

Lydia Wooldridge: Reworked Submission for *Art, Borders and Belonging: On Home and Migration in the Twenty-First Century*
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Parastou Forouhar: Materialising Pain and Beauty

*When I arrived in Germany, I was Parastou Forouhar.
Somehow, over the years, I have become 'Iranian'.*

Parastou Forouhar 2010

Textiles communicate. From an etymological perspective, the English usage of the word 'text' stems from the Latin 'texere', to weave, to braid, to join together or to fabricate. It can be argued that we weave words into literature the same way that we weave yarn into cloth. Contemporary artists engage with textiles as a way of communicating multiple and often complex ideas concurrently. The Iranian-born artist, Parastou Forouhar uses textiles or textile construction techniques to explore multiple frames of reference simultaneously. An initial frame for reading Forouhar's artistic practice is the heinous assassination of her parents, Dariush and Parvaneh Forouhar, by the Iranian Government in 1998. Consequently, her work is often read as a critique of the theocratic regime in Iran. However, Forouhar's artistic practice also concerns cultural transfer and understanding between Eastern and Western cultures, in particular Iran and Germany (her chosen home). Whilst other critics have focused specifically on these approaches in her work, I use textiles or textile construction techniques to consider her practice from a new perspective. In this chapter, I analyse Forouhar's use of textiles or textile processes to materialise commemoration, cultural difference, and identity. Looking specifically at *Eslimi* (2003), *Weaving Pain* (2013) and *Kiss Me* (2013), I consider Forouhar's use of entanglement, weaving and appliqué to create artworks that simultaneously communicate complex and often contradictory ideas concerning beauty and pain, religion and secularism, and tradition and modernity.

Forouhar was born in Tehran to Dariush and Parvaneh in 1962. Dariush was a politician in the Mohammad Mosaddegh era and Parvaneh a political activist. They both opposed the post-revolution (1979) theocratic regime in Iran and championed human rights and democracy. In the early 1990s the Forouhar's encouraged their children, Arash and Parastou to seek asylum outside Iran. Parastou relocated and settled in Germany, studying a masters degree at Offenbach College of Arts. On 22 November 1998 Dariush and Parvaneh were brutally murdered in their own home in Tehran. The murders formed part of 'The Chain Murders', which sought to eradicate intellectual dissidents in Iran. Their deaths provoked large protests throughout Tehran with 25,000 people taking to the streets to commemorate their lives and protest for dissident rights.¹ Forouhar's artistic practice has always been concerned with 'abstraction and the formation of metaphors' drawing on what she learnt from students who 'expressed dissent through highly coded and alternative methods'.² However, in the aftermath of her parents' murders, pain formed the central subject of Forouhar's artwork. *Eslimi*, *Weaving Pain* and *Kiss Me* all feature references to physical pain, but whilst it is easy to read Forouhar's artistic practice as biographical, it is also important to look at the broader cultural themes raised in her work. These include mourning, martyrdom, ritual, language, dictatorship and democracy. Examining these themes allows Forouhar to interrogate supposedly different cultural practices in the Middle East and Germany.

When viewing Forouhar's complete body of work, a dominant aesthetic is apparent – that of ornamentation. Studying at the Academy of Arts in Tehran University (1984-9) enabled Forouhar to observe how fellow students would work in code to communicate hidden meaning, thereby obscuring dissent.³ Her earlier textile work, *Eslimi* (meaning ornament), is a clear example of combining traditional Persian ornamentation and subversive coding. Forouhar digitally creates complex patterns out of unexpected objects – weapons and genitalia. These erotic and violent shapes are repeated and arranged to form intricate patterns, which disguise

the individual motifs. Abbas Daneshwari suggests that the highly structured, repetitive patterns in *Eslimi* are metaphors for the ‘intricate and sophisticated structures of [theocratic] control [in Iran].’⁴ He asserts that the works are more than just biographical, ‘they are critiques of a society ruled by anachronisms.’⁵ The full, half drop and mirror repeat patterns of *Eslimi* are printed onto woven cloth and displayed as a soft furnishing sample catalogue, intended to be flicked through. Russell Harris suggests that Forouhar’s imagery and realisation in the form of a sample catalogue, ‘makes a strong statement about harsh religious interpretations infiltrating the most banal and quotidian aspects of life’.⁶ Moreover, as Alexandra Karentzos outlines, the patterns in the *Eslimi* series recall the ‘ornamentally beautiful Orient’.⁷ On closer inspection, though, any suggestion of the erotically charged Orient is challenged by the inclusion of delicate patterns created by instruments of torture. Violence and intimacy are entangled.



Fig. 1. Parastou Forouhar, *Eslimi*, 2003, sublimation print on fabric, 594 × 420 mm, artist’s collection.

In relation to textiles, entanglement describes the process of felting, in which a web of fibres is agitated through heat so that the scales interlock and entangle. Entangled imagery features prominently in Forouhar's later series, *Red is My Name, Green is My Name* (2009). Here we see the familiar male genitalia and weapons of torture present in *Eslimi*, but the patterns are interrupted when we realise human figures in submissive positions intertwine with the heavily ornate pattern. From a philosophical perspective, the notion of entanglement is commonly associated with postcolonialism and cultural encounter. Édouard Glissant, the Martinican scholar, drew on Levinas' philosophy of entanglement to explain a postcolonial world view countering the reductive colonial processes of assimilation or annihilation. Glissant considers 'entanglements of world-wide relation' in his *Poetics of Relation*.⁸ His model of entanglement highlights the web of encounters between all cultures (including peripheral-peripheral). As explained by Duncan Koon, 'it [Glissant's model of entanglement] respects the encountered difference in the "other" thereby "protect[ing] the "Diverse"'.⁹ I argue that Forouhar entangles her experiences of two cultures (Iran and Germany) by subverting Persian ornamentation and miniature traditions. Her disruption of these traditional techniques, by using imagery related to sexuality and torture, challenges Western perceptions of the 'ornamentally beautiful Orient'.¹⁰

Ornamentation further provides an additional entanglement between Austro-German and Iranian cultures, as Forouhar makes direct associations between ornament and crime (torture and murder). *Ornament and Crime* was a seminal lecture by the architect Adolf Loos in 1910. As a backlash to the ornate decoration found in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art and design, Loos suggested that ornamentation was symptomatic of degeneracy and argued for a minimalist approach to design, its simplicity enabling a greater appreciation of the materials. He proposed a link between ornamentation and regression,¹¹ urging instead for pure forms which express rational functionality.¹² *Ornament and Crime* is considered a fundamental discourse surrounding the development of modernism and the shift from ornamentation,

particularly within architecture. In a solo exhibition of her digital drawings (2013), Forouhar directly challenges Loo's concept of *Ornament and Crime*. Her ironically entitled exhibition, *Parastou Forouhar: Ornament and Crime*, recalls Loo's assertion of the link between decoration and degeneracy, but Forouhar instead champions the postmodern appetite for ornamentation whilst highlighting socio-political mechanisms of inequality and violence. Forouhar's ability to draw on and entangle references to German (*Ornament and Crime*) and Iranian (ornamentation) traditions, demonstrates that there are similarities between supposedly oppositional cultures.

In Forouhar's digital drawing series, *Papillon Collection* (2010), she further intertwines signifiers of both her Iranian and German identity. The butterfly motif is highly symbolic in Persian poetry and miniature painting: it symbolises the ideal of beauty and freedom, whilst paradoxically connoting death. Butterflies, like moths, are attracted to bright lights or flames that in turn lead to their demise.



Fig. 2. Parastou Forouhar, *The Papillon Collection*, 2010, digital print, 1000 × 1000 mm, artist's collection.

Forouhar's butterflies are created by symmetrically depicting human forms in both positions of exploitation and submission. This alludes to one of the overarching themes in Forouhar's practice – 'the simultaneity of beauty and harm and the ambivalence of their co-existence'.¹³ Her experience of living in Germany post-WWII has led her to experience the legacy of and collective guilt for the crimes committed during National Socialism. As Lutz Becker states, Forouhar sees 'historical and psychological parallels with the Iranian trauma, she invests her art with a sense of personal responsibility that clearly implies a collective dimension'.¹⁴ Her use of butterfly imagery can also be read as a link to her mother, as Parvaneh in Farsi means butterfly. Whilst purely autobiographical readings of Forouhar's work simplify the complex

cultural critique inherent in her pieces, the assassination of her parents has strongly influenced her practice. In an interview with Saeed Kamali Dehghan, Forouhar states, ‘every time I produce one [butterfly], it’s as if I’m creating an image of my mother’.¹⁵ The butterfly also aesthetically recalls the inkblots created by the German physician and poet, Justinus Kerner. In 1857, Kerner compiled a collection of embellished ink blots and poetry, entitled, *Klecksographien* (Klecks meaning blot or smudge in German) which was published in 1890, after his death. Kerner’s collection of poetry and inkblots drew on themes such as *memento mori*, with his inkblots creating symmetrical forms which he turned into ‘creatures of chance’.¹⁶ During the nineteenth century, *Blotto* became a popular parlour game across Europe. Drawing on Kerner’s approach, customers would create or buy readymade inkblots to embellish with drawing or poetry. In the twentieth century, the game Blotto inspired the Swiss psychologist, Hermann Rorschach. He devised the well-known Rorschach technique for assessing individuals’ psychological characteristics. Just as Forouhar subverts *Ornament and Crime*, she engages critically with Rorschach in her photographic series *Rorschach: Behnam* (2008). In the series a man is dressed in the chador and his covered torso creates symmetrical forms reminiscent of the butterfly or inkblot. Forouhar’s butterfly forms depict the ‘simultaneity of beauty and harm’ whilst also locating the imagery within historic Iranian and German poetic and artistic traditions. Again, this entangling or intertwining of cultural references, enables Forouhar to challenge spectators’ understanding of similarities between different cultures.

Weaving is another textile technique that Forouhar uses to convey the synchrony of beauty and suffering. In *Weaving Pain*, strips of Forouhar’s drawings are woven together at right angles to create a wall hanging. The imagery on the strips include figures entangled together, enacting scenes of torture, and recall her digital drawings from *A Thousand and One Days I-III* (2012) and the *Papillon Collection*. The varying symmetrical patterns of the warp and weft threads are reminiscent of the mirrored yet organic inkblot or Rorschach drawings. However, Forouhar’s plainly woven construction transforms the imagery into a highly intricate

repeat pattern. The edges of the piece are left raw, making it easy for the audience to see her construction method.

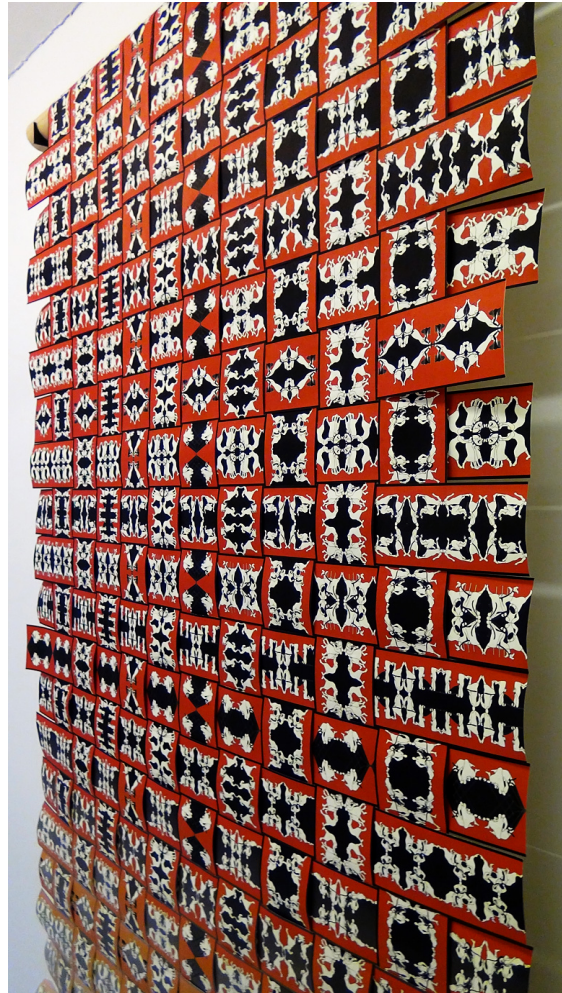


Fig. 3. Parastou Forouhar, *Weaving Pain*, 2013, digital print on laser cut paper, 2350 × 1350 mm, artist's collection.

Like entanglement, the textile process of weaving has often been used as a metaphor for explaining social structures or cultural encounters. Early uses of textiles as metaphor appear in Plato's dialogue, known as *Statesman*. As outlined by Arthur Danto, Plato was aware of the different skills required to maintain sustainable political order. Weaving offered him a suitable metaphor for describing the way these 'disparate but necessary elements can be held together

in a whole that offers shelter, protection, and fulfilment'.¹⁷ The connective and constructive qualities of weaving have led to it being used as an analogy for describing postcolonial cultural relations between former colonizers and colonized peoples. Although Germany and the Middle East did not have a colonial relationship, Germany had colonies in what is now called Cameroon, Tanzania, Uganda, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Nauru and the Solomon Islands. Much the same as France, Spain and the United Kingdom, Germany's history of imperial expansionism cemented Eurocentric perceptions of the world. Eurocentrism developed a world view in which non-European countries, cultures and citizens were considered as subaltern. Furthermore, National Socialism fostered and endorsed public disapproval of difference in relation to race, sexuality and disability. Post-WWII German politicians had to address these established and complicated public perceptions in the rebuilding of the Federal Republic. I acknowledge the relationship between Germany and Iran is not based on colonizer/colonized interactions. However, postcolonial theories help to examine how dominant and subordinate cultures interact/interacted whilst interrogating Eurocentric constructs of the Orient or the Other. In 'Counterpoint and Double Critique in Edward Saïd and Abdelkebir Khatibi: A Transcolonial Comparison', Françoise Lionnet uses the weaving metaphor to explain Khatibi's concept of 'double critique'. Khatibi developed 'double critique' to disrupt Orient/Occident and Self/Other (colonizer/colonized) binaries. Lionnet highlights the unbounded, 'future-orientated' qualities inherent in the weaving metaphor 'this motion is directed forward and back toward what precedes it so as to overlap with it, envelop it, and then point toward its exterior so as to move beyond it.'¹⁸

I suggest this metaphor could also be applied to Helmbrecht Breinig and Klaus Lösch's transcultural theory of 'transdifference', which suggests that cultural identity is in permanent flux and oscillates between irreconcilable cultural differences. They distance their concept from other prominent postcolonial terms associated with cultural interactions, such as hybridity

or syncretism, and instead highlight its emphasis on ‘a simultaneity of – often conflicting – positions, loyalties, affiliations and participations’.¹⁹ As explained by the authors:

Transdifference [...] denotes all that resists the construction of meaning based on an exclusionary and conclusional binary model [...] It does not do away with the originary binary inscription of difference, but rather causes it to oscillate. Thus, the concept of transdifference interrogates the validity of binary constructions of difference without completely deconstructing them (2002, 23).

The individual threads (warp and weft) are analogous to the different and irreducible cultures, which are simultaneously held in close proximity (weave structure) but retain their independence. Therefore, the weave, in its entirety, can be read as an illustration of the interactions between the different ideas, loyalties or affiliations during transculturation. The weaving metaphor is useful for analysing Forouhar’s artwork, as it helps to explain how she renegotiates the binary oppositions of beauty and pain/death, religion and secularism, and tradition and modernity.

Weaving has long been associated with pain and trauma. In Homer’s *Iliad*, Helen is seen weaving a tapestry which depicts the course of war. At once her actions can be read as an output for processing pain, similar to the war rugs woven by female victims in the Soviet/Afghan war (1917-89). However, Helen’s role is ambiguous as she is also portrayed as the weaver of the brutal scenes that unfold. Forouhar’s *Weaving Pain* also makes direct reference to pain in the title of the artwork. The symmetrical patterns of torture that line the warp and weft threads have been likened by Joanna Inglot to the abuses in contemporary Iran and the revelations of violence and torture at American-run prisons in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay in 2004.²⁰ By weaving imagery that can be associated with Iran and the U.S., Forouhar again highlights similarities that are often overlooked by the Western spectator. *Weaving Pain* represents the systematic, ingrained or even interwoven structures of power, abuse and violence that form part of Iranian and Western cultures.

Similar to Forouhar's earlier work, *Weaving Pain* interlocks signifiers to both her Iranian and German identities. Again, the symmetrical inkblot, which alludes to historical German illustration and poetry, forms a central motif in this piece. References to Forouhar's Iranian heritage are evident through her critique of institutional abuse of power. However, as explored above, this critique is not reserved solely for Iran's theocratic regime. Furthermore, in her illustrations of torture, blindfolds and restraint straps are repeated to create delicate arabesque shapes that intertwine. As Inglot suggests, these are highly symbolic of Persian calligraphy.²¹ The warp and weft strands which are decorated with repeating inkblot drawings intersect with each other at right angles. This over- and under-lapping at ninety degrees emphasises the woven construction of the piece, as well as the symmetrical structures of the individual patterns. In her analysis of Cecilia Vicuña's work, Catherine de Zegher suggests the crossing of warp and weft threads are the 'crux of [the] weaving, where change and interaction happens through encounter.'²² This is a useful lens for considering Forouhar's engagement with her German and Iranian identity and the associated cultural traditions. However, Forouhar instead uses mass or interwoven ornament to examine totalitarian authority and the associated, but often obscured, structures of pain and suffering. Unlike her other work, where cultural signifiers are entangled or intertwined, *Weaving Pain* provides a more structured representation of how German and Iranian cultures influence her identity and artistic practice.

Recalling Breinig and Lösch's concept of transdifference, in *Weaving Pain* Forouhar juxtaposes binary oppositions of tradition and modernity. Modernity is suggested through her use of digital technologies, whilst tradition is apparent in the inkblot motifs and dense ornamentation created through mirroring imagery. I suggest that Forouhar's engagement with both modern and traditional aesthetics highlights how culture and identity construction are strongly influenced by the past, yet develop in line with technological and cultural advancement. They remain dynamic and continually in flux. Forouhar's engagement with

weave also symbolises another traditional approach to construction. Weaving is an ancient practice, as Anni Albers discusses in 'Constructing Textiles'. She suggests that, 'the process of weaving has remained virtually unchanged for uncounted centuries.'²³ So, whilst Forouhar uses modern materials (digitally printed paper) for her warp and weft, she is still fully engaging with the Ur technology of weaving.

Before moving on to discuss Forouhar's use of appliqué in *Kiss Me*, I would like to suggest one more reading of *Weaving Pain*. Whilst it is limiting to consider Forouhar's work purely through the frame of autobiography, I was struck by the similarities between Forouhar's artistic practice and Penelope's weaving of Laertes funeral shroud in the *Odyssey*. Both Forouhar and Penelope experience loss and engage with textiles as a form of mourning. Penelope weaves (or weaves and un-weaves) to delay remarrying after the presumed death of her husband, Odysseus. Instead, Penelope agrees to marry once the funeral shroud for her father-in-law is complete. She weaves the cloth by day, but at night unravels all of the day's labour, thus never completing the cloth or remarrying. Forouhar, on the other hand, weaves her digital drawings to create artworks that examine the abusive institutional structures in the world, including those that led to the assassination of her parents in 1998. Although mourning and ritual feature more prominently in Forouhar's artworks made from Ashura banners,²⁴ her use of weaving in *Weaving Pain* could thus be interpreted as a therapeutic or cathartic processing of trauma and grief.

Whilst weaving enables Forouhar to interrogate many themes simultaneously, including her German and Iranian identities, the tradition/modernity binary and the paradox of beauty and pain, its rigid and uniformed structure limits the freedom she has as an artist to evoke the complexities of transcultural identity. As the artist and researcher, Jill Magi suggests in relation to her own identity:²⁵

Instead of expressing a desire to be “part of the weave”, embroidery, as a model for subjectivity, presents the “other” as capable of elaboration, proliferating beyond official or presumed status, working upon the surface of the cloth, piercing it with its presence in order to make something else that is not utilitarian, perhaps asking: are the benefits of full citizenship—integration into the weave, or melt into the melting pot—really the desired outcome? (Jill Magi, 2015)

Instead, I propose that Forouhar’s later work, *Kiss Me*, demonstrates engagement with another textile technique that more aptly describes her experience of transcultural encounter. Like Forouhar’s other work, *Kiss Me* provides a platform for dealing with multiple, complex cultural themes simultaneously. What is particularly compelling is Forouhar’s use of appliqué to stitch and layer these divergent ideas together. Stitch and suture have been explored by theorists as models for subjectivity. Stuart Hall considers the metaphor of suture to describe sociological identity construction. For Hall, ‘identity thus stitches (or to use a current medical metaphor, “sutures”) the subject into the structure. It stabilizes both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified’.²⁶ Although Hall applies the stitch metaphor to identity construction, the process is reminiscent of transcultural encounter, as both unify distinctive elements through joining or stitching. In *Kiss Me*, Forouhar uses stitch to manipulate individual components or material fragments to create a new fabric (her banner), yet each fragment retains part of its original characteristic. Moreover, stitching represents one of the paradoxes most prevalent in Forouhar’s work, that of beauty and pain. The term ‘suture’ is a medical term, which implies pain, whilst stitching has commonly been associated with embroidery and decorative ‘women’s work’.²⁷ In like manner, Leon de Kock uses the seam analogy to describe how national identity is constructed when multiple cultures meet and interact. He describes the seam as ‘the site of joining together that also bears the mark of the suture’,²⁸ thus the seam both represents the process of connecting multiple cultures (the suture), whilst highlighting inherent convergences and divergences (through connection and juxtaposition of separate fabrics). The German sociologist, Andreas Ackermann takes the

concept of the seam one step further by suggesting that postmodern, multicultural society is reminiscent of patchwork.²⁹ Patchwork or piecing is the process of joining together geometric shapes to construct a larger fabric. As with de Kock's seam metaphor, the patchwork analogy conveys connectedness and interdependence. Yet, rather than focusing on the connection at one juncture, patchwork infers visible multidirectional joins to create the whole fabric. This multidirectionality inherent in the patchwork metaphor resonates with Corrado Fumagalli's concept of 'patchwork multiculturalism', which highlights the 'highly decentralised mix of discursive interactions' inherent in contemporary multicultural society.³⁰ However, using multiculturalism as a tool for describing the complex and nuanced interactions that occur during transcultural encounter is restrictive. In multiculturalism, multiple cultures live side by side but they remain distinct, removed from mutual understanding and unable to transgress barriers. In patchwork, fragments are only connected at the periphery, leaving the centre of the fabric pieces intact and unaffected by neighbouring fragments. Instead, appliqué offers a better tool for describing the complex relationships of 'selection and adaptation' that the postcolonial theorist, Mary Louise Pratt, introduces in her theory of the 'contact zone'. Appliqué provides the artist freedom to work outside the lateral realm of patchworking or piecing geometric shapes. Instead the artist can layer diverse motifs and fragments on top of each other, resulting in the concealment and exposure of different fabrics. Thus, the artist has autonomy over the selection and adaptation process, and is in charge of what cultural associations are revealed and obscured from view. In her banner series, *Kiss Me*, Forouhar uses appliqué to represent divergent aspects of contemporary Iran, whilst challenging Eurocentric perceptions held by the largely Western audience of her work.



Fig. 4. Parastou Forouhar, *Weaving Pain*, 2013, appliqué Ashura banners, artist's collection.

Kiss Me is constructed using material fragments from Ashura banners and garish haberdashery elements, such as marabou feathers and faux-fur. Ashura is the Islamic mourning ritual performed by Shia Muslims. It is the day of commemoration for Hossein ibn Ali, a Muslim martyr and grandson to the prophet Mohammad. The commemoration ritual is demonstrated through street processions of chanting and self-flagellation. The Ashura banners adorn the walls of the city and offer a vibrant and colourful contrast to the black mourning garments worn by the participants. Over the years the banners have become increasingly garish and include depictions of mosques and traditional Persian ornamentation. Since 2003 Forouhar has created artwork using the Ashura banners, including *Funeral*, *Safari* and *Countdown*. However, *Kiss*

Me is the only piece which refers to the banners' traditional forms. Whilst mourning is suggested through Forouhar's use of the Ashura banners as medium, the title of the artwork also suggests the ritual. *Kiss Me* or *Mara Beboos* was a secular pop-song from the 1950s, written by an admirer to the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran, Mohammed Mossadegh.³¹ The song is known as a mournful ballad about the separation of two lovers. After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, it became emblematic of the failure or death of democratic rule. Mourning is, therefore, the link between the religious ritual of Ashura and the secular pop-song, *Mara Beboos*. By associating religious and secular approaches to mourning, Forouhar again shows the convergences that occur in supposedly oppositional societal groups.

Although commemoration and mourning are evident as the central themes of *Kiss Me*, Media Farzin's analysis of the piece highlights Forouhar's more humorous and flirtatious engagement with these rituals. The Ashura processions bring together individuals from both sexes (although men and women are separated) and have developed into an expression of collective identity for Shia Muslims and the theocratic regime of Iran. This does not mean that the social event is 'teenager proof'. As Farzin suggests, the Ashura processions provide an opportunity for young adults to interact and flirt with members of the opposite sex. Appliqué enables Forouhar to select and adapt individual letters and accents from the original Ashura banners and flirtatiously rearrange them to form lyrics from *Mara Beboos*. By doing so she subverts the traditional sombre sentiments expressed during Ashura to indicate the modern manipulation of the religious procession by teenagers looking for romantic relationships.

The appliqué calligraphy of *Kiss Me* alludes not only to the personal romantic relations between Iranian teenagers, but also to the lack of understanding across cultural groups. To the Western spectators, who are predominantly non-Farsi speakers, each banner appears to say something different, due to Forouhar's use of tashkil and harakat accents. However, despite the visual differences, the imperative displayed on each banner remains the same: *Kiss Me*. Non-

speakers of Farsi remain unaware of the message the script conveys and, therefore, only engage with the aesthetics of the calligraphy. This process is reminiscent of Glissant's theory of opacity, where he argues for an acceptance of difference, even if the differences are opaque and untranslatable.³² Glissant asserts in his *Poetics of Relation*, that transparency is embedded in Western thought. Instead, he argues for opacity and the acceptance of difference:

If we examine the process of “understanding” people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps judgements. I have to reduce. [...] Accepting difference does, of course, upset the hierarchy of this scale. I understand your difference, or in other words, without creating hierarchy, I relate it to my norm. [...] For the time being, perhaps, give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures. (Glissant, 2010, p.190)

In relation to Glissant's concept of opacity, Forouhar's appliqué calligraphy prevents Western spectators from translating and thus fully understanding the phrases. This challenges Western thought and instead provides the spectator with the experience of opacity. Forouhar creates the opacity through her use of calligraphic appliqué and the untranslatability this creates for non-Farsi speakers. However, untranslatability is not reserved for language; it is also highly relevant to the understanding of imagery and symbols. Forouhar's artworks are laden with culturally specific imagery, and these visual symbols are likely to be understood or not understood, but accepted in different ways by her diverse audience.

Whilst Forouhar's use of calligraphic appliqué symbolises untranslatability or the opacity/transparency binary, her use of materials represents another opposition that can be seen throughout her practice – tradition/modernity. Traditionally men and women are dressed in black; yet, by contrast, over the years the Ashura banners have become increasingly colourful. Although tradition is signified through references to the historic ritual, modernity is suggested through Forouhar's use of modern commercial Ashura banners, with their garish neon colours

created using modern synthetic dyes. In addition, Forouhar alludes to modernity through her use of modern synthetic backing materials, as well as manufactured haberdashery items, including faux-fur, lace, sequins and tasselling – materials commonly associated with fashion and clothing. By using modern Ashura banners as a medium, Forouhar embraces the contemporary developments of a traditional ritual.

Finally, I would like to return to consider Forouhar's use of ornamentation. As explored earlier, she has used ornamentation to entangle references to her Iranian and European art education. It was whilst studying at the Academy of Arts in Tehran that Forouhar first understood the communicative power of ornamentation and subversive coding. In addition, her subsequent education at Offenbach will have located her artistic practice within European histories of ornamentation, including the rejection of ornamentation by Modernists in the twentieth century. Whilst *Kiss Me* does not conform to the rigid, repetitive structures evident in *Eslimi* or *Weaving Pain*, the work does include dense sections of ornamentation that create symmetrical motifs. These decorative forms, with their longitudinal symmetry, are reminiscent of other Persian textiles, including the carpet. Forouhar selects and adapts different decorative patterns from commercial Ashura banners. These material fragments are layered and pieced together to create dense and intricate sections of symmetrical ornamentation, which again resembles the original form of the banners. It is through appliqué that Forouhar has the ability to select, cut, layer, connect, reveal and obscure intricate sections of ornamentation that would not have patchworked together. Just as in Pratt's description of the 'contact zone', Forouhar is in control of the visual elements she wishes to select and adapt.

Forouhar's artistic practice examines and interrogates multiple themes relating to her Iranian-German identity, from pain and beauty, to martyrdom and commemoration. Whilst other critics have focused specifically on these approaches in her work, I use textiles or textile construction techniques to consider her practice from a new perspective. Entanglement is

prominent in *Eslimi*, her earlier work printed on fabric. The repeated, entangled and intertwined digital imagery she develops for this series remains a central motif in her subsequent work on paper and mixed-media. It is through this process of entanglement that Forouhar examines the crossovers and divergences between her Iranian and German identities, thus challenging purely monolithic readings of either culture. Weaving is an ancient construction technique that has been metaphorically employed by philosophers over the years to describe politics and cultural interactions. Most recently it has found its place in postcolonial theories, where academics and philosophers use it to describe transculturation. Forouhar's use of weaving in *Weaving Pain* enables her to interrogate ornament as a social metaphor. However, Forouhar instead uses mass or interwoven ornament to examine totalitarian authority and the associated, but often obscured, structures of pain and suffering. Finally, using stitch theories associated with identity construction and patchwork analogies to describe multicultural society, I have analysed Forouhar's *Kiss Me*, which is a series created using Ashura banners. In this respect, it is suggestive of Pratt's description of selection and adaptation that occurs in the 'contact zone'. Whilst appliqué is similar to patchwork, it also provides the artist with creative autonomy and allows for the concealment as well as the exposure of certain elements. Furthermore, Forouhar's use of appliqué to simultaneously reveal and conceal recalls Glissant's theory of opacity, in which he argues for the acceptance of difference without reduction. It is not only through textile construction methods that Forouhar obscures and creates elements of opacity, it is also through her use of language and symbol. Combined, these references to difference and opacity provide another lens for analysing the inherent and complex ambiguities concerning beauty and pain in Forouhar's work.

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- ¹ Catrin Lorch, 'Their Audacity Leaves Me Speechless', *Quantara*, (2017), <<https://en.quantara.de/content/interview-with-the-iranian-artist-parastou-forouhar-their-audacity-leaves-me-speechless>> [accessed: 12 April 2018].
- ² Saeed Kamali Dehghan, 'Is It Art or Pain? Iran's Parastou Forouhar on Family, Death and the Failed Revolution', *The Guardian*, (2017), <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/29/art-iran-parastou-forouhar-family-revolution-artist>> [accessed: 09 April 2018].
- ³ Parastou Forouhar, 'Veiled, Unveiled' [lecture] presented at *Fundamentalism in Art* (Dusseldorf, 2002).
- ⁴ Abbas Daneshwari, 'Amazingly Original', *Parastou Forouhar* [website] (2014), <<https://www.parastou-forouhar.de/amazingly-original/>> [accessed: 05 April 2018].
- ⁵ Daneshwari.
- ⁶ Russell Harris, 'A cultural predicament', in R. Issa (eds) *Parastou Forouhar: Art Life and Death in Iran*, (Saqi: Lebanon, 2010), p.12.
- ⁷ Alexandra Karentzos, 'Eslimi Patternbook', *Parastou Forouhar* [website] (2003), <<https://www.parastou-forouhar.de/portfolio/eslimi/>> [accessed: 05 April 2018].
- ⁸ Edouard Glissant, 'For Opacity', *Poetics of Relation*, (University of Michigan Press: Michigan, 2010), p.31.
- ⁹ Duncan Yoon, 'World Literature and the Postcolonial: Ngugi's *Globalectics* and Glissant's *Poetics*', *The Global South Project*, (2013), <<http://www.globalsouthproject.cornell.edu/world-literature-and-the-postcolonial-ngugis-quos-globalectics-and-glissants-quos-poetics-page-2.html>> [accessed: 05 April 2018].
- ¹⁰ Karentzos.
- ¹¹ Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, (Ariadne Press: California, 1998), p.170.
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