting to accomplish part of its ideals by realizing its discourse under the banner of Islamic art to use it to promote its values. The revolution pushed art and mainly painting toward religious concepts while opening the doors of the religious community to the art of painting, removing the substantial barriers this community used to avoid visual arts (ibid., 156). Thus, many genres of Islamic art found legitimacy, and attempts were made to link Islam and art in painting. This study focuses on power and its effects based on the discourse. According to Foucault, power is not limited to the enforcer. Rather, it flows in all community levels, and each element can be a source of power, justifying it as a necessary and undeniable presence (Poormand & Davari, 2012, 95). The same is true for Islamic art in service of Iranian power, which is defined below.

Islamic Art

The literal meaning of Islamic art must be sought in the body of literature starting from 270 years ago, concerning the old crafts of Islamic communities who produced handicrafts with ornamental patterns. However, historical documents indicate that the people of said communities never used the term "art" for their crafts, or even if they did, they were not called Islamic (Kavoosi, 2019, 16). Ibn Khaldun, the 9th-century historian, in his book *Al-Ebar* refers to Islamic architecture as the general term of "construction craft," without distinguishing between religious and non-religious, or even Islamic and non-Islamic buildings. The theorists believe that it was the Europeans of the 19 and 20th century who first used a general term to refer to the art and buildings of Islamic communities, as they were forming a new vision to the world for a systematic understanding of the traditions and customs of other communities (Mojtahedzadeh & Saa'dvandi, 2017, 59-60). However, due to commercial interests, religious competition, ethnic conflicts, and colonization efforts, their approach gradually gravitated toward altering the culture of communities through anthropology (Turner, 2011, 85-86). In this canonization project, they used the phrase "oriental studies" for the body of art and buildings of Islamic communities, their structural and ornamental elements, and analytical method. In a short time, groups of architects traveled to Spain and Islamic communities to visit and record ancient buildings. The crafts were also exported to western museums and collections through native intermediaries. Hence, new terms such as "Saraceni art," "Mohammedi art," "Muslim art," and "Islamic art" were coined to refer to the crafts and buildings produced in Islamic communities (ibid.). Accordingly, Oleg Grabar, the reputable Islamic art historian, argues that collecting such museum collections by European tourists and orientologists had a key role in forming "Islamic art" under anthropological approaches. Islamic art reflected the ethnic characteristics of a people without the definite principles found in western art (Dashtizadeh, Javani & Sojoodi, 2016, 33). Jules Burgoen, an Islamic

art historian, writes in Arab Art (1873): "we should not expect to find a certain and strong development trend in eastern art, like what was found in western art.

Similarly, concerning the relationship between Islamic art and Quran, it is not a trans-ethnical book; instead, an ethnical book representing the Arab mentality" (Mojtahedzadeh & Saa'devandi, 2017, 61-62). Nevertheless, this notion gradually established its aspects and nodes, moving from anthropology to art history under the influence of various factors such as the advent of art history discipline in the mid-[19] century, changes in Islamic archeology, and new approaches to museum curator and collection of artworks. In other words, it transformed from ethnical and anthropological roots to a historical concept with cultural roots, thus classified as a new science developing alongside other disciplines of art history, museum curator, and archeology. Accordingly, the art historians reached a consensus to use the term "Islamic art" to denote this field of study, and this consensus made other conventional titles obsolete. In Typology of Architecture in Islamic Lands, Hog writes that considering the historical geography and art history, the term Islamic art appears to be the only acceptable name, demanding the rejection of other titles (ibid., 63). According to Ettinghausen and Grabar (2007, 2), Islamic art refers to tribes that lived under Muslim rule or lived in cultures and communities greatly influenced by Islamic thought and life. Overall, Islamic art is an unwritten agreement used by the world to refer to the tangible art heritage of Muslim communities as maintained by Blair and Blume (Mirage of Islamic Art).

Findings and discussion
• **Genres of Iranian painting**
In the last four decades, there have been many paintings known as Islamic art. When speaking of Islamic art, one is reminded of works decorated with historical Iranian patterns, religious paintings, and paintings with political messages about the Islamic

Republic. However, each work has its particular content and aesthetics, categorized as "Iranian painting," "traditional painting," "revolution painting," and "holy defense painting." As a result, it is vital to examine and comprehend the aforementioned genres. With its support, the dominant power's discourse has led to mixing these genres and has gradually made their dependent poles uniform with its formality.

- Persian painting
Persian painting (also known as a miniature) is rooted in Arjang (The holy book of Mani). This art was revived in the early Islamic centuries during the Abbasi initiative to translate Greek and Roman books of literature, philosophy, and medicine. Its first examples had a didactic function to help understanding texts (Golshani, Yarmohammadi & Daneshfard, 2016, 50). From the beginning, this style was categorized as "Illumination," "Miniature" and "Gol-o-Morgh" used in decorating books. Due to the illegitimacy of portrait painting in Islam, Illumination, which consists of "Arabesque" floral patterns and regular geometric shapes, was invented. This art was first used to decorate calligraphic copies of the Quran to give beauty to promoting the holy message. Gradually, it also found use in the decoration of other books.

Miniature was inspired mainly by literature for its ideal examples and metaphorical subjects, mainly originating from Shahnameh Ferdowsi, Khamse Nezami, and lyrical or moral poetries. Before being a tool to legitimize the artist's role or a source for inspiration, literature served as the semantic and aesthetic ideology of Iranian art (Moinaldini & Asarkashani, 2014, 84). Gol-o-Morgh genre was also developed in a deep relationship with literature, particularly mystical poetry. It focuses on manifesting the inner world and spiritual way. Morgh (bird) was a symbol of Islamic mysticism, illumination, and the manifestation of the soul, whereas Gol (flower) was a symbol of heaven (Panjebashi, 2016, 62). Hence, Persian painting dealt with a non-figural style with abstract qualities

that sought its object in spiritual concepts rather than material.

Moreover, as this genre attempted to immaterialize the artwork, it not only removed perspective to distance from realism but moved against it to represent the rank and position of personages to find truth by traversing the boundaries of time and space. Despite historical discontinuities and the influence of foreign cultures and integration of heterogeneous traditions, this characteristic maintained an inherent cohesion, serving as the identity of Persian painting and the continuity of its aesthetic and cultural essence. Indeed, what detached Persian painting from form, scale, and function, was the Iranian artist's tendency to expressing abstract, mystical, and symbolic notions based on a view that the actual reality of the external world is an effect of an ideal form and eternal truth (Mohammadivakil & Balkhariqahi, 2019, 20). To represent this truth in artworks, the artist combined Illumination, Gol-o-Morgh, and Miniature without distinction between religious or non-religious paintings.

Nevertheless, in the late 16th century, with an increased tendency toward the European style of painting due to increased political and economic relations with the west, a growing interest in realistic painting began. Persian painting gradually reformed its subject, form, and method, largely abandoning its previous form in exchange for European realism. In this era, a group of artists refused to accept western principles and styles, deliberately rejecting the new western system and refraining from carrying the principles of western civilization. They rebuked imitating the west and attempted to promote a new style of art based on Iranian visual culture. Therefore, they continued painting by copying and imitating their predecessors. This was known as the "New Miniature" movement. It had slight differences in visual style and structure compared to the preceding works; however, it kept its allegiance to the content, literary, mystical, and religious notions. The other side of this critical movement was known as "Qahvekhane'i painting" (coffeehouse painting),

formed of epic–religious notions and supported by the credibility of national literature (ibid., 29). This genre was based on old traditions of storytelling, elegy, and religious elegy (Ta'zieh). However, it developed and evolved by non-academic artists in response to public demand and to accompany the constitutional revolution and criticize the autocratic regime of the time. In those days, the public witnessed new plots by foreign imperialism, internal repression, suppression of liberal movements, and the massacre of national and religious leaders, which entangled them with a type of cultural worldview. As such, they attempted to nationalize and localize modern ideas, even in the constitutional law and its addendum, declaring Shia Islam as the official religion of Iran in Article One. Accordingly, the most narrative form of painting used symbolic language, in which inspirations from Shahnameh Ferdowsi, Khamse Nezami, tales of Karbala event, Quranic tales, and folklores became popular (Zarei, Shamloo & Hamidimanesh, 2018, 146). It attempted to visualize epic, legendary, and historical heroes and champions to incite public opinion against despotism and in support of revolutionary force, reinforcing the sentiments of patriotism and defense of values and beliefs among the public (Hoseinabadi & Mohammadpoor, 2016, 70-71).

The same objectives, i.e., protest against the absolute rule and autocratic regime, fighting against the unchecked intrusions of foreign powers, and demand for the rule of law became the predications of the Islamic Republic 72 years later. The new regime, with its religious background and nature, had the same ideological foundations. Hence, coffeehouse painting could articulate around the central predication of Shia Islamic as the discourse of the new regime. Moreover, the new regime sought to reinforce its foundations and had to expend considerable resources on the political repercussions of altered policies. Additionally, due to the Iraq invasion, Iran was involved in an unwanted war that affected all social, political, cultural, and economic developments. Iraq occupied regions in the south

and west of Iran. It attacked infrastructures such as airports, power plants, hospitals, oil rigs, transport pipes, bombarded cities and border villages, and unsecured cargo export and import routes. This created a situation that prioritized saving the Iranian territory (Etesam, Farahani & Eqbali, 2013, 26). As such, in that era, the new regime was not concerned with continuing in the footsteps of national art and attaining a discourse suited to the richness of the ancient legacy, as it believed when the youth of the nation were giving up their lives, even the idea of modern painting based on western principles of art implied indifference to national fate. Hence, it undertook a project to sponsor and revive the past art styles called Islamic art by the west. Overall, the regime believed each genre of Persian painting, including Illumination, Miniature, Gol-o-Morgh, New Miniature, and coffeehouse painting, contained content and visual predications in the Islamic territory. Therefore, it believed they could create new values and anti-values when linked to its discoursal predications.

- Traditional painting

Among the public, traditional painting refers to a painting without novelties and innovations, which is only based on historical principles and patterns. Tradition is the body of principles that, due to age and repetition, have become spontaneous practices for the artist who uses them, believing in their perfection and constancy (Aron, 1991, 595). However, traditional painting also features other attributes, as it was dependent on the religious, intellectual movement known as "Hekmat Khaledeh" (perennial philosophy). This movement was formed in response to modernism to overcome the challenges and crises created by it and gradually found an independent character with the efforts of Rene Guenon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burkhardt, Huston Smith, Martin Lings, Marco Pallis, and Seyyed Hosein Nasr. It was finely developed in theoretic realms, particularly that of art (Atoufi Kashani, 2010, 148). This movement held that tradition was a set of theological principles

with a divine origin, integrating with culture and customs to gain eternity in a strong structure of unified truths. As it is not a result of pure human effort and knowledge, it is highly affiliated with the concept of religion (Maziar, 2011, 8). Hence, traditional art originates from a nation's spiritual culture, essentially rooted in a revelatory origin linked with religious leaders and the heartfelt sentiments of the artist. According to this definition, traditional Iranian painting is based on Islamic beliefs common to the people and relies on historic visual principles and preceding visual techniques (such as two-dimensional and incorporeal space, transparent and luminescent colors, and diffused, non-concentrated light) to deliver the messages of a holy origin. This origin has always led traditionalist Iranian painters to refrain from depicting ordinary material reality in favor of picturing the transcendent and divine aspect of things (Abolqasemi, 2015, 21). Although this artist occasionally attempts to utilize innovation, dynamism, and other visual tools such as perceptive or modern artworks, the central concept consists of divine rule, holiness, and virtue. As such, this artist is ultimately a traditionalist who sincerely attempts for emancipation from the material world toward a supernatural revelation. He aims to invite the audience to an internal meditation and exalt their artistic perception (EskandarPoor Khorrami & Shafi, 2011, 25). According to said missions that differentiate this genre from Persian painting, IRI, who attempted to invite men to religion, spirituality, and God, considering human conscience as its audience, turned to this genre and gave it broader functions under the banner of Islamic art. The hidden notions in this genre of painting appeared equivalent and similar to its discoursal predictions, i.e., coexistence under moral teachings and promotion of spirituality, which can act as a visual mechanism to propagate Islam. Moreover, it could be used to express the belief in the ultimate global Islamic rule under the leadership of Mahdi the Savior and toward the realization of its discourse objectives, i.e., performing divine responsibilities

and promoting humanity's wellbeing in the whole community of men (Asadi, 1992, 80).

- Islamic Revolution painting

Islamic Revolution painting is a particular genre formed a decade before the revolution. It is based on values, beliefs, politics, and social matters of the Iranian community. As the artists intended to create novel works that were functional and informative according to the revolutionary foundations, they did not show over-attachment to the past legacy or prejudiced use of modern painting principles. Instead, they adopted an interactive approach to change the content of their works (Khazai, 2008, 4) to assist the revolution as a living, dynamic, and intellectual movement. Indeed, more than artistic quality or skillful design and execution of painting based on Persian or modern guidelines, they were concerned with recording and delivering the revolutionary slogans and ideas of the masses and the forces led by Ayatollah Khomeini. The said guidelines formed the ground for the content of revolution art, expressed in ideas such as, "art is to instill the spirit of commitment in man," "art is pure and beautiful when it clashes with bloodthirsty capitalism and communism, Islam of luxuries, mixed Islam, compromising Islam, the Islam of the unconcerned rich, and in a word, American Islam" (Avini, 2014, 9). Therefore, for painters, the genre inevitably became a mixture of tradition and modernity, as despite being born from the modern phenomenon of revolution, the idea of the leader was to return to the ideal past of Islam. However, the ideas of intellectuals such as Ali Shariati or Jalal Aleahmad were also influential, especially Shariati, who introduced a particular interpretation of revolutionary Islam to art (Hoseinirad & Khalili, 2012, 14).

The aforementioned ideas led revolutionary painters to portrait the figures of the revolution leader, the clergy, the wives and mothers of martyrs, children who joined in street protests, the battle between the capitalists and the poor, and people participating in acts of sacrifice and charity. Therefore, the students and some Tehran Fine Arts University instructors banded in a "Muslim Group" and created anti-imperialistic paintings (Moridi & Taqizadegan, 2012, 154). Their paintings contained visual symbols such as the Quran, clenched fists, clenched palms, the American flag, hawk, and reversed portrait of Mohammadreza Shah (Zangi, Ayatollahi & Fahimifar, 2012, 88). Following the victory of the revolution, the Islamic Republic, which partly owed its rise to power to such painters for visually satisfying the masses, took their sponsorship and organized their activities under the Islamic Movement Cultural Institute. Later, the organization's name was altered to the Circle of Islamic Art and Thought, and afterward, to the Art Circle of Islamic Development Organization (Eskandari, 2008, 10). This time, the artists, aiming to proliferate and deepen revolutionary values and reinforce the new regime's foundations, slightly reformed their works. They distanced themselves from modern art and increased the influence of Persian painting. The regime argued that modern art is a visual reproduction of western discourse, gaining attention in the Pahlavi era to the point of destroying the principles of Persian painting. It is a cultural conspiracy to escape reality and ignore the pain and suffering of the nation without sensing any responsibility (Zangi et al., 2012, 88). Accordingly, painters altered the content of their works by portraying the known figures of Islamic history, particularly Shia Islam, such as an idealistic and god-seeking warrior (a symbol of a justice crusader and Imam Hussein), a woman fighting for freedom and leading other free women (a symbol of resistance and sacrifice, and a symbol of Zeinab), Mahdi the savior as the rescuer of the poor, and the events of Ashura (representing the revolution events). The said works are based on the regime's discourse predications such as rejection of evil temptations, rejection of anti-theism, rejection of corruption and injustice, demand for justice, freedom, prioritizing the public interests, and battling against poverty; all of which are centered on the predications of Shia

Islam. Moreover, this genre was created alongside the religious revolution to depict faith, expand Islamic ideas, and replace wrong sovereignty with right. Hence, they had a mission to advertise Islamic governance values such as admonishing materialism and welfare-seeking, attention to the afterlife, and refusing western materialistic ideas. With its link to religion and by providing an exalted position and privilege for the regime to rule over people, this mission places the genre on the same page as the literal meaning of Islamic art.

- Holy defense painting

The 1979 Iran–Iraq war led to another painting genre. The holy defense genre apparently only aimed to picture war scenery; however, it attempted to establish and prolong a new spirituality in that period (Poorsalimi & Mohajer, 2019, 6). In that spirituality, defeat was meaningless, death in war was a blessing rather than loss, and participating in the frontlines was a holy act and a manifestation of heaven on earth (Moridi, 2016, 100). This genre was a more experienced continuation of Islamic revolution painting and had two objectives: to encourage the public to attend the frontlines or provide support from behind the fronts. It depicted the bravery of warriors and the melancholy of their relations to gain public participation at the frontlines and promote the culture of martyrdom and sacrifice. Second, this genre produced symbolic artworks to document part of Iran's territorial and political history, the reality of war, and defense of the homeland and the people according to the regime's ideals and its wartime ideology (Maleki, 2010, 128). It attempted to preserve the existential aspects and the deep belief of Muslim fighters in preserving the totality of the land. The painters adopted a symbolic and metaphorical language in their approach to the past of Iranian art to incorporate the holiness and spirituality of the defensive war. They added new elements such as tulips, pine and palm trees, blood droplets, dog tags, scarfs, doves, and bunkers inspired by the society and the time (Zangi et al. 2012, 91). They distanced themselves from a pure

real space to depict religious idealism, that is, the holiness of war, defending Islam, and the justice crusade of the oppressed.

However, after the end of the war, an imperialistic plan was considered for dividing the Islamic world and based on Ayatollah Khomeini's statement: "war may be over, but the fight does not end. The realization of Islam in the globe and upholding justice depends on the fight between good and evil. Jihad preserves the principles and supplements of religion" (Avini, 2014, 13). Therefore, the artists attempted to actualize the goals of Ayatollah Khomeini and the political objectives of the regime. The said objectives included propagating international resistance for Islamic awareness and awakening across the world and forming relationships with various political regimes to reinforce friendships. Therefore, the content of holy defense painting expanded in this direction to realize the Islamic–ideological objectives of the dominant power across borders. The genre included the following aspects:

1) Resistance means defending against tyranny and intrusion, monopoly, despotism and injustice through a return to divine human essence regardless of color, language, ethnicity, and geography; 2) resistance means defending against cultural invasion and the dominance of imperialist media; 3) resistance means defending against evil, terror, and violence; 4) resistance means unveiling the lies behind human rights propaganda, defending the true divine and human rights of man, defending genuine esteem and freedom of man, and unveiling the hidden world events, such as the interests of Israel in Palestine and the 9/ 11 event; 5) resistance means upholding moral, cultural, religious, and spiritual values; resilience, jihad, sacrifice and martyrdom, piety, faith, and righteousness, the way of the prophets and divine leaders; resistance means defending against the US, defending Quds and the people of Palestine, resisting against occupation forces in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Islamic lands; 7) resistance means depicting the regular

tyrannies committed at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and other hidden, fearsome prisons of the capitalist world (Mirhashemi, 2012, 6).

Hence, artworks based on such notions center around higher social Islamic values, also encompassing IRI discourse predications such as Islamic pacifism and mercy, human esteem, uprising for social justice, and the principle of thinking and fighting. Hence, this genre is called Islamic art as it visually defends the interests of the united Islamic community and preserves Iran as the leader of the Islamic world.

Analysis of findings

The investigations show that the genres in question represent different kinds of exploitations by the dominant power. They have found their content and legitimacy under its hegemonic discourse and within a broad context of Islamic notions. Therefore, the articulation of predications during the creation of the artworks of these genres is of crucial importance. According to Laclau and Mouffe's theory and the finding of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1) In all its types, including Miniature, Illumination, Gol-o-morgh, New Miniature and Qahvekhane'i painting, Persian painting features mystical, illuminary, and epic predications based on Farsi literature and particular aesthetics that serve as visual predications of Iranian territory in the Islamic era. Previously, they were internationally known as Islamic art based on the same predications. Hence, in the post-revolution period, they turned into legacy-oriented predications as remnants of the Iranian–Islamic civilization. Within the semantic breadth of the history of Islamic civilization, they can guide the current regime toward cultural independence and recognition and protection of its historical positions.
2) Traditional painting features visual predications based on Islamic art aesthetics. Essentially, it is a sanctifying art with divine, moral, and spiritual predications. With its relation to the central predication of the dominant discourse, i.e. Shia Islam, it serves as a religious genre of art that, based

on articulated predictions in the semantic context of Islamic teachings, can enable the regime to promote its virtues and values toward a divine rule.
3) Revolution painting was formed in response to represent Islamic ideological concepts and in opposition to the Pahlavi regime. With the fall of the Pahlavi regime and according to the discourse of the new dominant power, it gradually abandoned protesting predications, replacing them with propagandistic and justice-demanding predications in the semantic context of the Islamic government. Even visual predications were directed toward the aesthetics of Islamic art (i.e. Persian painting in historical meaning), thus performing its duty as a genre with a mission through such an articulation. Commitment to the new regime meant it had to sanctify the revolution based on its Islamic identity and attempt to propagate it internationally and instill its values and intellectual foundations in the national territory.
4) Holy defense painting was initially founded to provide semantic arguments and spirituality for a political-military period of IRI. Accordingly, unlike other genres, it was formed entirely within its discourse and connected with its ideological predications within the semantic context of political Islam, rather than only being influenced by it. Its content accepts value-based, idealistic, and resistance predications, whereas its aesthetic goes beyond limited visual predications to accomplish the regime's objectives of preserving its political identity and reinforcing its global relationships.

Conclusion

This study on Persian painting, traditional painting, revolution painting, and holy defense painting, as well as their articulation analysis, has the following conclusion. As Laclau and Mouffe argue that to maintain its hegemony, a discourse attempts to hide the discrepancies among visual genres of a field and represent them as unified; the dominant power's discourse in Iran has also attempted to do the same in painting through a chain of identical values. It

has combined the critical marks of the said painting genres with its central predication (Shia Islam) so that gradually, the differences among their content and aesthetics have been forgotten, with all of them dissolving in a single semantic system. In fact, as the content and visual predications of said genres are linked to the regime's central predication, they can portray different notions of historical-civil Islam, moral-spiritual Islam, ideological–sovereign Islam, and political-ideological Islam. This has assisted IRI in enriching its discourse foundation and accomplishing its goals while also contributing to the acknowledgment of the genre as Islamic art. As such, the public, in Iran or outside, perceive them as a single genre.

The author declares that in conducting this study, he faced no conflict of interests.

Endnotes

1. Ernesto Laclau [1935- 2014]
2. Chantal Mouffe [1943- ….]
3. Among discourse theorists, the theory of Laclau and Mouffe is special. They could do a better job of expanding a theory rooted in linguistics to the field of culture, society, and politics. They created a systematic categorization of discourse theory via a constant chain of new concepts to provide an effective instrument for identifying and interpreting different phenomena while placing politics at the top of the hierarchy. They argue that a society's way of thinking, foundation, and actions are products of hegemonic political articulations, believing that the social relationships stem from political discourses and phenomena that rely on enforcing power, hostility, and rejection of others. Laclau and Mouffe argue that the discourses which build communities and organize human perception of the world are essentially political structures. They attempted to explain their view in the book Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.

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