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Original Research Article

The Freezing of Melancholic Ruins: A Psychological Analysis of Themes in Iran Darroudi's Third Period of Artworks

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Abstract

Problem statement: Between the 1970s to 1980s, the "Freezing Period" is one of the most prominent periods in Iran Darroudi's career. "Loss" is a recurring themes of the works of this period. This paper intended to shed light on an aspect of the latent content in these artworks using a psychological approach and theoretically expanding two concepts: "mourning" and "melancholia."

Research objective: This paper gives a psychological interpretation of how "loss-related" forms and themes have been applied in Iran Darroudi's Third Period of artworks.

Research method: This paper is a descriptive-analytical investigation of form and theme in the artworks of Iran Darroudi in the Third Period, from the late '70s to '80s. The study used the library approach for data collection.

Conclusion: Darroudi's works in the "freezing period" present an interwoven embodiment of personal losses (the death of loved ones) and social-historical losses (lost glory of the homeland), and the artist has visualized her desire to preserve and immortalize the lost object in various forms. The image of "ruins" on an eternal horizon, the predominant element in Darroudi's works in this era, gives robust references to "homeland" and representation of "losing" it. The artist has tried to "immortalize" and "eternalize" the lost objects by freezing forms behind a curtain of ice. These representations involve streaks of archaism discourse remaining from the Pahlavi era as well as the effect of the death of loved ones, self-exile, and the imposed war with Iraq in the 1980s. The recurrence of the attachment between the concepts of "death," "ruins," "homeland," "eternalness," and "eternity" in the context of these artworks implies some sort of "melancholic mourning." In this regard, Darroudi's works in the Freezing Period can be interpreted as in line with the embodiment of a type of "aesthetics of loss".

Keywords: *Iran Darroudi, Contemporary Iranian painting, Psychology, Melancholia, Mourning, Homeland.*

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Introduction and statement problem

Each painting is situated between two worlds: the individual and the social. Each painting can be regarded as a point where these two worlds meet. The painting is "the deposit of a social relationship" (Baxandall, 1988, 1), while the traces of the "painter's" psyche and mind are embodied in each artwork. The artworks of Darroudi, as one of Iran's most influential and active contemporary painters, clearly display such duality. A large body of recent critiques and discussions on Darroudi's artworks often focused on demonstrating the link or bond between the recurrent themes and the events in her life. However, despite the significance of some of these critiques, they fail to use a scientific and "robust" method to provide a deep analysis of the semantic layers, based on the medium that published them, which was often one with a "general audience." This paper aimed to examine and analyze those artworks of Darroudi created in the Third Period, also known as the Freezing Period, in the late 1970s and 1980s. This paper adopted a psychological approach to uncover some dimensions of the latent meanings in these works. In this regard, this paper founded its main discussion on "mourning" and "melancholia" to interpret the dominant themes in these works. The main research question deals with how melancholic mourning is embodied in Iran Darroudi's works in the Freezing Period.

This paper also attempted to provide a social perception of mourning and melancholia by expanding them theoretically and going beyond the individual aspects suggested by Freud's theory. This theoretical expansion was based on Freud's recent works and reviewing the social theories of arts. Thus, this paper attempted to interpret the recurrence of the motif of "ruins" in Darroudi's Third Period of works through the melancholic embodiment of the concept of "homeland."

Literature Review

Many papers, essays, and interviews have been

published about Darroudi. She also has published a comprehensive autobiography, although few studies have systematically addressed her works with a scientific method and a specifically exclusive approach. In part of her dissertation, "A Study of Identity in the Works of Iranian Immigrant Painters" (2017), Delkhosh studied Darroudi's artworks and demonstrated that although influenced by Western arts and techniques, these immigrant painters have used this technique to showcase their identity. Examining the works of several painters, including Darroudi in her thesis "Remembrance in Contemporary Iranian Painting" (2017), Matlabi concluded that in spite of taking different approaches, these artists recreated glory aiming to celebrate the former glory under the influence of the spirit of the era.

Persian critics in Iran have also authored many essays on Darroudi, reporting some intriguing results and notions. One of the most notable of such papers is the critique authored by Mojabi (2004), in which he categorized Darroudi's works based on temporal periods and concepts. Mojabi used these periods as the basis for classifying Darroudi's works. Interestingly, these critics have been particularly curious about the "stylistics" of Darroudi's works. Most of them believe that Darroudi's style swings between surrealism and symbolism.

Meanwhile, critics such as Hooshang Taheri (1969) have referred to the "romantic" tendency in Darroudi's works. These critics have regarded Darroudi's romanticism in her works as a type of sensationalism keeping distance from the new civilization and criticizing it. This paper attempted to provide the necessary theoretical foundations for a stylistic investigation of Darroudi's works by resolving the research problem concerning the concepts of ruins, melancholia, and homeland.

Research Method

This paper adopted a psychological approach and expanded Freud's theory of melancholy with a

descriptive-analytical approach to investigate the form and content of the Third Period of Iran Darroudi's works in the 1970s and 1980s, attempting to select a range of works for analysis that can represent the main trends in form and content of the artworks in the period to ensure generalizability of results to the whole period. This paper used the library method for data collection.

Theoretical Foundations

Although melancholia has long been a subject of investigation as a mental and physical state, contemporary discourses in this regard often commence their discussion based on a psychological model proposed by Freud in the 1917 paper "*Mourning and Melancholia*" (Mox, 2015,18), in which Freud recognizes two forms of response to "loss". Mourning is a response to the loss of a loved person or an abstract idea, such as homeland, freedom, aspiration, so forth. Freud believed that some people react to the same effect of loss with melancholy rather than mourning (Freud, 2017, 290). In mourning, despite psychological drives' resistance, libido is ultimately retracted from being bound to the object of desire. This psychological resistance can be so strong and intense that, as a wishful psychosis, leads to alienation from reality and adhesion to the lost object.

Meanwhile, the existence of the lost object continues psychologically. Freud believed that although much time and mental energy are spent before acquiescing to and respecting reality (ibid., 291), mourning is sometimes not fruitful. "Defying from ending mourning and continuing it is the element that separates melancholia from mourning" (Mox, 2015,21). Melancholia does not clarify what has been lost; the main source of melancholia is an idealistic loss and deprivation (Santner, 2017, 291). In this duality, melancholia is regarded as a "pathological disposition versus mourning as a natural and "normative" response" (Cho & Chae, 2020, 7).

Freud's theory is based on individualistic analysis,

but he fundamentally revised these concepts by his essays after the social disaster following World War I. In those years, "Freud for the first time ... admits that mourning may ... not be a simple liberating process of detachment [from the object lost] and its replacement" (Clewell, 2004, 60). In "Ego and Id," regarding the concept of "melancholy," Freud states that "the lost object is re-created and activated in Ego, meaning that cathexis is replaced with an identification" (Freud, 2017, 34). Therefore, replacement and melancholic identification are combined into an imperative process for forming "Ego" and "character." In other words, the identification process, previously associated with the pathological outcome of loss, is now "the only condition in which Id can abandon the object" (ibid., 35). Hence, the context of Freud's recent works suggests "melancholia's significance is not merely pathological; it is an essential stage in mourning" (Mox, 2015, 23). While previously assuming that "mourning" led to a decisive ending, in his more recent works, Freud stated that mourning could be unending. Stressing this dimension of Freud's theory, Pollock argued that "in the case of the loss of an essential object, the mourning may never end (Pollock, 1989, 31). This "essential object" can be a historical object related to social identity.

Addressing the notion of historical loss, Liyod stated that "the relationship with the past is not only the relationship between the individual and their past; this relationship is also with their social history and its material and institutional effects" (Liyod, 2000, 216). Therefore, mourning and melancholia display a higher convergence when producing a collective response to social and historical losses. Under such conditions, mourning for loss cannot end since those things are irreplaceable. If the self-initiated and decisive end of mourning does not occur, the boundary between mourning and melancholia is undetermined" (Cho & Chae, 2020, 8).

Many literature and art critics have worked

on Freud's conception of "mourning" and "melancholia" and, particularly, expanding his theory into the social sphere. In this regard, Tammy Clewell invented the terms "cultural politics of mourning" and "ongoing mourning" to expand this interpretation into new arts. In Clewell's view, the pieces of modernist art "have become ruined around resistance to consolation" (Clewell, 2009, 3). These ruins do not kneel before being fixated with the past; from a political view, it is the progressive revision of what is called mourning. This revision is what Clewell called ongoing mourning: "a mourning dealing with maintaining and tolerating loss instead of detaching from it" (ibid.). This theory agrees with Ramezani's previous discussion in his interpretation of modernist elegists in Poetry and Mourning, in which he went beyond Freudian polarization and used the combined term "melancholic mourning" to interpret the work of modernists that carry on mourning consciously. This mourning has a melancholic aspect, aggressively resists consolation, addresses self-criticism, and gives a harsh criticism of modernity and its disasters (Ramazani, 1994).

In "Postmodern Condition," Lyotard regards modernism as the aestheticization of loss and, with recourse to his own concepts, demonstrates the aesthetics of modernism are the aesthetics of the sublime, although nostalgic. Modernism represents the unrepresentable only as lost content from this perspective. In other words, Lyotard regards modernism as a building element of melancholic discourse (Lyotard, 1984, 81).

Discussion

"Ruins" is the most recurrent theme in Darroudi's works. In over half of the 106 works published in "The Hearing Eye" (2004), as the last edition of her collection of works, the ruins are somehow present; they are escalated in the later works between the 1970s-1980s in the so-called Freezing Period so that the horizons leading to the ruins become the structural elements of the works' space.

The Everlasting Matrimony (Fig. 1), one of Darroudi's famous paintings¹ in the Freezing Period, explicitly manifests this issue and its related spatial structure. The ruins create the depth of the work towards the distant horizon, occupying a significant width of the work. Like many of the works in this era, the ruins in Everlasting Matrimony have been implemented in several plans. At the front plan, the effect of erosion and collapse is evident in the shape of arches and walls. The rear plan displays a perspective to a city where the finials, minarets, and houses fade away between cold and dark blue colors. Both these perspectives can be read as an embodiment of "homeland."

At the beginning of "In the Distance between two points ...!" (2020), Darroudi's autobiography, she stated that these landscapes are often the manifestation of the same village where she and her family took shelter during World War II (29). Their home windows opened to a graveyard, and since their secret lives were an obstacle for getting into the village, these children only caught a glimpse of an outlook of the village walls. The village looked "motionless," immersed in "absolute silence" and "as stagnant as eternity." Darroudi asserted that she came to know "death" in such a space (ibid., 23).

However, minarets and domes in the urban landscape associate with the view of Mashhad, Darroudi's hometown, which is also associated with death in her memories so that she lugubrously recalls the gates of Mashhad as the tomb of "three loved ones" – her father, grandfather, and grandmother (Darroudi, 2020, 67); a city being situated on the "outskirts" of the infinite horizon of the desert (ibid.), looked upon from "far away." This outlook, which is also present in her visualization of the views of Mashhad, can be reminiscent of the aspect of distance and distancing or loss.

In several paintings of this period, there is harbor such a visualization of the landscapes of ruins or landscapes fading into the horizon². The bond between death, eternity, and homeland is the curious element in this visualization. Darroudi



Fig.1. "Everlasting Matrimony", by Iran Darroudi, 1987, Source: Darroudi 2004, 17.

has asserted that: "I have roots in homeland's soil not only because of cultural and traditional constructs but also because of the loved ones who have become eternal there" (*ibid.*, 68). The link between eternity and death somehow indicates the lost object's persistence; despite the loss of the loved one, it or they are perpetual. The lost object's persistence in the psyche demonstrates its or their melancholic presence. From this view, the title -Everlasting Matrimony- becomes more curious. Darroudi painted it after she lost her husband. In the foreground, the wedding gown - that Darroudi never wore - is stretched toward the ruins and the distant horizon (eternity), as if, in this work, this "bond" is supposed to be eternalized after "death." Darroudi manifests her impression of "time" and "eternity" with a quote from Heidegger: "Time

is incarcerating moments and eternalizing them" (*Darroudi, 2009, 246*), which can be regarded as a particularly melancholic interpretation of time. The previous section on distinguishing between mourning and melancholia stated that the detachment from continuity with the lost object in "mourning" came at the price of time. Mourning can fulfill its normative function by distancing from the "moment" of loss, while in melancholia, the loss is stretched in time, and the individual remains chained to it. This is the point when "ongoing mourning" occurs. Thus, the "eternalization" of lost moments is nothing but making them "melancholic," which is particularly visible in the theme and title of "Everlasting Matrimony." The Freezing of forms in this work grows an additional layered meaning. As stated above, this

period— in the late 1970s and 1980s — is the so-called Freezing Period in Darroudi's works, in the early years of which Darroudi went into self-exile and lost four loved ones in the next seven years. Darroudi has stated, following her husband's death, she could not paint for a year; then, ice and freezing engulfed her paintings" (Darroudi, 2020, 226). In many of the artworks of this era, ruins, walls, city, and sky, plains, and even the sun are immersed in a "cold freezing." Darroudi creates an intriguing link between "freezing" and "eternalness" when describing "Four Riders of Death" (1985), another famous painting that has the same structure and composition as the Everlasting Matrimony: "a frozen road finding its way to eternalness, like a cloud over this city sunken in silence; ice has covered everything, eternal, as cold offers a protection against the cruel passage of time" (Darroudi, 2020, 218).

Ice and freezing can indicate a sort of coldness

where "the world goes poor and empty" in mourning (Santner, 2017, 292). Studying Darroudi's works reveals that she tends to use less warm colors, such as red, at the beginning of the period, a period during which Darroudi loses her "passion" in exile, away from home, going through the pain of losing her loved ones (Darroudi, 2009, 409). Despite the bright-colored space, in many of the works of this period, the sun is invisible from behind the frozen sky, or its beams are so weak, making it resemble the moon⁴ under dust as seen in "Broken Sun" (1993).

In this work, Darroudi has depicted the beams of sunlight as wide strips or molds of ice (Fig. 2). Using cold colors, less significant color effects, and opaque skies in the works of this period can be read as reflections of this "internal cold." Even the effects of white connote death⁵.

However, the freezing of space emanates from a melancholic desire to keep the lost object.



Fig. 2. Iran Darroudi's "Broken Sun" 1993. Source: Darroudi, 2004, 151.

Everlasting Matrimony (see Fig. 1) boldly encompasses this indication. Darroudi attempts to maintain and eternalize the bond within herself by freezing the bond moment after a loss. Accordingly, if this analysis is developed further, it is possible to read and interpret the manifestation of ruins and urban landscapes in her works to maintain and eternalize

Aside from the landscapes somehow denoting homeland, images inspired by the stone ruins of Persepolis are also a significant part of her compositions in this period. In *Limpid as Love* (1977), two separate horizons are unusually intermingled into a painting on two levels. At the top horizon, landscapes of muddy and bricked ruins and on the horizon below are the stone ruins of Persepolis. These two horizons are linked symbolically in the middle of the painting with an image of the mighty and frozen Mount Damavand. This image connotes the intersection of these landscapes, favoring the concept of "homeland."

As Darroudi has stated, from the mid-1970s, the chapters, shattered stairs, and columns of Persepolis have not left her compositions (Darroudi, 2020, 99). The painting "To Break off" (Fig. 3) is one of the first examples displaying the ruins of Persepolis clearly. While the ruins are seemingly on fire, the painting itself has an overall cold and frozen atmosphere. "To Break Off" has similar motifs and composition to *Everlasting Image* (1993). In both works, "A horse with a backpack of sun escapes from what has come to this land" (ibid.). The horse's legs are like the wizened branches of a tree. The juxtaposition of shriveled trees and ruins is a recurrent element in Darroudi's Third Period of works.

"Stone does not turn into anything else," as commented by Darroudi (Darroudi, 2009, 244). However, "the passage of time even corrodes the toughest stones" (Darroudi, 2020, 101). Darroudi seems to have applied this dual symbolism to the concept of "homeland" in the ruins of Persepolis. In a tangible critique in the late 1960s, which Darroudi

later republished several times in her books, Taheri (1969) stated that the splendor and magnificence of stone [as in columns] had massively impressed Darroudi (Taheri, 1969). The ruins are seemingly an embodiment of the "homeland's lost glory." In addition to the earlier signs, including catching fire and the light beams turning away, these two paintings' titles gain a more significant meaning in this regard, as "To break off" can signify "loss" and "deprivation," and "everlasting" can be the painter's desire to "eternalize" loss.

The love of "homeland" was an early conception in Darroudi's mind since childhood. Darroudi's childhood reveals many signs of this attachment and love. For instance, her elementary school peers called her "Iran Achaemenid" or "Enemy of Herodotus." However, the object of this love was, more precisely, "the ancient Iran," whose glory seems to have been lost in her mind. The ideological tendencies of such a conception can be traced in the discourse of the first and second Pahlavi



Fig. 3. "To Break Off" by Iran Darroudi, 1976.
Source: Darroudi, 2004, 67.

eras; archaism can be regarded as the central idea of the Pahlavi I's cultural discourse (Moridi, 2018, 68), during whose reign, the European orientalist helped glorify the silent and forgotten pasts (Tavakoli Targhi, 2002, 11). Accordingly, the expansion of archaeological excavations in Persepolis formed a significant portion of Pahlavi I's discourse backbone (Moridi, 2018, 70). This discourse also extended during Pahlavi II's reign and turned into a type of a "cultural discourse of returning to self." In other words, Pahlavi II's discourse of "originalism" was also a continuation of the same pro-archaism policies (ibid., 97).

Bearing witness to the images of an Iran under occupation during World War II as a child, the self-exile in the late 1970s, and the ruins of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s – which find evident manifestations in many of her works- intensify cathexis on the "homeland" object. Note that the image of the ruins was included in her works even before the Freezing Period. However, these ruins were depicted in a new urban context and had a more prominent social-critical theme. In one of the most exciting works of this period, "The Stagnation of Memory" (1969), the ruined stone columns have been turned into crucified figures delegations that somehow reminisce the statues of Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) (Fig. 4). One can trace the footprints of such figures in the Freezing Period works in the form of worn-out columns, aloof in an unending wasteland, or next to the ruins of stone arches. Even in *The Everlasting Matrimony* (see Fig. 1), the pairing of minaret-like columns can be reminiscent of these humanoid figures. The painting's content here suggests that these figures probably connote the xternalization of the bond.

The landscapes and perspectives in Darroudi's works are not "natural" but "cultural:" they are regarded as the manifestations of an inclusive idea toward nature. In her works in the Third Period, nature is unending, pervasive, and corrosive, often associated with effects of "decline", "death", and "ruins" since these concepts correlate from the

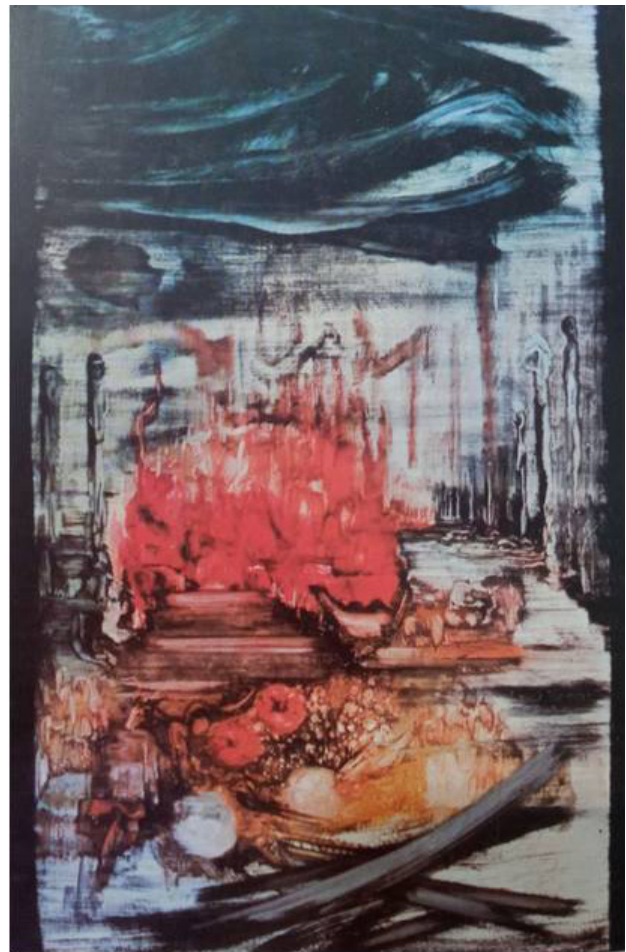


Fig. 4. "The Stagnation of Memory" by Iran Darroudi, 1969.
Source: Darroudi, 2004, 49.

perspective of natural history. The subjects and forms in most of Darroudi's works in this period are indeterminate and somehow fade away as if they cannot stand out prominently in the face of the sublime nature, shapes, and figures. Meanwhile, the absence of a human figure or its embodiment as a ruined column is another manifestation of nature's magnificence and infinity. The observer feels an escalated level of this magnificence and infinite grandeur by many of her paintings' large dimensions. However, as mentioned above, "homeland" and its "magnificence" are the primaries constructing elements organizing cultural landscapes. This "homeland," which itself has deteriorated and is "lost," is often manifested in the "ruins" and will become "eternal" in this natural history.

Conclusion

Loss is the predominant theme in the Third Period (the Freezing Period) of Iran Darroudi's works. This period began when she was in exile amid war and the death of her loved ones. These paintings amalgamate the embodiment of personal (the death of loved ones) and social-historical (the lost glory of the homeland) losses, and the artist depicts her desire to preserve the embodiment of the lost object in different forms. The image of distant ruins on the unending natural horizons symbolizes the "ongoing mourning" over this loss. These works are supposed to "eternalize" the moments of bonding and the manifestation of the homeland's former magnificence as opposed to "nature" and natural time as "inclusive" and "corrosive" entities. The form, subjects, and titles of these works reflect this tendency. The ruins in the unending horizons, on the one hand, are an objective sign of "remoteness" and "parting," and on the other hand, a manifestation of "decay" and "destruction." These ruins should be preserved and eternalized by freezing. The recurrence of concepts and forms such as "ruins," "death," "homeland," "eternalness," and "eternity" in a mourning context in these works implies a kind of "melancholic mourning."

However, the conception of "homeland" as a magnificent object lost, and the desire to preserve emanate from the "archeological" and "pro-originalism" discourse of the artist's era that prevailed specifically during the Pahlavi era. Thus, by expanding the social aspect of the concept of melancholy, it can be said that from a modernist aesthetics view, these works are based on a kind of "aesthetics of loss," melancholically and nostalgically talking about the metanarrative of homeland, a homeland manifested as Darroudi's works as the sublime object lost.

Endnote

1. Darroudi's Collection of Works (The Hearing Eye) starts with a large, two-page picture of the painting.
2. For instance, in the "To Endeavor"(1987) or "Land of Kindness"(1987).
3. Apart from Darroudi's particular reception of Heidegger's time philosophy, you can find streaks of a melancholic interpretation of

"history" in Walter Benjamin's works, especially in the classic "Theses on the Philosophy of History". Redemption of lost moments and hopes faded into the history plays a fundamental role in Benjamin's political philosophy. Ref (Mox, 2015).

4. The painting "Kingdom of Silence" (1986) is one of the few works of this era in which the sun is visible, but in a moon-like form.

5. Darroudi has interpreted white as the color for everlasting sleep at the introduction of "In the Distance between two points" (Darroudi, 2004, 28).

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