

## Original Research Article

## Postcolonial Redesign of Iranian-Islamic Identity in Contemporary Iranian Industrial Design, with an Emphasis on the Concept of Borderline Agency\*

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Received: 01/10/2025

Accepted: 27/10/2025

Available online: 20/02/2026

### Abstract

**Problem statement:** In the context of postcolonial and globalization discourses, industrial design in peripheral countries, such as Iran, has evolved into a complex arena for redefining cultural, religious, and historical identities. Therefore, the comprehensive objective of the present study is to analyze how Iranian-Islamic identity is represented in contemporary Iranian industrial design, particularly under conditions where design is no longer viewed as a neutral activity but rather as a site of discursive and cultural contestation itself.

**Research objective:** This study aims to examine the re-articulation of Iranian-Islamic identity in contemporary Iranian industrial design through a postcolonial lens, with particular emphasis on the concept of border agency. It seeks to analyze the role of industrial designers as cultural agents operating within the tensions between the local and the global, tradition and modernity, and center and periphery, and to explore the possibilities and constraints of identity construction in this in-between condition.

**Research method:** The present study adopts a theoretical-analytical approach, utilizing the concept of “Borderline Agency “ as a framework to explain the designer’s position situated between the dualities of local/global, tradition/modernity, and center/periphery.

**Conclusion:** Through a discursive analysis of design artifacts and theoretical documents, the article demonstrates that Borderline Agency is both an opportunity and a challenge: on the one hand, it provides Iranian designers with the chance to recreate meaning and cultural agency; on the other, it exposes them to dualities, identity tensions, and pressures from the global market. The analysis indicates that many products designed in Iran carry efforts to integrate traditional elements with contemporary design language. However, this synthesis is not always successful or tension-free, as designers are compelled to operate in a ‘gray space’ between indigenization, modernization, and cultural representation. Furthermore, the findings reveal that industrial design in Iran has evolved beyond mere technical function and aesthetics, becoming an arena for cultural confrontation, negotiation, and even resistance—a site where the designer, as a border-agent, is engaged in a continuous process of meaning-making and identity-construction within an uneven power structure.

**Keywords:** *Postcolonial Studies, Globalization, Peripheral Countries, Industrial Design, Borderline Agency, Iranian-Islamic Identity.*

\*This article extracted from M. A. thesis of “Fatemeh Taji” entitled “Iranian-Islamic design of urban furniture with an emphasis on the concept of border activism in industrial design” that under supervision of Dr. “Meysam

Khodashenas” and Dr. “Siamak Pedrammehr” which has been done at Tabriz Islamic Art University, Faculty of Design, Tabriz, Iran.

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## Introduction

In the twenty-first century, with paradigmatic shifts occurring, a reassessment of concepts such as agency, space, power, and identity has become essential. In this context, the emerging concept of "Borderline Agency" is introduced within the framework of postcolonial studies and cultural anthropology. This form of agency is not formed within established structures, but rather in the transitional and borderline spaces between discourses, classes, and identities. The borderline agent is an interstitial and multilayered individual who traverses traditional distinctions and possesses the capacity to redefine social, political, and cultural structures.

The Borderline Agency is more of an operational position than an identity status, enabling the creation of meaning, the mediation of tensions, and the challenging of dominant orders (Farasatkah, 2024). This agent operates not just at the peripheries, but at the points of cultural and social collision and intersection.

With the expansion of interdisciplinary studies, this concept has entered fields such as design. Design is now regarded not merely as a functional or aesthetic practice, but as a socio-political act. The present article attempts to, while analyzing the theory of Borderline-Agency, investigate the potential for its extension to design and offer a theoretical framework for analyzing design as a borderland act.

## Problem Statement

The process of globalization, through cultural and aesthetic homogenization, has turned the issue of identity into a significant challenge in design. Identity, being a dynamic and cultural concept, reflects social-cultural values and structures in design. However, globalized design often ignores cultural-spatial expression, leading to a crisis of "design identitylessness," particularly in non-Western societies (Matos et al., 2019). In response, "Identity-Oriented Design" (or Identitarian Design) emphasizes a return to local, historical, and climatic elements to present designs that are compatible with local culture yet globally intelligible (Amani & Ghaderi, 2023).

Challenges such as the tension between cultural authenticity and the global market, the contradiction between indigenous design and dominant economic structures, and the lack of theoretical frameworks for combining the local and the contemporary have exposed Identity-Oriented Design to serious obstacles that necessitate a critical and multilayered approach (Kazemi, 2023).

The concept of "Borderline-Agency" originates from postcolonial and cultural discourses (Anzaldúa, 2004; Bhabha, 1994), referring to actors who operate across epistemological and identity borders. The translation of this concept to design, particularly product and urban design, highlights the capacity of designers to act as intermediaries between local and global discourses (Kazemi, 2023). Borderline design facilitates cultural resistance, creative representation, and participation in global networks of meaning. The main question is: How does Iranian industrial design, as a borderline agency, re-create Iranian-Islamic identity in its interaction with global values?

## Literature Review

Pournaderi et al. (2025), in their study of Sculptural Furniture—a type of design that encompasses users' emotional and spiritual dimensions in addition to their physical needs—demonstrated that the convergence of sculpture and furniture is the primary factor shaping this style. Culture, economics, technology, sculptural architecture, and new artistic approaches also play secondary roles.

Khodashenas & Azhand (2024) demonstrated that product design, besides responding to needs, reflects the culture and lifestyle of society, establishing a dialectical relationship between global design (universal) and national design (specific) in the contemporary era. In a study on the position of essentialism in national design, they identified five key methods for creating national identity in design: Utilizing aesthetics and function based on national character (or ethos), Designing in accordance with citizens' lifestyles, Leveraging local materials and methods, Relying on a specific worldview in the design process.

They argue that national identity in design is formed through its “exclusive design element” and its “historical continuity.” In another study, Aghajani (2022), focusing on environmental graphic design and urban furniture, emphasized the importance of design’s connection to local and ritual culture, considering it a prerequisite for a vibrant and identity-rich society.

Amani et al. (2021), employing a postcolonial approach and a descriptive-analytical method, investigated the reasons for the resistance of Islamic calligraphy against the trend of Westernization. They showed that the encounter of Islamic societies with the West, while altering discursive and social structures, resulted in a crisis in culture and art, leading to the marginalization of traditional arts, including calligraphy and book ornamentation. With the emergence of postcolonial studies and the re-reading of the concept of “resistance” against cultural domination, the legitimacy of Western aesthetics was challenged, and Islamic artists returned to calligraphy as a symbol of resistance and the manifestation of local culture to recover their identity. Their study identifies two main factors contributing to the persistence of Islamic calligraphy: The social context and the need for identity redefinition from a postcolonial perspective, which helped preserve tradition against the influence of cultural imperialism. The inherent characteristics of calligraphy, including its “intertwinement” with the Divine Word, its abstract nature, its connection to Islamic wisdom and literature, its compatibility with other local arts, and its educational system rooted in Islamic mysticism.

Accordingly, Islamic calligraphy, due to its multifaceted and spiritual nature, has been able to resist Westernization, and its authenticity and dynamism will continue in the contemporary world as long as its creative capacities and its epistemological links to tradition are preserved.

Zarei Farsani (2017), in examining the trend of industrial design in the West, pointed to the impact of the Industrial Revolution and the mechanism (mechanization) in reducing design identity and authenticity, particularly in the automotive industry. He

showed that despite efforts during the 1980s and 1990s to revive design identity, the dominant trend in recent years has shifted towards mass production and profit-orientation, which has weakened the cultural character of products.

In summary, while previous studies have addressed topics such as national identity, indigenous design, and globalization, they have often neglected the active role of designers as borderline-agents in the negotiation between local and global levels.

## Theoretical Framework

### • The concept of borderline agency

The concept of “Borderline Agency” is an interdisciplinary and emerging notion that has been formed by linking theories of agency, space, identity, and power. It is applied in fields such as cultural studies, sociology of space, urban design, and critical anthropology. This concept refers to the capacity of actors- whether individual, collective, or institutional- to act, resist, and re-create structure and identity in interstitial and borderline positions. These borders can be geographic, social, cultural, political, or epistemological.

Anzaldúa (2004) speaks of “borderline identity,” a state of living between different discourses that leads to the creation of a new identity. Bhabha (1994), in postcolonial theory, sees the “Third Space” as the locus of meaning and new identity creation, introducing it as the context for Borderline Agency. Latour (2005), with his Actor-Network Theory (ANT), removes agency from the exclusive domain of humans, viewing objects, technologies, and spaces as agents in boundary situations. Haraway (1991), in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, introduces this human-machine hybrid being as a symbol of Borderline Agency at the intersection of knowledge, technology, and gender.

Mignolo (2011; 2012), through the concept of border thinking, emphasizes the role of individuals who operate at the linguistic, cultural, and epistemic boundaries between societies. He regards these actors as effective mediators in the exchange of knowledge and culture, and as agents who contribute

to the circulation and expansion of marginal, non-centric perspectives in knowledge production (Farasatkah & Kebriaee, 1998).

Borderline Agency has five principal dimensions (Fig. 1):

- 1) The Interstitial Position: Based on Turner (1969)'s anthropology, this places the individual in the state of "neither here nor there" (liminality).
- 2) The Power of Traversing and Interacting with Diverse Discourses: Described by Bhabha (1994), this empowers the borderline agent to move through and redefine discourses.
- 3) The Synthesis of Plural Identities and the Creation of the New: This dimension ensures that contradictions are re-created rather than suppressed (Anzaldúa, 2004), leading to the emergence of something novel.
- 4) Distributed Agency (Non-Human): In Latour (2005)'s Actor-Network Theory, agency is not limited to humans; objects, technologies, and institutions also act as agents within border spaces.
- 5) Agency of Resistance and Exclusion: Marginalized populations and excluded minorities emerge as a force for social change, a role that Haraway (1991) symbolized in the Cyborg, a human-machine hybrid being.

**- Globalization**

Humans are beings susceptible to influence and adaptable to environmental changes. However, in a rapidly transforming world, this characteristic can lead to the loss of their authentic identity (Kavousi & Hosseinzadegan, 2011). Globalization, with features such as denationalization, high mobility of

goods and services, and economic internationalization, has a long history, with its roots tracing back to the era of trade among ancient empires. This phenomenon creates both opportunity and poverty, impacting human lives with both positive and negative effects (Amani et al., 2021).

With the growth of globalization, the influence of transnational factors has increased across the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of countries, and the relationship between humans and their surrounding environment has been transformed. Globalization moves the individual from regional introversion toward an extroverted and transnational identity. According to Tomlinson, this process is not merely a transition from a local to a macro-order; rather, facilitated by advances in communications and technology, it has strengthened the interdependency of human beings and enabled the formation of new political-cultural alliances and solidarities (Kavousi & Hosseinzadegan, 2011).

**- Border-agency in globalization studies**

The theory of Borderline Agency within the discourse of globalization, particularly in the works of Mignolo (2012), offers a deeper and more critical redefinition of the concept of agency, focusing on peripheral positions and "knowledge from the Global South." Mignolo views the borderline agent not merely as an individual situated between tradition and modernity, but as a decolonizing agent who sees the border beyond mere geography, as an epistemological, cultural, and political space. In his book "The Darker Side of Western Modernity", he introduces the border as a site for epistemological resistance, the reproduction of identity, and the creation of new possibilities, critically utilizing knowledge from both indigenous and modern sources (ibid.).

Bhabha (1994) also introduces the concept of the "Third Space," which, similar to Mignolo (2012)'s perspective, views identities at the intersection of cultures and in a state of suspension, simultaneously possessing the potential for both creativity and tension. Furthermore, De Sousa Santos (2015) addresses the "Epistemologies of the South," arguing that modern

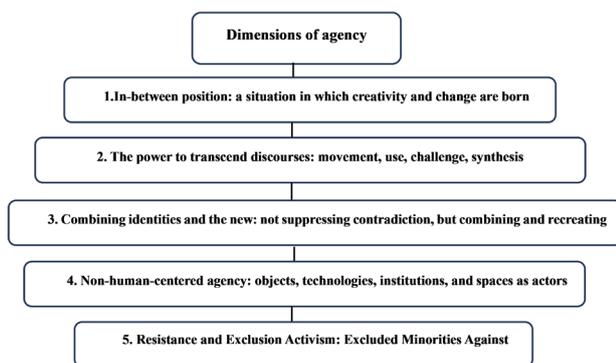


Fig. 1. Dimensions of borderline agency. Source: Authors.

Western knowledge, through the colonial process, has suppressed other forms of knowledge (or knowledges). The concepts of “Globalization from Below,” introduced by Escobar (2001) and Nandy (2003), emphasize the importance of indigenous narratives and resistances against the central powers of globalization. Within this framework, the borderline agent acts as an intermediary between the official and popular narratives of globalization.

In the field of design, borderline agents provide innovative solutions by integrating traditions, modern technologies, and local values. This hybrid approach focuses on the combination of local and global knowledge, aiming to develop products that, besides function and aesthetics, express multiple cultural identities (Mignolo, 2012).

**- Borderline agency in Iranian social sciences studies**

In Iranian social science studies, “Borderline Agency” is a novel concept that analyzes social, cultural, and political behaviors in interstitial spaces. Farasatkah (2009) refers to these actors as “intra-structural”; individuals who are situated in the middle or lower layers of the formal structure and who implement initiative, soft reforms, and gradual resistance by exploiting institutional gaps. These individuals are neither fully in power nor fully excluded, but rather operate on the borders of the formal structure, possessing the capacity for interpretation and maneuver, and playing a crucial role in civil society. Borderline Agency pursues incremental reforms instead of fundamental changes, utilizing intra-structural spaces within a closed institution (Farasatkah, 2024). This

agency can be analyzed at the micro, meso (middle), and macro levels (Farasatkah, 2013; 2016) (Fig. 2).

Farasatkah (2024) emphasizes that the borderline agent is a social intermediary between the state and society, particularly in dual (or bipolar) societies like Iran, where the formal system and society operate with different rationales (logics). This agent, through soft disobedience (or tactical non-compliance), attempts to reform the status quo without achieving a complete rupture from the existing order. In a society like Iran, where formal structures face heavy bureaucracy, distance from the public, and institutional rigidity/immobility, Borderline Agency is not only a means of survival but also a pathway for gradual reform from within.

**• Iranian-Islamic identity and postcolonial components in art and design**

**- Theoretical foundations of postcolonialism**

Postcolonial theory emerged from the critique of Western modernity and as a reaction to the intellectual and cultural legacy of colonialism. This theory addresses not merely the period “after colonialism” but rather the persistence of dominance discourses and Western representation in the contemporary world. As Bhabha (1994) emphasizes, the prefix “post” in the word “postcolonial” does not signify an “aftermath” or “moving beyond colonialism.” Instead, it refers to a condition where cultural subjects, in the interstice (or ‘in-between’) of the border between dominance and resistance, are engaged in the process of redefining their own identity. In the words of Said (1978, 64) in his book *Orientalism*, colonialism was not confined to the political and economic spheres; rather, through cultural and knowledge-based discourses, it forged a distorted image of the ‘Orient’ as a passive ‘Other’ in need of guidance. This process constituted a form of cultural and epistemic colonization that was reproduced through educational, artistic, and media institutions. In contrast to this process, postcolonial theorists such as Spivak (2023) and Fanon (1961) emphasize the possibility of a ‘voice of resistance’ emerging from the margins. This is where colonized cultures endeavor to move beyond the position of the “Other” by re-reading

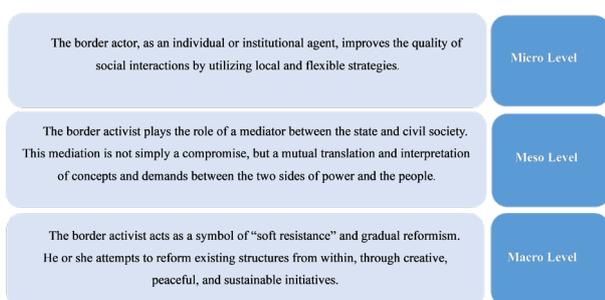


Fig. 2. Three distinct levels of borderline agency influence in society. Source: Authors.

and reclaiming their own traditions, thereby achieving the self-reproduction of independent meaning and identity. From this perspective, indigenous art and culture can serve as powerful tools for cultural resistance and reconstruction against Western hegemony.

#### - Iranian-Islamic identity and cultural redefinition

In Iran, the concept of Iranian-Islamic identity is the result of the interweaving of two historical and epistemic spheres: one being the cultural-civilizational roots of Ancient Persia, and the other, the spiritual and aesthetic foundations of Islam. Throughout history, this identity has repeatedly faced challenges and redefinitions due to various encounters with the West, including periods of neo-colonialism, modernity, and globalization (Katouzian, 2013). From a postcolonial perspective, Iran and other peripheral societies are exposed to a form of “soft cultural colonization.” This is a type of dominance that, through Western scientific, educational, and aesthetic discourses, attempts to impose global standards of art, progress, and modernity upon non-Western cultures. The result of this process is the emergence of an identity crisis and the marginalization of indigenous traditions in the artistic and intellectual spheres (Nasr, 1987; Bhabha, 1994). In response to this, a tendency emerged in Islamic societies towards “return to the self” (a form of cultural authenticity movement), the revitalization of indigenous traditions, and a critical reading of modernity—all considered postcolonial components. Thinkers such as Shariati (1997) and Nasr (1987), despite their differences in approach, both emphasized the necessity of preserving Islamic cultural identity against “Gharbzadegi” (Westoxication/West-Struckness). This cultural return is not a mere reproduction of the past, but rather an effort to create a new dialogue between tradition and modernity.

#### - Postcolonial components in Iranian-Islamic art and design

Recent studies in the field of Islamic art and industrial design indicate that postcolonial components primarily manifest in three main axes:

Cultural representation and resistance: Iranian-

Islamic art, particularly in forms such as calligraphy, architecture, and traditional design, has consistently carried a form of cultural resistance against the Western aesthetic discourse. By emphasizing concepts like abstraction (or ‘Tawhid’), unity in multiplicity, and connection to the Divine Word (Kalam Ilahi), this art showcases a type of visual spirituality in opposition to Western materialist realism (Burckhardt, 1976; Nasr, 1987).

Liminal agency (or border-crossing agency): The concept of “Liminal Agency” (or Border-Crossing Agency), introduced by Bhabha, describes a condition where the cultural subject, positioned in between two worlds (tradition and modernity), strives to create new meanings. In contemporary Iranian industrial design, this concept is manifested as an attempt to integrate modern technology with indigenous identity and Iranian-Islamic cultural signifiers (Bhabha, 1994).

Recreating identity and collective memory: Islamic art, in contrast to Western modern art, which emphasizes individualism and innovation, relies on collective memory and the continuity of tradition. From a postcolonial perspective, this continuity does not imply passivity; rather, it is a form of “resistant recreation” that, while preserving its roots, engages in the creation of new meanings within a contemporary context (Grabar, 2009; Amin, 2019).

#### • Identity-oriented industrial design

Industrial Design, which originated after the European Industrial Revolution, was initially focused on the integration of function and aesthetics (Hauffe, 2007). With the advancement of modernism and the establishment of pioneering schools like Bauhaus and Ulm, industrial design was defined as an “art for shaping mass-produced objects.” In the late 20th century, with the emergence of humanistic and postmodern perspectives, the importance of the cultural role of designed objects and their semantic analysis increased significantly (Mahdieh et al., 2015; Hauffe, 2007). Designers such as Sottsass, Mendini, and De Lucchi, drawing inspiration from art and culture, created objects imbued with meaning (James, 2018; Erlhoff & Marshall, 2008).

Today, industrial design extends beyond mere function to address cultural identity, social interaction, and the narratives embedded within products (Kazemi, 2023). Postcolonial approaches emphasize indigenous knowledge and cultural diversity within global design (Schultz et al., 2018; Moran et al., 2018). Consequently, industrial design has evolved into a socio-political activity with significant cultural, environmental, and critical dimensions (Kalantidou & Fry, 2014). The rise of nationalism in the second decade of the 21st century has transformed national identity into a crucial subject in industrial design studies, with geographical borders remaining the most authoritative mechanism for classifying design based on nations (Fallan & Lees-Maffei, 2016). In Iran, industrial design has similarly transformed under the influence of Western Modernism, and it is currently facing two primary perspectives within academic circles: Global and Trans-local Design. This approach advocates universal design principles. Culturally and Locally Specific Design: An approach that emphasizes local characteristics and cultural features (Khodashenas & Azhand, 2022). The integration of cultural and national components into design can strengthen the local identity while adhering to universal principles (Khodashenas & Azhand, 2024).

#### **- Liminal agency (or border-crossing agency) in industrial design**

Bonsiepe (2006), in his analysis of the global design system, divides countries into central and peripheral. Within this framework, designers from peripheral countries—such as Turkey, Taiwan, South Korea, Africa, and Australia—act as liminal agents (or border-crossing agents). By integrating local and global elements, they create hybrid, innovative, and cross-cultural designs that are simultaneously rooted in indigenous cultural traditions and possess the capacity to compete on a global level.

In these countries, industrial design is executed in a liminal and hybrid manner; that is, it is simultaneously faithful to visual and cultural traditions on one hand, and leverages new technologies and the global design language on the other. In Turkey, the products of brands

such as Derin Design and Autoban have achieved international recognition by drawing inspiration from Ottoman architecture and Islamic calligraphy, yet realized through modern execution. In Taiwan, the brand Qis Design and designer Pili Wu have presented a novel aesthetic by integrating Chinese traditions with industrial technology.

In South Korea, the “K-Design Movement” is a prime example of liminal design, successfully balancing modern technology with indigenous culture, which is clearly manifested in brands like Samsung. In Australia, designs by Marc Newson and various Indigenous designers offer examples of tradition being redefined within a contemporary design format, drawing inspiration from local nature and culture. Furthermore, in Africa, projects such as Design Indaba and brands like Dokter and Misses have transformed design into a tool for cultural and social activism by recreating tribal forms and concepts.

These examples demonstrate that designers, acting as liminal agents, expand the boundaries of industrial design by redefining tradition and globalization, thereby establishing a dynamic link between the past, present, and future.

#### **- Methods of manifestation of liminal agency in Iranian-Islamic design**

In recent decades, the necessity of rethinking cultural identity within industrial design has gained increasing importance, particularly in non-Western societies. Industrial design in Iran has sought to affirm the Iranian-Islamic identity as an effort to preserve and reproduce cultural identity components against the tide of modern design globalization. This has created a fertile ground for the “liminal agency” of Iranian industrial designers. The concept of “liminal agency” refers to the active and conscious presence of designers at the border (or ‘in-between’) of tradition and modernity, local and global, industrial and handcrafted. These designers employ specific methods and techniques to reflect the Iranian-Islamic identity in contemporary industrial products. By doing so, they have been able to operate within the two intermediate layers: the nation-state (citizens) and the foundations of global design (local

values). To examine this subject, the works of some of the most prominent Iranian designers have been considered—those who have successfully represented Iranian-Islamic identity in industrial products (Table 1).

### Methods of Expressing Iranian-Islamic Identity in Product Design

Analysis of the case studies examined in this research reveals that Iranian industrial designers utilize a set of approaches and design techniques to represent the Iranian-Islamic identity in their products. These methods are rooted in the country's visual, cultural, and architectural traditions while simultaneously being integrated with the demands of contemporary design. These methods can be classified into five primary categories:

- **Revivalist approach: re-reading traditional forms and motifs**

In this approach, designers revisit traditional ornamental patterns such as Islimi (Arabesque), Khata'i (Floral), Shamsah (Sunburst), and Toranj (Medallion). They then simplify and geometrically redesign these motifs to ensure compatibility with the modern design language. This process allows for the preservation of cultural authenticity while simultaneously facilitating its application in contemporary and urban products. An example of this approach can be seen in the use of the Islimi motif in the design of the 'Saba' urban furniture.

- **Narrative-driven approach: utilizing cultural stories and symbols**

In this method, the designer draws inspiration from Iranian myths, rituals, indigenous concepts, and cultural narratives to create a product that conveys a meaning extending beyond its physical function. Symbolic narratives, such as the Tree of Life, aid in establishing an emotional and cognitive connection between the user and the product, as seen in the design of the 'Toranj' (Medallion) chair, for instance.

- **Hybrid-technological approach: integrating modern technology with handicrafts**

In this approach, tradition and technology are placed in interaction rather than in opposition. Techniques such as digital printing, laser cutting, and modular

production are employed alongside traditional skills like wood carving (Monabbat-kari) and pottery (Soffal-gari). The result of this combination is products characterized by high quality, mass production capability, and diverse visual aesthetics. An example of this is the 'Baharestan' tea-set collection, where traditional patterns are executed using digital printing technology.

- **Architectural-adaptation approach: inspiration from Iranian-Islamic architecture**

In this approach, the structural and ornamental elements of Iranian architecture—such as arches, domes, Muqarnas (stalactite vaulting), and latticed windows (Orosi)—are utilized as sources of inspiration in product design. These adaptations are typically reflected in the product's body in either an abstract or a functional manner. For instance, the design of the 'Noor-Ara' lamps, inspired by the Muqarnas of the Shah Mosque in Isfahan, is a clear manifestation of this tendency.

- **Meaning-oriented approach: emphasis on mystical and conceptual experiences**

This approach focuses on transmitting spiritual and transcendental emotions. It creates spaces conducive to meditation and contemplation by utilizing pure forms, minimal lighting, calm colors, and natural materials. This technique is primarily employed in the design of ritual spaces or fine art pieces. An example of this is the use of meaning-based lighting design in public areas, inspired by the principles of Islamic aesthetics.

This typology demonstrates the diverse, creative, and yet deeply rooted strategies among Iranian industrial designers; strategies that treat tradition not merely as a static past, but as a dynamic source for innovation in product design.

### Methods of Emergence of Borderline Agency in Iranian-Islamic Industrial Design

One of the key findings of this research is the identification of the role of designers as boundary workers within the context of Iranian industrial design. Boundary work in this field signifies the act of mediating between various domains, tradition

Table 1. Manifestation of borderline agency in Iranian-Islamic design. Source: Authors.

Item No.	Title of work	Image	Designer/Manufacturer	Year of production	Core features	Execution method	Borderline agency
1	Saba Urban Furniture Design		Ali Ezati	2024	Islamic arabesque patterns and Islamic geometry.	Redesigning traditional motifs with simple, industrially reproducible forms.	Continuity of Islamic Visual Culture
2	Noorara Decorative Lights		Nemanour Lighting Company	2023	Iranian Architectural Motifs such as Muqarnas and Shams-e (Sunburst) in the Design of the Lamp Bodies	Translation of Historical Forms into Industrially Producible Modular Forms	Revival of Islamic Aesthetics
3	Toranj Chair		Fereshteh Zamani	2025	Inspiration from Persian carpet designs and the Tree of Life	Utilization of symbolic concepts combined with contemporary ergonomics	Representation of Iranian mythological stories in a functional form
4	Baharestan Tea Set		Aravan Design Studio	2022	Utilization of tilework patterns from Iranian mosques	A combination of hand-drawn motifs with digital printing technology on dinnerware	Integration of traditional handicrafts with modern production techniques
5	Persian Garden Coffee Table		Niloofer Hashemi	2022	Designing the table's form based on the structure of Persian gardens (Chahar Bagh)	Transformation of architectural spatial patterns into three-dimensional furniture forms	Reflection of the concept of natural order and sacred geometry
6	Serving Set		Chichak Studio	2021	Inspiration from the forms of ancient Iranian pottery with a modern interpretation	A combination of traditional pottery techniques with contemporary minimalist lines	Reinterpretation of traditional objects in contemporary industrial forms
7	Urban Porch Water Cooling Device		Ali Haghshenas	2019	Inspired by the Structure of the Porches of Iranian Mosques	Designing a Structure Inspired by Islamic Architectural Forms	Promoting Islamic Architecture
8	Ghab-e Noor Urban Lights		Farzad Daliri	2021	Designing the body of streetlights based on Iranian tilework patterns	Transferring decorative geometry to an industrial structure with environmental resistance	Infusion of Iranian visual identity into modern urban furniture

and modernity, local and global, institutional and grassroots. This boundary work can be examined at three main levels:

- **Mediation between tradition and modernity**

Iranian industrial designers, positioned at the intersection of cultural-religious values and the requirements of modern design, are compelled to establish a creative balance between these two domains. By redefining traditional elements within contemporary frameworks, they both reflect cultural identity and respond to global design standards. This process is a conscious act of preserving identity in the face of globalization.

- **Interaction with formal structures and social needs**

Designers are positioned to bridge the gap between official cultural policies (government, universities, religious institutions) and the diverse demands and needs of the consumer market. This mediating role transforms them into active participants in the process of production and the redefinition of socio-cultural boundaries; they become actors who are sometimes compelled to negotiate with dominant cultural policies or align themselves with evolving public tastes.

- **Utilizing design as a tool for cultural representation**

Given Iran's peripheral position in the global industrial production chain, industrial design has become a means for many Iranian designers to reassert cultural power. They utilize design not merely to respond to market demands, but for symbolic resistance, the re-reading of historical narratives, and the creation of new representations of Iranian-Islamic identity. In this respect, industrial design transforms into a cultural act with significant socio-political ramifications.

## Research Method

This research falls within the Interpretive paradigm and was conducted using a qualitative research method with a descriptive-analytical approach. The constructivist paradigm is founded on the belief

that social reality is constructed through human interactions within cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. Accordingly, data were collected through the study of documentary sources and specialized texts, including books, academic articles from reputable databases such as Google Scholar, Civilica, Elmnet, and an examination of case studies of industrial design works that reflect Iranian-Islamic identity elements. The data were then categorized and interpreted using qualitative content analysis.

## Conclusion

This research, by focusing on the concept of “boundary work” (or “boundary action”) in industrial design, has investigated the possibilities of redefining Iranian-Islamic identity within the globalized framework of design. The findings indicate that designers in non-Western societies, including Iran, can play an active role in the representation of identity at the frontier between tradition and modernity, and the local and the global. Successful design examples in Iran, such as “Saba,” “Noorara,” “Toranj,” and “Saboo,” demonstrate that diverse strategies—including the revival of traditions, narrative-centricity, technological fusion, architectural adaptation, and focus on meaning (sense-making)—have been employed in the representation of cultural identity.

These examples demonstrate that identity-driven design is not merely a theoretical discussion but a practical and multilayered strategy that can pave the way for transformation in Iranian industrial design. Despite these efforts, at the macro level, there is a lack of a coherent strategy and adequate support structure for institutionalizing this approach. A crucial conclusion of this research is that identity-driven industrial design in Iran necessitates a paradigm shift in the way designers are viewed—seeing them as socio-cultural agents. These agents, by integrating design skills, historical-cultural knowledge, and an understanding of contemporary technologies, are capable of offering fresh narratives of Iranian-ness in today's industrial world.

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#### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Khodashenas, M., Taji, F., & Pedrammehr, S. (2026). Postcolonial Redesign of Iranian-Islamic Identity in Contemporary Iranian Industrial Design, with an Emphasis on the Concept of Borderline Agency. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 22(153), 21-32.

DOI: [10.22034/bagh.2025.528965.5901](https://doi.org/10.22034/bagh.2025.528965.5901)

URL: [https://www.bagh-sj.com/article\\_236958.html?lang=en](https://www.bagh-sj.com/article_236958.html?lang=en)

