(Un)Making Femininity on the Walls of Tehran

Negar Zojaji
Umeå University

Abstract
This article explores how a series of street art images in Tehran which address the restriction of the right of women to enter sports stadiums, challenge the official discourse of femininity within the semiotic landscape of Tehran. It investigates how, through techniques of carnivalesque satire, these images subvert the gender order that dominate the official visual discourse of femininity in urban space. The article proposes that the function of this street art series as a form of resistance is enacted both by its internal generic structure, and in relation to the official mural landscape of the city.

Keywords
Street Art, Mural, Tehran, Carnivalesque, Femininity

1. Introduction

In the summer of 2014, a poster appeared on one of the busy main streets in Tehran and, soon after, went viral on social media. This street art piece portrayed a girl wearing the national soccer jersey of Iran while holding up a container of dishwashing liquid like a trophy (Figure 1). The poster was created by graffiti artist Black Hand, concurrently with the FIFA World Cup games, and illustrated an issue relating to women's rights. In Iran, women have long been banned from watching sports matches live in stadiums and, along with several other issues, this has become a dominant narrative in the discourse schema of discrimination against women. The restriction has been resisted by female soccer enthusiasts through different types of resistance and guerrilla acts, such as sit-ins at the stadium gates, and at times making their way into the stadium by disguising themselves as men. Black Hand's timely piece addressed the same issue by making a metaphorical reference to the traditional role of women as homemakers. The container held by the girl in this image is inscribed with the classical trademark of dishwashing liquid, Jaam. Additionally, Jaam is also the Farsi word for cup, as used in the phrase 'world cup'. Hence, the artist has made a paronomastic use of the word Jaam while simoltaneously juxtaposing the icons of a female figure, a dishwashing liquid container, and the national team's jersey, to visually signify, and critics, the restriction on women's right to enter the stadiums.

Just as quickly as the piece was erased afterwards, reproductions of it began to circulate widely on social media and, furthermore, it attracted the attention of mainstream broadcasting media (see for example Rakusen, 2014; Kamali Dehghan, 2014; Jamshidi, 2014; Tavakolian, 2014) (Figure 2). Later, in 2017, a twitterstorm erupted using a hashtag meaning 'women's turn' (#□□□□_□□□□) which, once again, heated up controversies about women's restricted access to stadiums. These sensation occurred mainly in order to negotiate women's right to enter the stadiums to watch an imminent soccer match between the national teams of Iran and Syria. It is also worth mentioning that this occurrence coincided with the primary post-presidential election months, and that attempting to facilitate women's access to stadiums was among the propositions of the new administration ("Iran Again", 2017). All these conditions joined together to raise the controversy to an unprecedented level (Bastani, 2017). Accordingly, and building on the successful experience of 'Woman with dishwashing liquid', a group of street artists became engaged with the respective controversies through their creative practices. The issue was mainly addressed by street artists Black Hand, T2, and Shahrzaad in a thread of

Fig. 1

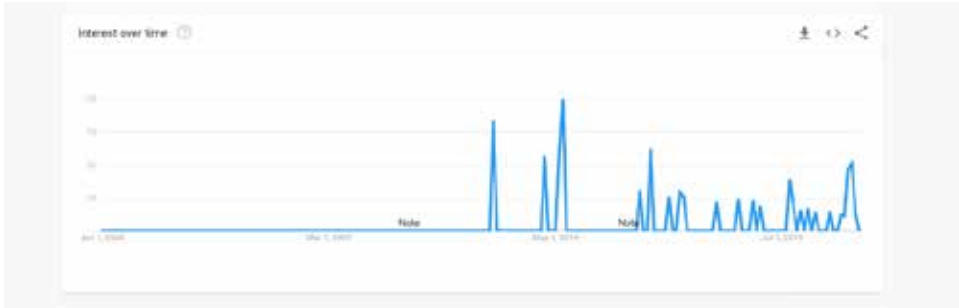

Fig. 2

street art on the walls of Tehran. This article explores the visual and textual resistance carried out by means of this thread of creative practices. It explores how the generic content of these images reifies the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque and further, through visual analysis of these works, it investigates how they function as forces of resistance in the city's visual discourse of femininity.

2. Resisting the restriction on the right to enter sports stadiums

The ban on women attending men's games in stadiums has long been in effect. Since the early post-revolution years, women have been banned from practising fandom in men's games at stadiums. Although this ban is not explicitly stipulated in the country's constitution, it has been fixed as an unwritten law following the gender-based segregation of sports spaces since the revolution (Babakhani, 2014; Hassanzadeh, 2019). Thus, the issue has since been surrounded by controversies. In the meantime, women have been engaging in acts of resistance to reclaim this right. As a form of resistance, women have in some cases have made their way through by masquerading as men. In a note about the background to the restriction on women's access to stadiums, Doroodgar (2017), a board member of the Iran Football League narrates an instance that took place in 1996, when a girl who had disguised herself as a man was identified and scolded by a security guard (Doroodgar, 2017). In the 2006 movie Offside, which is a realistic drama about these masquerading women, the director portrays the struggles of a group of young women disguised as men, who are detained and taken to the police after they have been identified.

Another activist effort made by Iranian women is collective sit-ins or public gatherings at the gates of a stadium. A famous instance of these is women gathering at the stadium gates in 1997 during public celebrations of the Iranian National team's qualification for the World Cup. During this event, women were allowed to enter the stadium for the post-match celebration under the control of the police (Amado and Amato, 2001). In another instance, in March 2018, some women created a visible presence in front of the stadium in the hope of gaining the opportunity to be able to watch a Tehran derby live (Ghanoon Daily, 2018). Similarly, the visual creations of street artists in 2017 expressed their discontent and resistance to the restriction on women's right to enter stadiums.

3. A Carnival sense of femininity

Created in response to the intensified controversies about women's right to access stadiums, 'Women's Turn' street art began to show up in 2017 Tehran. This street art series negotiated, and claimed, women's right to participate in football events both through both dashing portrayals of women and the juxtaposition of normative elements of femininity and masculinity. Regardless of differences in their artistic techniques, these works all shared a generic feature that distinguished them as a series. They all articulated their reflections on the dispute with humour and chaos, which characterise them as reifications of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque.

Humour, in street art, is more than simply an applied technique of articulation. As in other forms of artistic expression, the use of humour in street art can be strategic. Nevertheless, regardless of any strategic applications, humour is an integral part of street art. This is due to the interventionist nature of such art, which allows it to evade the more serious tasks attributed to the arts. Yet, as contended by Gralińska-Toborek (2018), this does not canonise street art as an aesthetic genre of humour, but it rather characterises serenity as one aspect of street art, which coexists with its seriousness. Yet, art theorists and public space experts often strip street art off of this serenity in their analytical approaches (Gralińska-Toborek, 2018). The techniques of carnivalesque used in 'Women's Turn' street art, are an instance of this coexistence of humour and seriousness.

Introduced by literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1984b), the carnivalesque describes a genre whereby relations of domination or oppression are challenged in the process of

Fig. 3

practising humour and disorder. As such, the carnivalesque is a mode of dissent and resistance to the orders of domination. Bakhtin's conception of the carnivalesque stemmed from his analysis of the folk culture of humour in late mediaeval carnivals, and was further developed and coined as a term in his book Rabelais and His World (1984a). Bakhtin considered the plots of these carnivals to form a serio-comical genre in which the hierarchies of the official world were represented inside out by means of an alternative discourse. This inside-out representation was generated through techniques of desecration, mesalliances, manifestations of eccentric behaviour, and familiarisation of the otherwise separated elements, used in the plots of the carnivals. Thus, although ephemeral, the carnival offered an opportunity to experience life from inside a different worldview and, by doing so, prepared the human consciousness for an alternative world of possibilities.

The key element of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque is the carnival laughter. This is an ambivalent form of laughter that is both mocking and joyfully assertive. It is not hostile or negative (Bakhtin, 1984a). It is not the laughter of one-sided humour, irony, or sarcasm, nor is it directed against one single private person. It is rather directed at a historical situation or an ideology and is, hence, philosophical. Therefore, it is fundamentally universal and inclusive (Bakhtin, 1984a). With its philosophical nature, the carnival laughter does not deny seriousness, but rather coexists with it.

> Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naivete and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality… It is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. (Bakhtin, 1984a: 123)

Moreover, based on its philosophical nature, in contrast to the carnival itself, carnival laughter is not ephemeral. It is timeless and "rises above and transcends the objects at which it is temporarily aimed" (Lachmann et al., 1988-1989: 123).

The pure manifestation of this genre is Menippean satire. This makes bold use of fantasy and adventure to create a situation in which the alternative discourse is put to the test. The sense of adventure and fantasy, in Menippea, is combined with the collision between the wisdom of a philosophical idea and the vulgarity of worldly evil. It is full of allusions to the great and small events of the epoch; it feels out new directions in the development of everyday life; it reveals newly emerging types in all layers of society, and so on. It seeks to unravel and evaluate the general spirit and direction of evolving contemporary life (Bakhtin, 1984b).

To apply the Bakhtinian framework of carnivalesque humour to the 'Women's Turn' street art series, this research has used images of street art created mainly by Black Hand, Shahrzaad, and T2. These images have been stratified into groups based on the visual devices of the carnivalesque employed in them.

Figure 3 illustrates some instances of these street art works created by T2. The topic of the images is connoted by the setting (i.e., the stadium), or by typical elements that signify soccer spectatorship, including the national flag painted on participants' faces. Women in these images are portrayed laughing and wearing moustaches. In the Iranian culture, the moustache signifies masculinity, especially to the contemporary eye, although at some points in history they have been popularly worn by women, too (Najmabadi, 2005). It signifies manhood and reputation (Keshavarzian, 2007). In one of the images, the moustache is pink which, as a colour that is traditionally considered feminine, is incongruous with the connotation of the moustache itself.

In these images, normative gendered assumptions built upon biological sex traits are challenged through the juxtaposition of incongruous symbolic elements. The laughter thus inspired is not a destructive one. It is an inclusive laughter resulting from the unexpectedness of the carnivalesque unification of elements that are supposed to be kept separate in the non-carnivalesque world.

Figure 4 presents other examples of these street art images. Here, the artist has used satirical reversal, changing the real-life hierarchical order of the male-dominated field of soccer into a female-dominated one. By doing so, the artist has exposed the exclusionary nature of the established power relations exercised in the practice of soccer spectatorship by introducing an antithesis. "As a form of statement, satirical inversion presupposes that the world will recognize in the reversal of itself its own perversion and thus come to see its true possibilities" (Gadamer, 2004: 284).

From a Bakhtinian perspective, these images represent life turned inside out. Through this representation, the impositions that determine the socio-hierarchical order of the ordinary are suspended (Bakhtin, 1984b). This carnivalesque reversal of the gender order proposes an alternative to the current state of affairs.

The poster shown in Figure 5 represent reunification of the otherwise separated or, in Bakhtinian terms, carnivalesque mésalliances. Through this technique, all things that were self-enclosed, separated, or distanced from one another in a non-carnivalesque worldview are brought together, unified, and integrated. In the second picture, this sense of unification is further emphasised by the participants' outfits, which represent the two main rival soccer clubs in Iran.

By the unification of men with women, who are banned from stadiums in non-carnivalesuqe life, these representations visually authorise a situation that is considered inadmissible based on the established, real-life gender hierarchies.

In these images, the immovable and long-established restriction of women's right to access stadiums is negotiated through being visualised. Through this visual negotiation, these representations prepare the viewer's consciousness for a more egalitarian possibility. The humour that is used to communicate this possibility presents this world of equality as a happier one (Bakhtin,1984a). At the same time, these images challenge the real-life gender boundaries that have long been publicised as sacrosanct. Moreover, in terms of introducing a novel and unprecedented alternative to their subject of criticism, the humour used here is corrective.

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

The ambivalent humour in these representations challenges the seriousness and immovability of the gender hierarchies and, by doing so, subverts the orders of domination. This humour does not direct laughter against a particular entity, but rather towards a paradoxical human condition. Hence, the laughter is inclusive and universal, and not negative or driven by a sense of superiority. In contrast to the one-sided, negative laughter that could reinforce divisions, this laughter mitigates the divisions by its panoptic dimension. It is through such laughter that these images create an opportunity to experience a carnivalesque sense of the world that stands in tension with the orders of the official world.

4. Genealogy of Official Urban Visual Discourses of Femininity

In contemporary Tehran, murals make up a significant part of urban public art. Before the 2000s, these murals maintained a male-dominated discourse. They mainly served to make ideological statements that supported revolutionary values and wartime resistance. Thus, they formed a landscape of power. Dominant patterns in these murals included depictions of the fathers of the revolution, anti-American manifestations, and martyrdom (Chehabi and Christia, 2008). The murals that were introduced into the city's public space later only added a touch of femininity to the urban visual context through sporadic

visual representations of motherhood. The emergence of representations of motherhood in these murals is attributed by Christiane Gruber in her 2008 article 'The Message is on the Wall' to incentives to boost the birth-rate in line with the atmosphere of hope that followed the ending of the Iran-Iraq war. Gruber also contended that the visual patterns in Tehran's murals may change in the future, depending on the changes in the country's political standpoint (Gruber as cited in Chehabi and Christia, 2008). Today, mural representations of women in Tehran have become more thematically diverse. These murals, which now appear more frequently, no longer portray women only as mothers. Women in these murals are portrayed in three principle thematic contexts: motherhood, wifehood or housewifery, and public presence. Nevertheless, women still appear to be visually underrepresented in the urban visual discourse compared to their omnipresent male counterparts. Drawing on Gruber's contention, this recent increase in the emergence of mural representations of women can be traced in the national policies.

The principle national urban policies have been devised based on the framework of a master development plan that was launched in1988. After the revolution of 1979, the government took an executive initiative in order to fulfil developmental objective on a nationwide scale. This initiative has since been put into effect in the form of five-year plans of action, with the first one launched after the end of the war in 1988.

In terms of urban development, the considerations in the first five-year plan (1989-1993) mainly focused on the equipping of the cities and rural areas, the provision of facilities, and urban decentralisation (see Islamic Parliament Research Center, 1990). The second plan (1995-1999) called for civil development projects (see Islamic Parliament Research Center, 1994). It was in the 2000 to 2004 plan of action that cultural considerations were gradually incorporated into urban development plans. Accordingly, some objectives in the same plan were to optimise the urban image in accordance with Iranian cultural values of vernacular architecture, preserve the nation's cultural heritage, and create new cultural centres. Increasing the integration of cultural considerations into urban development plans lingered on into the fourth development plan (2005-2009), which laid stress on urbanisation (see Islamic Parliament Research Center, 2000). The fourth plan required the identification, and thereby preservation, of the sites that had witnessed major incident during the revolutionary years. It also required making use of cultural centres and urban public spaces to publicise the values of the revolution, and the deployment of Iranian art motifs and symbols in architecture and urban design (see Islamic Parliament Research Center, 2004). Urban considerations in the fifth and sixth development plans included the enhancement of urban and rural landscape identity, as well as the reconditioning of the Iranian-Islamic architecture (see Islamic Parliament Research Center, 2011; Islamic Parliament Research Center, 2017). In overview, the urban development plans have created a gradual shift from an exclusive focus on developmental constructions to the integration of cultural conduct.

With regard to gender policies concerning women, the first plan mainly sought to carry out educational reform among women. The main objectives of this plan included the promotion of women's socio-economic position through increasing their level of education, increasing women's participation in educational affairs, and extending the scope of girls' education. Thereafter, from the third development plan onwards, enhancing the status of women in the family, the realisation of women's legitimate rights, and attending to the constructive role of women have held a fixed position in gender policy. In addition to these, the fourth plan required the drafting of a bill of rights focusing on the core principle of providing the necessary conditions for the growth of social organisations that work to protect women's and children's rights. The fifth plan, additionally, required supporting single female heads of household. During the same years, the municipality of Tehran sponsored a two-year research programme entitled 'Women and Urban Life' to optimise the conditions of urban life for women based on their demands and preferences. This programme was conducted by means of contributions from scholars,

Fig. 6

experts, and urban managers and aimed to propose policies and strategic urban planning patterns to be incorporated into executive measures (Moshirsadat, 2015). Thus, as with the gender policies, the national policies appear to have followed the trend away from focusing on educating women to considering their other social needs.

In retrospect, the increasing number and diversification of mural representations of women in Tehran represents both the increase in attention to women's status and the increase in considerations of cultural conducts in national policies. Hence, representations of women in official murals have been organised in accordance with public policies.
However, despite the recent quantitative increase and thematic diversification of official mural representations of women in Tehran, these representations still seem to follow a tendentious visual logic. This logic can be recognised in the way in which each of the thematic strata of representations are semiotically coded.

4.1 Semiotics of Femininity in the Designed Landscape of Tehran

Figure 6 presents some instances of mural representations of the feminine as a mother. These are the earliest patterns of femininity in post-revolutionary murals in Tehran. In these murals, motherhood is conceptualised through a relational process between the child and the female participant. Relational processes represent the world in terms of permanent states of affairs or general truths about the world (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Participants in murals of motherhood are posed as 'offers', that is they do not cast a reverse gaze upon the viewer. The figures are, however, predominantly pictured in frontal view facing the audience. Considering the headroom as well as the scale of the human body covered in these images, representations of motherhood are for the most part framed as medium-close or medium-long shots. A medium shot implies the dominance of social affinity between the viewer and the participant. Regarding colour processing, different degrees of colour saturation and colour differentiation are worked into the imagery that represents motherhood. However, the predominance of soothing shades of blue, grey, and green in the majority of these murals suggests a sensory approach towards colour coding. This sensory approach to colour selection contributes to the sentimental signification of these representations. This signification lends these murals a higher level of modality by creating

pathos. In terms of figurative representation, however, a more naturalistic approach has been adopted. Moreover, the feminine participant is the most salient element in the majority of these murals, in terms of both size and its central position.

Figure 7 provides examples of murals in which the feminine is represented as either a wife or a housewife. As seen in the images, the domestic role of the feminine as housewife is signified either by representations of tools or/and by the setting of a house, or by a male participant as the husband. In the latter case, the semiotic function of the male participant is similar to that of the child in motherhood murals. The male participant in these murals attributes a uxorial role to the woman.

The human participants in the majority of murals that domesticate the role of women interact with the viewer as offers. The participants maintain a social or impersonal distance from the viewer due to being framed in medium or long shot. Regarding colouring the depiction of homemaking in murals has largely been modalised through the modulated use of naturalistic colours. The background, although not always fully realised, is mainly processed. In terms of depth and lighting, the participants in these murals are naturalistically represented. Furthermore, although not maximally bright, these images have a higher range of brightness than the motherhood murals.

The most recent group of murals represents women in the public domain (Figure 8). These often include images of urban women in the public space as well as exertion by rural women. The notion of a public presence in these murals is often signified by the indexical application of tools. In some instances of public urban life, the analytical arrangements embedded in the women participants' outfits also signify their socio-economic concerns.

In these murals as well, the participants interact with the viewer as offers. The framing pattern ranges between full shot and long shot. Participants are rarely portrayed in frontal view. Instead, they are either viewed from behind or from an oblique angle. The colour approach in a rural context differs from the colour approach in an urban context. On the one hand, while in representations of rural women the degree of colour saturation degree is higher than the natural level, representations of urban women are articulated in lower colour saturation. On the other hand, low colour modulation in representations of rural women contrasts with the modulated colours used in representations of urban women. The same distinction is made in colour brightness between the two tropes. In contrast to rural displays, the colour brightness is minimal in representations of women in the urban public domain. In terms of compositional framing, the separation of elements in murals that represent the urban domain suggests a sense of disconnection. However, in the case of the rural domain, a coherent arrangement of elements has been used.

Altogether, considering the three thematic clusters in relation to each other, mural representations of women in Tehran seem to be coded differently based on the role they attribute to women. These murals mainly interact with the viewer as offers. The human participants in these images are not looking at the viewer. Instead, they offer the represented participants to the viewer 'as items of information and objects of contemplation' rather than participants with whom the viewer can enter into a social relationship (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 119). As a consequence, they produce a sense of disengagement and depict the represented participant as 'other' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). This type of interactional representation is used when the purpose is to offer a kind of objective knowledge that is free of emotive involvement or subjectivity (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). The dominance of offers in these murals thus, serves as a visual rhetorical strategy that authorises them as sources of knowledge and modes of inquiry.

Notwithstanding, owing to the predominant use of a frontal angle in murals representing women in the domestic roles of motherhood and homemaking, the feminine participants in these representations maintain higher interpersonal relations with the viewer than those in the murals of social interaction. A frontal angle implies involvement. It implies that "what you see is part of our world, something we are involved with" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 136). These murals thus communicate a sense of 'self' by means of their

Fig. 7

positioning. A frontal angle is also the angle to depict 'this is how it works', 'this is how you use it', 'this is how you do it' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 145). Hence, in these murals, the domestic role of the feminine has been coded as an objective truth while at the same time trying to subjectify the viewer as 'self'. The dominance of a frontal view in these murals thus further supports their function as devices of instructing, informing, and thereby interpellating the subjects.

In representations of motherhood, this sense of involvement is also promoted by framing. Compared to the use of long shots. which implies impersonality, the use of a medium shot in these representations implies a higher level of interpersonal interaction. It connotes the cultural value of motherhood as a highly cherished position in Iranian social culture. In Muslim culture, the mother is deserving of respect, generosity, and kindness for her role in birthing and raising the people. A famous quote, stating that 'paradise lies at the feet of the mother', indicates the high status that mothering occupies within Muslim culture (Pappano and Olwan, 2016).

Conversely, the frequent use of an oblique angle and back views in murals representing women in public space implies a sense of detachment. Hence, identification with the female participants in these murals is not facilitated as it is in cases of murals of the domestic role of women. In murals that have assigned domestic roles to women, the frontal view functions as a device of involvement. In contrast to such a frontal view, an oblique view implies to the viewer that "what you see here is not part of our world; it is their world, something we are not involved with" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 136). Accordingly, a back view is considered the non-social side of the human body. By being represented from these visual points of view, female participants in the most recent murals are represented as 'other'.

The detaching effect of the back view in these murals is accentuated by other semiotic devices, one of which is the absence of any background. The way in which background is articulated in an image can modify the effects of the foreground. In western visual culture, for example, the same compositional device, the back view, is employed in romantic rückenfigures, where the human participant is portrayed in posterior view, but facing towards a worked-out background, which is usually natural scenery. The use of background in such paintings places the viewer in the position of identifying themselves with the represented participant due to sharing the visual experience of viewing the background (Schott, 2020). In the case of the present murals, in contrast, the absence of any background hampers the identification experience.

Within the naturalistic coding orientation, the absence of setting lowers modality. By being 'decontextualized', shown in a void, represented participants become generic, a 'typical example', rather than particular, and connected with a particular location and a specific moment in time (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 161).

In addition to the absence of background, the participants are represented in an action process that implies moving

away from the viewer. Thus, their detaching effect is promoted by their status of movement. Additionally, in those murals of public presence where both male and female participants are present, the detaching effect of the representation of female participants in back view is further emphasised in comparison to the male participants. The male participants in the same murals are viewed either from the side or in frontal view and, in the occasional cases where they are viewed from the back, the detaching effect is nullified by portraying the participant's face as turned towards the viewer. In the latter case, the orientation of the male participant's head mitigates the maximum detaching effect of their posterior posture. The result is 'a double message: 'although I am not part of your world, I nevertheless make contact with you, from my own, different world'; or 'although this person is part of our world, someone like you and me, we nevertheless offer his or her image to you as an object for dispassionate reflection' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 138). Given all these circumstances, feminine participants are coded as 'other' when represented in the public sphere.

Overall, in terms of the differences in colour processing and contextualisation, female participants in murals of the domestic sphere have been naturalistically coded, and thus more realistically portrayed, while representations of participants in the non-domestic sphere tend to shy away from maximum realism. Quoting Steve Neale, Christine Gledhill attributes such realism to verisimilitude. Realism, she writes, is:

the more familiar term through which we judge whether [a fiction] constructs a world we recognize as like our own. ... Verisimilitude, he argues, refers not to what may or may not actually be the case but rather to what the dominant culture believes to be the case, to what is generally accepted as credible, suitable, proper (Gledhill, 1997: 360).

To conclude, as an institutional means of mass communication, the current urban visual discourse in Tehran takes two different modal approaches to the articulation of femininity in domestic and non-domestic contexts, respectively. This difference lies in the use of semiotic devices that determine the level of certainty in each of these tropes of visual representation. While mural representations of women in the domestic sphere are semiotically coded to imply certainty, credibility, and verisimilitude, mural representations of women in the public sphere imply detachment and estrangement due to their lower modality. This reduced degree of modality in the latter group of mural representations is at odds with the very decision to introduce these representations as new elements into a visual discourse that had, for too long, existed without them. It thus manifests an aporetic attitude towards the inclusion of such representations.

This challenge between certainty and aporia within the visual discourse of murals, further suggests an epistemic approach to their modalisation. It is through the epistemic modalisation of representations, rather than absolute statements of inclusion or exclusion, that possibility or necessity of inclusion of an object situation based on the author's world of knowledge or beliefs is expressed (Zagona, 2007). In relation to the other two visual tropes of femininity, and as a nascent semiotic sequence within a pre-existing visual discourse, the recent mural representations of women suggest an epistemological break marked by discursive struggles of power relation that objectivise women as social bodies through visual modes of inquiry. The public presence of murals serves as a resisting force that challenges the well-established structure of a discourse that has long tended to domesticate the role of women.

In retrospect, the 'Women's Turn' street art series, as a non-sanctioned visual means of communication, functions as a force of resistance in the visual discourse landscape of the city. As such, the images challenge the hierarchical gender order that is marked out by semiotic struggles over representing women in the private and public spheres.

Conclusion

This article has tried to build on the body of knowledge about urban visual activism by exploring the official and unofficial visual discourses of femininity in the urban space

of Tehran. Drawing on the use of satire in Women's Turn street art created on the walls of Tehran in resistance to unequal power relations that gender the right to access and use stadium space, it has exemplified the performativity of street art as a form of resistance related to the designed landscape of the city as part of a discursive whole.

The analysis of these street art images suggests that their activism takes place at both textual and visual levels. At the textual level, the resistance is performed by the mode of expression used to communicate the message in these images. The modal techniques used in these images to communicate the message - including travesty, reversal, and the unification of incongruous elements - offer a carnivalesque worldview. By employing these techniques of the carnivalesque, these images manage to subvert the existing orders of domination that run the non-carnival world. Driven by their carnivalesque serio-comical features. these images represent a bold and activist image of femininity.

At the visual level, Women's Turn street art challenges the semiotic order that dominates the designed landscape of the city. While the semiotic articulation of the designed mural landscape of the city favours a domesticated image of women, Women's Turn street art promotes an agentic image. Therefore, when considering both their textual and visual structure. these images make statements about femininity and at the same time challenge the statements that tend to dominate the official discourse of femininity.

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