Voices of the Masked:

Material Culture, Identity, and Agency in the Gulf

Submitted by Manami Goto to the University of Exeter
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Masked woman in Sohar, Oman in 2016.

(Image: Manami Goto)

Abstract

The female face mask is one of the most visible representations of the Persian/Arabian Gulf's cultural heritage and regional material culture. While the black full-cover face veil is considered to be a symbol of Islamism or a form of pious resistance in today's Western world, the face mask, which is regionally known as *burquʿ* or *baṭūla*, carries an honour and pride strongly associated with identity. The wearing of the face mask has been practised for more than five hundred years in the eastern Arabian Peninsula, southern Iran, and East Africa, and this attests to diverse cultural exchanges through maritime trade and across historical territorial boundaries.

This nautically spread custom was adapted and developed within each local environment and cultural context. This resulted in the emergence of different mask styles, colours, and designs, signifying wearers' identities composed of ethnic, religious, tribal, geographic, and socio-economic affiliations. However, due to regional and local issues (particularly sectarian rivalry and gender segregation), in-depth analytical research of the face mask has not been conducted thus far. Accordingly, this thesis investigates the links between the socio-cultural identities of women in the Gulf region and the role of the face mask by focusing on three main aspects: the symbolic meanings of the mask's material features, women's agency in relation to masking and unmasking, and the impact of national narratives on the use of the mask by women. In-depth ethnographic exploration of two contrasting case studies—Iran's Qeshm Island and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—provides new insights into contemporary women's lives and their relationship with the face mask.

Keywords: ***Agency; Culture; Face Mask; Gulf; Identity; Material Culture; Women***

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Notes on Transliteration

All translations from Arabic and Persian to English are my own throughout this thesis, unless otherwise noted. For Arabic and Persian words (both standard and colloquial) of less common parlance, I used the system of transliteration established by *the International Journal of Middle East Studies*. For the name of places, I used the English spelling on Google Maps, with the exception of place-names that do not appear on the map. In such cases, I have used the local transliteration.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the face-mask tradition and its relation to the socio-cultural identities of women in the Persian/Arabian Gulf (hereafter referred to as the Persian Gulf or Gulf). I will show how the face mask, locally known as the *burquʿ* or *baṭūla*, has continued to underwrite these socio-cultural identities and act as a method of communication in the Persian Gulf region, expressing the wearer's individual and formative identities, particularly in the cases of Qeshm Island of Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While women's voices have been largely absent from social history in this region, the female face mask has been portrayed differently in various academic studies and public domains. The most commonly held images of the mask present it as: 1) either a sign of religious devotion or a political statement; 2) a representation of women's oppression or subordination; and 3) a cultural symbol of the national identity and heritage of the Gulf Arab states. These widely established generalisations and misconceptions about the face mask tend to overlook its complex and nuanced forms of agency, thereby overlooking women's own perspectives, particular socio-cultural contexts, and the multi-dimensional nature of the mask.

My research takes a bottom-up ethnographic approach within the field of material culture to explore the significance of the face mask in the society of the Persian Gulf region. This research poses questions such about the material characteristics the face mask represents and symbolises in the study areas; how women's agency is practised around the act of masking and unmasking; and finally, how national narratives of Iran and the UAE

represent the face-mask tradition and affect the use of the mask amongst women. It draws on original ethnographic fieldwork, investigating ordinary women's perspectives and practices of the face-mask tradition to extend the current scholarship available on the subject.

Historically there have always been intercultural exchanges between communities on the Persian Gulf littoral. By the early twentieth century, as a result of pearl trading and British settlement in the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman, individuals from both coasts had become used to moving freely without the limitation of legal borders. Migration, intermarriage, and the exchange of cultures, products, religious ideologies, and languages were all taking place on a multitude of levels. The female face mask was one area impacted by these cultural, transnational, and multi-directional interactions. Visual elements of the mask, such as style, colour, and material, have been influenced by people from both sides of the littoral, causing the unique traditions of local cultures to merge.

This long-continued relationship along coastal areas of the Persian Gulf has turned into a sectarian political rivalry. Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, diplomatic ties between the Gulf Arab states and Iran have weakened, and relations between individual *Khalījis* (Gulf Arabs) and Iranians have also been affected. For example, while Sunnis and Shiites had cooperated and coexisted for a long time, recent political developments have resulted in these citizens of Gulf societies becoming increasingly conscious of sectarian difference. Moreover, in the Persian Gulf region, especially the Arab Gulf states, history has been written and conserved largely by men, and therefore has focused almost exclusively on events in male society. Accordingly, very little about the social history of women, such as the face-mask tradition, has been documented despite its socio-cultural importance.

The complexity of this situation calls for further analytical and ethnographic research into the region's material culture.

My research and analysis, which is primarily based on a total of more than fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork on both littoral sides of the Gulf, attempts to fill these gaps by incorporating women's voices as part of this cultural narrative. I focus on the practices and perspectives of women who have masked or used to mask, seeking to regard history and document this vanishing tradition from the viewpoints of those who have been marginalised in the mainstream discussion. A comparison of the cases of Qeshm Island and the UAE provides insight into the face mask's different functions and associated meanings within each specific social context, along with the wider regional dynamics of this material culture. The face mask provides a lens that enhances understanding of women's lives and changes and developments in their respective societies, thereby enabling the personal experiences and perceptions of women from both sides of the Gulf to further expand discussion of three distinct areas of research: veiling, transnational material culture, and politicisation of material culture in the state discourse.

1.2 Research Aim and Contribution

This research aims to obtain insight into the significance of the face mask and masking in Gulf society, with particular emphasis on Qeshm Island and the UAE. It explores how women mask or unmask to perform, acknowledge, and confirm their identities both at the individual and social level, while seeking to understand the role of the face mask in this process. This research therefore makes unique contributions to three specific areas: firstly, in providing an in-depth study of the face mask as an object of the regional material

culture that is explored from a comparative perspective, the research deepens understandings of both the physical components of the face mask and personal and cultural identities. Secondly, although the use of the face mask in the region has decreased in the past decades, the research contributes to the preservation and documentation of the face-mask tradition as part of women's identities and heritage in the Gulf. Observing the practice of women's present and past wearing of the face mask not only serves to illustrate how political and religious influence in the process of modernisation have impacted on women's life styles and their traditional roles, but also demonstrates how women have reacted to these changes. Finally, women's social history in the Gulf region, especially ethnographical information, has not been widely documented because the history of the Arabian Peninsula and the coastal cities of southern Iran has often been written and conserved by men, and events in male society have been emphasised as a result. It is therefore important to report on the cultural traditions associated with different types of face masks that specifically belong to women in the Gulf.

A search of the literature reveals few studies that investigate the face-mask tradition in the Gulf. One rare study that attempts to summarise and provide a collective idea of the face mask—*baṭūla*—is written by Najlah Al Azzi. Her article, "The Batulah-Its Origins and Developments," was published in *Al-Ma'thurat Al-Sha'biyaah* in Arabic in 1989 and later in English in 1990. According to her research, the mask was commonly worn amongst women in Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar, some places in Oman, Failaka Island of Kuwait, and possibly eastern parts of Saudi Arabia, and she adds that it was also worn by women in Bandar Abbas and Bandar Lengeh in Iran as well (Dickson [1949] 1967, 154; Al Azzi 1990, 19). Though Al Azzi (1990) claims to provide generalisable findings about the face mask, we might at best consider this research a case study of the face mask in

Qatar alone, as her analysis is based on data from interviews with four Qatari women and her own knowledge. Nonetheless she presents interesting observations on the meaning of the mask and its origin being from India and a brief overview of the history of veiling practice in the Middle East.

Two other sources on the face-mask tradition amongst Qatari women are Abeer Abu Saud's work on Qatari women published in 1984 and Klaus Ferdinard's extensive ethnographic work published as a book, *Bedouins of Qatar*, in 1993. These studies provide an insight into the masking practice amongst women in the city as well as amongst nomadic tribes, contributing to the documentation of the living traditions of the pre-oil era to a great extent; however, as they do not treat the masking practice as their main research subject, their knowledge of the diverse significance of the mask tends to be limited. Abu Saud also states in the introduction of her book that her aim is to introduce the Qatari women's past and present to Western readers through her interactions with people in Qatar and not to conduct academic research on the subject (1984, xvii-xviii).

Relatively detailed information about the composition and practice of wearing the mask in the UAE is available in the book *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment among Arabian Women*, written by Aida Kanafani in 1983. This is based on her fieldwork between October 1977 and June 1978 (Kanafani 1983, xi), which enabled her to make comparisons between emirates and study the relationships between women and the mask. Some of the information is quite relevant to my research as she describes the usage and perceptions of the mask amongst women at time when the making custom was still widely practised. Thus, based on her research, I can highlight the changes that took place throughout the late twentieth and early twentieth-first century.

More recent research on the mask has been carried out by Reem El Mutwalli (2015) and Karima Al Shomely (2016), highlighting the importance of the mask tradition in the Emirati society. In her study of Emirati women's dress as a whole, El Mutwalli (2015) locates the mask as just one element of Emirati traditional dress, and seeks to provide general information about the mask as oppose to individual narratives. For example, the change of the production, local names of the parts of the mask, and its various usages and meanings. Al Shomely's ethnographic work, conducted in various areas of the UAE and India, focuses extensively on the practice of Emirati women in relation to the face mask, including their engagement of mask production and mask wearing. As an Emirati herself, Al Shomely also describes her personal engagement with the mask as an artist and how it becomes a tool or image of Emirati identity expression. While her ethnographic data concerning the productions and associated meanings of the mask in the Emirati context greatly contributes to my thesis, my research takes a cross-national comparison of the mask tradition and critically challenges and deconstructs the idea of the 'Emirati' face mask, which Al Shomely takes for granted.

The most notable ethnographical research on the face mask in Oman was conducted by Unni Wikan and published in the book *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman*. Her observations, which are based on her two-years of fieldwork starting in 1976 in the coastal city of Sohar, give interesting insights into everyday practice of the face mask and its social significance. By defining the mask of Sohari women as "the most powerful symbol of wifely status" (94), Wikan overlooks differences in customs between Arab and Baluchi women and presents the mask as an expression of pride. In this manner, she challenges the Western belief that the veiling practice is a sign of oppression, and this further supports the findings of my research.

With regard to the literature on the face mask in Iran, the most comprehensive study is a book written by ʿAbbās Anjamrūz in Persian, *Sīr Tārīkhī Burquʿa az Bāstān tā bih Imrūz Burquʿa Pūshān Khalīj Fārs va Daryāī ʿOmān,* or *The History of the Burquʿa: Since Ancient Times until Today. The Burquʿa in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman*. In this book, Anjamrūz (1992) examines reasons for the use of the face mask amongst women in the southern Iran and the religious perceptions of the face mask in Iranian society. Some of the images of masked women in his book provide rare visual descriptions of the mask at that time; nevertheless, his explanation is rather descriptive, and it lacks in-depth ethnographical analysis of specific cultural contexts. Another newly published book written on the face mask is *Borqa: Art Climate Aboriginal Identity* authored by Ehsan Mirhosseini (170), which was based on his MA thesis. As a local artist, he exhibits diverse designs, colours, and styles of the face mask in Hormozgan Province of Iran. However, the contexts of the book reveal a lack of methodological rigour as well as the disadvantage of being a male researcher in the topic of traditional female dress. The author himself admitted this during my interview with him in Bandar Abbas and Minab in Iran in 2016, and he clearly stated that the aim of his book was to show artistically the beauty of his culture, specifically the face mask—to people outside of the community, and not to approach it as an academic research subject.

The abovementioned studies will still be considered and combined with my field research data to further analyse the face mask as both a symbol of material culture in the Persian Gulf and a representation of both individual and collective identities, particularly in Chapter 4. However, there are two significant limitations in existing scholarship relating to the face mask.

The first is the small scale of sampling. There are few written sources discussing the face mask and these largely depend on a small number of interviews or limited fieldwork. These include Sohar of Oman by Unni Wikan ([1982] 1991), the Harasiis Tribe and other Pastoral Communities of Oman by Dawn Chatty (1997), Failaka Island of Kuwait by Harold Richard Dickson [1949] 1967; meanwhile, Najlah Al Azzi (1990) engages a few older women from Qatar; Abeer Abu Saud (1984) mainly focuses on radio listeners and colleagues of Qatar Radio; Klaus Ferdinand (1993) focuses on two Qatari Bedouin groups of the Al-Naim tribe; Aida Kanafani (1983) discusses the UAE'S coastal towns, in addition to a few of the country's mountain and desert towns; Reem El Mutwalli (2015) focuses on women, and especially royal family members in the UAE; Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood and Willem Vogelsang (2008), ʿAbbās Anjamrūz (1992) and Ehsan Mirhosiyni (2015) respectively focus on the eastern Arabian Peninsula and southern Iran, southern Iran and Iran's Minab and Qeshm Island. Although these studies make important contributions to the field, in particular Al Shomely's (2016) work that focuses extensively on the use of the face mask in the UAE, the literature tends to concentrate on the associated meanings of the face mask in a particular geographical area and fails to appreciate the diverse roles and functions of the face mask in the Persian Gulf region as a whole.

Validity and liability are the second limitations in the existing scholarship. Despite the fact that one of the most important characteristics of the face mask is that it is recognised on both sides of the Persian Gulf and in the areas of East Africa that were previously under the control of the Sultanate of Oman, the existing literature often does not include information from both sides of the littoral. A fundamental reason for this might be the language barrier: for example, research carried out in the Gulf states heavily relies on

English and Arabic sources whereas studies based in Iran depend on Persian sources.

Another issue relating validity and liability arises from the inadequate selection of respondents. One example is provided by Abu Saud (1984, 58), who examines her hypothesis about the diffusion of the face mask by interviewing 'some Iranians' in Qatar, who she does not identify. On this basis, she then proceeds to claim that the *baṭūla* is used in Ahwaz and Bandar Bushehr, an assertion that is denied by the Persian sources and my own data collected through fieldwork and interviews conducted with people from these places. These disagreements emphasise the need for a comparative study of the subject.

This section has outlined the aim of this thesis and the gap in research it intends to fill by exploring a wide-range of personal perspectives and experiences of women in relation to their masks. My research therefore addresses these limitations and provides new perspectives on the subject by: 1) interviewing a wide range of women who have experienced masking across diverse geographical locations and ethnicities; 2) analysing various secondary sources, primarily written in Arabic, Persian, and English; and 3) documenting first-hand, large-scale comparative information on the use of the mask across the Gulf littoral. The methodology of this thesis is based on the principles of feminist anthropology, exploring the lives of women and their relationships with the mask. There are other valid questions such as the men's perspectives on masking and foreign labourers' involvement in the mechanisation of the mask production though these aspects are equally important and will be referred to where they are relevant to my research. Because the originality of this thesis relies on providing an overview of the face-mask tradition in the Persian Gulf region and exploring similarities and differences in the development and changes of the tradition between the Gulf Arab states, particularly the UAE, and Iran. The results of this research are important because they provide more

comprehensive and accurate knowledge about the face-mask tradition as it has been and is practised and preserved by local women. It is hoped that the results will widen perspectives and understanding of the veiling practice.

1.3 Research Questions

The initial goal of this thesis is to gain an understanding of the role and importance of the face mask in relation to women's identities in the Gulf region. The main research question is therefore: ***What is the socio-cultural importance of the face mask as an indicator of diverse identities amongst women in the Persian Gulf?***

In order to answer this main question, I ask three further sub-questions, each of which examines a particular aspect of the relationships between the mask and women. No two face masks are alike, as remarkable traits such as colour, size, design, material, and embroidery all embody specific meanings and represent the identities of the wearer. These meanings differ depending on culture and society and change over time, and it is therefore vital to analyse these characteristics of the face mask within the local contexts. Consequently, the first sub-question is: ***What material characteristics does the face mask represent and symbolise in the studied areas?***

The face mask is also associated with agency and choice. While the adoption of a face mask from puberty or on a wedding day had been a cultural norm both on Qeshm Island and the UAE, many women have gradually stopped masking since the 1970s. Thus, the second sub-question seeks to shed light on individual experiences around the act of (un)masking, especially in relation to the decline of the tradition: ***How is women's agency practised around the act of masking and unmasking?***

Finally, the states often take part in regulating and promoting the way their citizens dress in public and construct the relationships between certain pieces of dress and national identity. Thus, the third sub-question is: ***How do national narratives of Iran and the UAE represent the face-mask tradition and how have they affected the use of the mask amongst women?***

1.4 Definition of the Face Mask as the Research Subject

The face mask, which is the research subject of this thesis, is called *burquʿ* (بُرْقُع) in the singular or *barāqiʿu* (بَرَاقِعُ) in the plural in the UAE, Oman, and most parts of Hormozgan Province including Baluchistan of Iran; meanwhile, in some littoral areas of the upper Hormozgan in Iran, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait, the face mask is called *baṭūla* (بَطُولَة) in the singular or *baṭāṭīl* (بَطَاطِيل) in the plural. There are two main issues with these words—meaning, and their written and spoken variants. First, the word *burquʿ*, is used to describe different types of veiling from Europe to South East Asia. In Kuwait, *burquʿ* is a face mask that “hangs from forehead to just below the neck” and “consist[s] of two pieces of black cloth—a narrow band, which was lined, and a rectangular veil attachment which was folded double at eye level” (Scarce 1985, 76-77) (Figs. 1.1, 1.2). Moreover, in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the word is referred to as “the (mostly blue) piece of clothing covering the entire female body, including the head, except for a small region around the eyes, which is covered by a concealing net or grille” (Brems 2014, 3) that is also known

as *chador*[1] (Rosenberger and Sauer 2012, 3). *The Encyclopaedia of World Costume* (Yarwood 1978, 58) further explains three different types of *burquʿ* as:

1) A long *veil* worn in public places by Asiatic and mainly Moslem women to hide them from the view of men and strangers.

2) In Moslem India, *burkha* signifies a tent-like cloak that envelops the whole figure, leaving only a mesh panel for the eyes to peer through.[2]

3) A *short*, *round cloak* of coarse fabric worn by Russians, Poles and Moldavians: in Russian, *bypka*. The Cossacks wore long, full cloaks of black wool or fur, together with astrakhan caps on their heads.

(Fig. 1.1) Left: Bedouin woman's face veil—the *burquʿ*, a black veil (Scarce 1985, 974).
(Fig. 1.2) Right: Kuwaiti Bedouin woman wearing the *burquʿ*, a black veil (Scarce 1985, 974).

[1] Ennaji (2014, 194) and Kahf (2008, 42) identify *burquʿ* as a head-to-toe long garment with eye openings.
[2] *Burquʿ* is also used in India (Shaheed 2008, 291).

The diverse meanings of the words used to describe face covering in the region are further complicated by the written and spoken variations that are used. For example, the word *burquʿ* originates in Arabic[3], but it is pronounced differently depending on local languages and dialects: for instance, there are several ways to write it: *burka*, *burqa*, *boorka*, *burqu'*, *burga'*, *borqa'*, *borgoʿ*, and *burke* (Yarwood 1978, 58; Kanafani 1983; Scarce 1985, 77; Fernea and Fermea 1995, 241; Wikan [1982] 1991; Chatty 1997; Edwards 2011, 53; Barton 2012).

A similar kind of confusion also arises in relation to the name, *baṭūla*. While a face mask made of a golden/indigo cotton fabric is called either *baṭūla* or *al-burquʿ al-badawi*—literally meaning 'the Bedouin *burquʿ*—in Bahrain; in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia, *baṭūla* indicates a different type of face mask (Al Azzi 1990, 20).

Despite confusions relating to terminology and the various types of face covering worn by women in the Middle East, there are specific characteristics that distinguish the face mask, *burquʿ* or *baṭūla*, from other face coverings, most notably its shape and material. One characteristic of this mask is a wooden or plastic piece, which is inserted in the middle of the mask in order to lift the part covering the nose for the purpose of retaining "its good texture, design and rigidity" (Abu Saud 1984, 54) and facilitating breathing (ibid.; Al Azzi 1990, 19). While this characteristic is shared by all face masks, another characteristic, the material, varies in accordance with geographical locations, tribal or family affiliations, and socio-ethnic groups. Although these details are further discussed

[3] Although *burquʿ* is considered to be an Arabic word, as it does not consist of the three consonants that generally identify Arabic words, and accordingly some scholars argue that it derives from Persian or Sanskrit (Al Azzi 1990).

in Chapter 4, for the sake of brevity, I divide these face masks into four types that are commonly used in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman region. Nevertheless, the first type of the face mask, which is worn by women on Iran's Qeshm Island and the UAE, is the focus of this research.

The first one is a face mask that can be found in the Arabian Peninsula—Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, eastern Yemen, south eastern Saudi Arabia, Omani towns close to the UAE border, and Failaka Island of Kuwait, in addition to the coastal areas of Iran's Hormozgan Province. It is called *burgaʿ* in the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and most parts of Hormozgan Province, while the name *baṭūla*, is used in Bahrain, Qatar, Failaka Island of Kuwait, and Iran's upper Hormozgan Province. The characteristic of this face mask is its shiny golden coloured fabric that is permeated with indigo dye and leaves blue or purple stains on whatever it touches. The design of this type of the face mask varies from place to place, but it tends to be a trapezoid structure that often covers the area extending from the forehead to the upper lip or chin. In general, this face mask is made to fit each wearer's face shape and, with the intention of securing a passage of breathing, the nose part is lifted by a wooden stick (see Chapter 5) (Fig. 1.3).

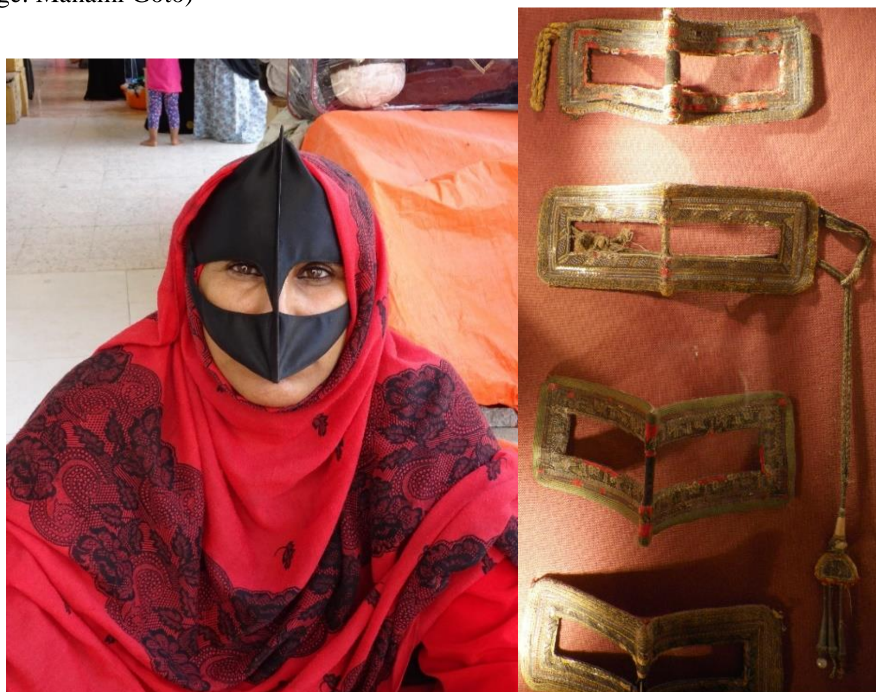
The second face mask has been worn particularly by Baloch women in Iran, and today it is seen in the lower Hormozgan Province, south of Minab, as well as a few villages in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan Provinces. This type of face mask is locally known as *borke*. It is made of various coloured cotton threads and is sometimes decorated with hologram spangled sequins. The most common colour is red, but in recent years other colours, such as green, pink, yellow, orange, and light brown, have become available in local markets in southern Iran. This face mask has a rectangle shape which completely hides the eyebrows and the nose (Fig. 1.4).

The third type of face mask is mainly found in Oman, namely in Al-Wusta, Al-Dalhiliya, and Al-Sharqiya Governorates, and is locally known as *burguʿa*. This face mask is made of black nylon, and it has a unique form which approximates the shape of either a pentagon or an ovoid, and projects above the forehead and beyond the nose (Fig. 1.5).

The fourth face mask is hardly ever seen at the present time. It is called the *saif malik* (king's sword in Arabic) and can be found in Oman—mostly in private museums and historical pictorial records—as well as some parts of Eastern Africa that used to be under the control of the Sultanate of Oman. The shape of this face mask is similar to that of the second face mask—a rectangle—but it has more adornments decorating the surface. Moreover, the tips of the strings attached to both sides of the face mask are sometimes adorned with silver and pearls. According to the description of the *saif malik* face mask at the Bait Al Zubair Museum in Oman, this face mask was associated with women holding prestigious positions, such as a daughter of a Sultan, and can be traced back as far as the eighteenth century (Fig. 1.6).

For purposes of convenience, I use 'the face mask' instead of *burquʿ* or *baṭūla*—the reason being that the name of the mask differs from place to place, and this helps to avoid confusion. I also refer to four different masks in the following order: the first is the golden/indigo face mask; the second is the Baloch face mask; the third is the Omani Bedouin face mask; and the fourth is the *saif malik* face mask.

(Fig. 1.3) Woman with the golden/indigo face mask. Photo taken in Dubai, March 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 1.4) Woman with the Baloch face mask. Photo taken at the Thursday Market in Iran's Minab, July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)



(Fig. 1.5) Omani woman with the Omani Bedouin face mask. Photo taken at the Thursday Market in Sinaw of Oman, March 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 1.6) The *saif malik* face mask. Photo taken at Bait Al Zubair Museum in Muscat, February 2015. (Image: Manami Goto)

1.5 Theoretical Consideration

As this thesis examines the role of the face mask through the context of a particular material culture, it is essential to unpack the following theoretical frameworks that are used throughout the thesis: conceptualisation of material culture; identity; and tradition and modernity. This section illustrates how these conceptual clarifications can contribute to the critical discussion of key research questions.

1.5.1 Material Culture

The subject of material culture emerged from the study of archaeology and anthropology in the twentieth century (Hicks 2010, 25). The study of material culture gained popularity with the expansion of academic literature on the subject during the late 1980s (Hicks and Beaudry 2010, 2). The way in which material culture distinguishes itself from other cultural studies is its materiality—in the words of George, "a way of making visible the invisibility of quotidian existence" (2010, 123). The observation of material along with associated information such as its origin, characteristics, and usage enable us to gain a much clearer understanding of history, lifestyles, geographical relations, and cultural practices. In particular, studying the material culture of dress involves observing "the unconscious symbolisms attaching to forms, colours, textures, postures, and other expressive elements of a given culture" (Davis 1994, 5), and therefore dress as a material object always reflects personal statements that people either consciously or unconsciously make. Here, dress is not only referred to as clothing or adornment, but also represents the 'act' of covering the body (Roach and Eicher 1995, 1).

Dress is a non-verbal but visual language of communication, and it also performs the functions of both individualisation and the representation of the belonging community (Crawley 1931, 117; Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson 1999, 1; Fowler 2010, 355; Arvanitidou and Gasouka 2011). While dress is interpreted as a general term for "body modifications and supplements" (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1995, 9; Lindisfarne-Tapper and Ingham 1997, 13), it further attests to a personal aesthetic sense and structural categories including gender, class, and generation (Buse and Twigg 2015, 1). A materialistic aspect of dress is one significant reference to these embodied statements: for example, social developments and natural environments, including technology, techniques, components, and ingredients, are often reflected in material characteristics. Dress is also associated with "expressivity, agency, and choice—qualities that are presumed to erode with the progress of the condition" (Buse and Twigg 2015, 2). Dress and dressed bodies affect people with personal and social information at first sight and continue to provide a large amount of information to observers. However, the distribution of materials or objects does not always draw a clear line between cultural and social boundaries; in particular, they do not provide sufficient evidence to locate an ethical boundary (Barth 1961; Fowler 2010).

Face covering is often not regarded as a 'fundamental' part of clothing in that it is not entirely necessary for its wearers: to this extent, it does not maintain the body temperature or protect the skin from a harsh environment. However, it is also often considered to be 'Islamic' attire that represents the image of a 'fundamentalist' 'Middle Eastern' woman (Lindisfarne-Tapper and Ingham 1997, 1). This is despite the existence of male face veiling as evidenced, for example, by the nomadic Tuareg men of the Sahara in North Africa (R. Murphy 1964). Nevertheless, the act of veiling amongst Muslim women is practised for more diverse reasons: for example, Lila Abu-Lughod interprets the veiling

practice to be “the most visible act of modest defence” ([1986] 1999, 159) in Egypt’s Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin society. In this community, women change their ways of dressing after marriage as this entails a transition from a virgin girl to a sexually mature woman, with a black head veil and a red belt around a woman’s waist coming to symbolise fertility (ibid., 134). The colour red embodies femininity and productivity, and is often deployed as signification at weddings and female circumcisions (ibid., 136). On the contrary, the colour black embodies “religion and purity” (ibid., 137) or even “sexual shame” (ibid., 138). These cultural references attached to particular elements exemplify how symbolic meanings of objects, behaviour, and phenomena can differ from community to community and change over time. Thus, it is a crucial part of ethnographical study to observe objects within a specific cultural context.

Observing material objects and their use within particular settings provides accurate information about relations between objects, people, and society. Dress, which is a product of people’s interactions, indicates the choices that individual wearers make and also reflects material and social circumstance (Lindisfarne-Tapper and Ingham 1997, 19; Damhorst et al. 2005, 7). However, the study of dress in the Middle East explicitly focuses on the issues of women’s veiling (Karimi 2003, 14), and the face mask is also generalised as part of the veiling act. Thus, the following section illustrates current discussions that relate to the veil and also demonstrates how my research on the face mask contributes to understanding of the practice.

1.5.1.1 Veil

The veil has often been a focus of contention, and this has become more apparent over the past few decades (Hessini 1994, 53). Veiling is one of the instances where choices made by women concerning their own bodies are impinged on by larger forces such as patriarchy and nations, and it feeds into wider debates about the interaction between the 'West' and 'Islam' (Ahmed 1992, 152; Karimi 2003, 15). Examining current scholarship around the veil and situating it in a wider context helps articulate the position of this research and demonstrates the contribution that this research makes.

Veil is a general term that invokes various conceptualisations of coverings that are closely associated with social, cultural, and religious contexts (Arimbi 2009, 191-92). However, the diversity of the concept is often ignored, and the word 'veil', has come to represent one unified item of clothing, which is often understood by Western cultures to be the Islamic veil (Heath 2008, 104). For example, veil and *burquʿ* have been treated as equal in the West, invariably in the absence of proper analysis (Riley 2013, 26). Despite the fact that veiling practices existed before the arrival of Islam, its origin dates back to the Mesopotamia era, and possibly beyond, and it has been used as both face and head covering by Greeks, Romans, and Assyrians (Bosankić 2014, 24). Yet, depending on the time and place, the symbolic meanings of the veil differed: it functioned as a means of seclusion amongst Greeks and Romans, a representation of elite status in Assyria, and an indication of distinct position and purity among Jews. Since the fourth century, the veiling of a bride-to-be has also been a Christian tradition (ibid., 24; Grace, 2004; 14). One important use of the veil has been as a tangible object to distinguish noble women from slaves (Al Azzi 1990, 18; Shirazi 2001, 3; Grace 2004, 14). This distinctive fashion was even legalised at some points in history: for example, it was under Assyrian rule that the

first legal statement concerning veiling was enacted to execute veiled prostitutes in the thirteen century B.C. (Keddie and Baron 1991, 3); Babylonian law later punished prostitutes as well as slave women who covered themselves with a veil (Driver 1952, 491-92). Veiling therefore acted as a visual symbol of the prestigious status of women.

Veiling practice was also transmitted to Islamic communities that adopted this 'woman-veil relationship' through subjugators (Shirazi 2001, 3). Chatty (1997, 128) observes that because the wives of Prophet Mohammed covered their faces for both the purpose of seclusion and to evidence their special status, a small number of women began to emulate the practice. Veiling as a means of seclusion subsequent to reaching puberty became widespread one hundred and fifty years after the Prophet's death, and it became a common practice, particularly among wealthy women (ibid.).

However, some scholars claim that men in the Arabian Peninsula wore a face veil even before the arrival of Islam as a means of protecting against the evil eye[4], to which attractive men—by the standards of the time—were considered to be particularly vulnerable (Wellhausen 1897, 196; Crawley 1931, 76). On the other hand, Al-Jubouri (1989) provides a different interpretation of male face veiling. According to his analysis, men who covered their faces were called *thu khimar* (literally meaning 'the veiled ones'), and they did this to indicate their status as a member of the group (1989, 119). Despite the ambiguity of the reasons behind men's practice of face veiling, it is important to note that not only women, but also men, covered their faces in the pre-Islamic period. El Guindi acknowledges that some Persian and Turkish miniatures show the image of

[4] The evil eye is defined as "it relates to the fear of envy in the eye of the beholder" (Spooner 1970, 312) and similarly as it tied to "the fear of envy and jealousy in the eye of the beholder" (Abu-Rabia 2005, 241).

Prophet Muhammad with a white face veil (1999, 148). Though this practice is might be due to the religious requirement that the face of the Prophet should not be identified, it is interesting to note how, in this instance, the veil is used to meet religious obligations.

Although veiling is a cultural practice, in the contemporary period the veil represents Islamic culture and tradition, often indicating the 'ideal' image of a Muslim woman; but there is no mention of actual vocabularies relating to face or head coverings in the *Qurān* (the central text of Islam) or the *ḥadīth* (a collection of sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammed) (El Guindi 1999, 152; Ennaji 2014, 74). Lazreg also argues that the *Qurān* does not maintain that face covering is part of Islam's dress code, and the word 'modesty', which is often invoked in relation to veiling, is also not mentioned in the *Qurān* (2009, 20-21). According to Lazreg, 'the Arabic words *khimar* (referring to a piece of clothing, possibly a kerchief, worn by women in the seventh century), and *jilbab* (another garment that clothes the body) have often been translated as "veil"' (2009, 20-21). Stern (1939, 111) also notes that the only possible source for the argument would be *Sūra* (a chapter of the *Qurān*) 33, 59: "O Prophet tell your wives, daughters and believing women to put on their *jilbāb*s so that they are recognized and thus not harmed." However, the most common justification for veiling is *Sūra* 24:31 (El Guidi 1999, 154), which states:

> "That they [feminine gender] should not display their beauty and ornaments except what [must ordinarily] appear thereof; that they should draw their *khimār* [often translated as head veil] over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or underage children." (*Sūra* 24: 31)

In this *Sūra*, there is no mention of covering the face (Keddie 1995, 250; El Guindi 1999, 155) nor is there any reference to a specific way of dressing.

Similarly, Mernissi (1991, 99) argues, in referring to the descriptions of al-Bukhari and al-Tabari, that the *ḥijāb* does not imply a literal interpretation of a veil for women but instead invokes a metaphorical meaning that refers to men's division between private spheres of their lives—for example the Prophet Mohammad and Anas Ibn Malik—and was therefore advanced in order to secure the Prophet's private life. In fact, the word *ḥijāb* descends from a concept meaning "a physical curtain" (ibid., 100).

Regardless of these Islamic scholarly arguments over veiling, the veil has been depicted as relating to an image of exotic women of the Orient inside the harem (Zeiger 2008, 267). This imaginary assumption surrounding veiling tended to be created by Western men who did not have access to the real women's living sphere but purposely produced postcards, paintings, and literature that often objectified women as sexual and mysterious (Alloula 1986, 122; Graham-Brown 1988, 74). This fictional eroticism and victimism of veiled women not only continued to exist, but also motivated people to act as savers who would protect and emancipate these powerless women from the oppressing society, and therefore justify Western intervention (Tarlo 2010, 3). Some observers who were influenced by these Western modes of thinking began to urge the removal of the veil, with Qassim Amin and Huda Sha'rawi being notable in this regard.

Qassim Amin, the Egyptian jurist, did not only seek to reinterpret women's status in Islam, but also sought to change the local cultures and customs that he saw as oppressing women (Ahmed 1992, 144-45). In his book, *The Liberation of Women*, which was published in 1899, he clearly stated that Islam and Islamic law do not require women to cover their

faces (Lazreg 2009, 101). Amin also made it clear that the Maliki and Hanbali religious schools do not require women to cover their faces and hands (Amin 2004, 38-39; Lazreg 2009, 138). In combining his experience of living in Egypt under British control and receiving French education, he successfully outlined a new interpretation of the veiling (Ahmed 1992, 145). Since then, Islamic feminists who do not necessarily agree with his theory have nonetheless drawn on his contribution when examining and discussing the veil.

Similarly, Huda Sha'rawi, who is an Egyptian feminist and was educated in France, has criticised the Western attitude towards Egyptian women that, in her view, misrepresents them as passive, secretive, sexual, and romantic objects. In 1923, she took off her face veil in Egypt to cast doubt upon women's roles and status in the society (Fernea and Fernea 1995, 243; Shirazi 2001, 4). [5]

While the influx of Western ideas about Oriental women into Egypt and other East and North African countries did impact on the societies to some extent, it was nonetheless the case that the unveiling movement that took place in the early twentieth century won broad support from women who sought greater freedom of choice in fashion, as Ahmed (2011, 36) recognises. This clearly contradicted the idea that the movement was caused and supported only by Westernised social elites.

The misconceptions about veiled women that Orientalists generated have given rise to serious issues in recent years. Due to rising Islamophobia as well as increasing numbers of Muslim migrants traveling from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region,

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[5] Huda's active involvement in Egyptian politics is discussed by Nelson (1991) and Ahmed (2011, 35-36), and her historical contribution is explained in Chapter 5 of Keddie's book (2007).

most notably from Libya and Syria (Bommes, Fassmann, and Sievers 2014, 45), face covering has simultaneously become perceived as a threat to national security and a symbol of oppression in Western countries (Zempi and Chakraborti 2004, 19; Barton 2012).

It should however be acknowledged that the issues around face covering are complex: this is shown by the example of France where secularism is part of the national cultural and political ethos, which religious symbols are frequently held to conflict with or even challenge. This ethos, along with rising tensions, was clearly a factor in the government decision to issue legislation banning face veiling. Similar developments have also occurred in Belgium and, to a lesser and more partial extent, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland (Brems 2014; Kovach-Orr 2016). Brems (2014, 4) further clarifies that although local laws against facial concealments existed in Belgium, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands, an official ban against a face cover had never been enforced at a national level until 2011, when face-covering women began to be seen in the streets. This ban resulted from a combination of Islamophobic bias and the traditional European position on face covering. This was confirmed by a 2009 French Parliament report that concluded the face veil was "an infringement on the freedom and the dignity of women (liberty); a denial of gender equality and of a mixed society (equality); and a rejection of 'the common will to live together' (brotherhood)" (ibid., 7).

This rhetoric was also deployed by George Bush Jnr, the former US President, when he sought to find a pretext to justify US military operations in Afghanistan after the September 11 incident: one of his main justifications for the war was to save "women in cover" (Abu-Lughod 2002, 783) from the Taliban. Nevertheless, *burquʿ* (A blue head-to-

toes garment) was worn by women, especially Pashtuns, in Afghanistan well before the Taliban seized power (ibid., 785).

As Abu-Lughod (ibid., 785) observed, some people still fail to fully understand why some Afghan women still wear the *burqu*ʿ after being freed from the Taliban. This question is also often raised when people see women wearing head or face covering in European countries when they are in a country where they can choose their own clothes. This, at the same time, shows the widespread misunderstanding that veiling is a sign of oppression (Ahmed 1992, 152). This attitude is not confined to media and government officials, but also extends to Western feminists who view this continued attachment to the veil to be "emblematic of an oppressed minority within patriarchal structures" (Grace 2004, 1).

Politicisation of the veil is neither a recent development and nor is it confined to the West. Throughout history, veiling has been intentionally classified and exploited by governments both as a symbol of backwardness and concealment of sexuality, which in turn establishes the basis for political projects that work towards liberation and empowerment. For example, Reza Shah's regime in Iran during the 1930s saw veiling, particularly of the face, as a sign of backwardness and as preventing the modernisation of society (see Chapter 8.1). The exact opposite view took hold after the Iranian revolution in 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini enforced an Islamic ideology that associated the head veiling with the image of a decent Muslim woman and liberty from Western domination (Shirazi 2001, 94). The history of the veil in Iran will be treated in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

Likewise, the full veil covering was enforced by the Mujahideen in Kabul in 1992 and was later, after 1996, applied to the whole of Afghanistan by the Taliban, who are

ethnically Pashtuns and received Wahhabi education in Pakistan (Keddie 2007, 118). There are also cases where the veiling practice is newly adopted in the society. Jihadi movements including the Wahhabis, who emerged in the Arabian Peninsula during the eighteenth century, and who hold a normative and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, brought the veiling practice to “parts of Sumatra and West Africa that had not known it before” (Keddie 1995, 228).

In Tunisia, while a full-body-covering veil called *safsari*[6] has been traditionally worn by women for many years, the head veil— *ḥijāb*—became popular since the 1970s as a result of an Islamic movement that originated in Iran’s Islamic Revolution (Cotton 2006, 4). However, the Tunisian government, which had followed the West in promoting the state’s modernisation since 1956 (Boulby 1988, 90), saw the *ḥijāb* as a symbol of Islamist ideology, and restricted its use in public institutions in 1981 (Cotton 2006, 3). In the case of Turkey, the prohibition of the veil was gradually institutionalised over the course of the 1980s in order to “maintain secularism and religious neutrality in the country’s public realm” (Piatti-Crocker and Tasch 2012, 29). Once the veil became part of urban fashion and harmonised with a growing sense of individualism in the country, this prohibition was dropped in 2013 (Sayan-Cengiz 2016, 11).

Religio-political meanings associated with the veil do not only provoke the states to use the veil in accordance with their political interests, but also encourage women to visually express political statements. For example, in Tunisia during the state’s struggle for independence, the traditional veil, *safsari*, embodied nationalistic identity in opposition

[6] The *safsari* is “an all-white rectangular cloth…[which] wraps around the body and covers it from head to toe” (Cotton 2006, 65)

to French colonisation (Bodman and Tohidi 1998, 66). After France withdrew in 1956, *safrari* again became a traditional dress lacking in any particular political connotations (ibid.). This was also the case in Algeria, where women used the veil to resist the French during the French-Algerian War (Ahmed 1992, 164).

Today, women more often make political statements as individuals rather than in groups. Ahmed describes how, in the US, some women wear a head scarf to challenge negative views of Muslim women that increased after September 11, and also to show their solidarity with Palestine (2011, 210-11).

On the other hand, some scholars emphasise how the veil promotes seclusion in relations between men and women. Zayzafoon who examines gender relationships in the context of the Middle East, argues that "it is men who pursued a 'politics of visibility' through which the 'Muslim woman' functions as the 'visible marker of national homogeneity'" (2005, 102). Fernea and Fernea also refer to Nadia Abu-Zahra's observation that men gain power by secluding women along with her conclusion that the veil—*purdah*—controls men and women's roles as well as behaviour (1995, 243).

While views of the veil are gradually changing, it is still the case that, as Grace notes, "[t]he veil is central to the discourses of west versus east, democracy versus 'fundamental' Islam, and still remains an icon of the otherness of Islam and a symbol of Muslim women's oppression" (2004, 12). Although the veil possibly becomes a sign of women's oppression or a representation of Islamic identity (Ahmed 1992, 151-52), the actual issues around the discussion of veil are the tendency to generalise and, as a consequence, the lack of recognition accorded to diverse uses of veiling (Lindisfarne-Tapper and Ingham 1997, 15). This is to say that the specificity of each custom is not usually acknowledged

and is often generalised. Secondly, the merging of different civilisations and cultures, particularly those from Europe, means that these backgrounds and contents are generally not taken into consideration. In other words, as a result, Islam is viewed as the only influential rationale for veiling (Abu-Lughod 2003; Ahmed 1992, 149). Mernissi (1991, 99) also points out that obsession with the discussion of the veil results from the strong reaction of Islamic scholars against Western culture and thinking, which in turn results in an overprotection of women's bodies.

It is worth mentioning that the veil has been studied mostly in the fields of Area, Religious, and Women's studies and that these engagements have made very limited contributions to the discussion (El Guindi 1999, 117). This is reflected, for example, by the fact that feminist scholars are predisposed to see the veil as 'reflecting women's invisibility, women's anonymity, female subordination, women's oppression in "patriarchal" societies, or a function of Islam' (ibid.). The destabilisation of Orientalist perspectives and contributions therefore anticipates the emergence of new findings and perspectives and the enrichment of contemporary discussions of veiling. In investigating the roles and meanings associated with the face mask and women's agency around the act of (un)masking, this thesis aims to contribute to the current scholarship on veiling from the perspective of material culture.

1.5.2 Identity

The concept of identity is another key theme in this thesis. In the field of anthropology, it emerged from 'personality', which Erik Erikson defines as a psychological term (Meijl 2008, 169). He explains that identity gives a person a feeling of sameness by being one's

self or behaving in a certain way (Erikson 1977, 36). Moreover, the concept of 'identity' is also described as "a shared similarity of character for several beings or things—the way in which they are identical—but it also refers to the distinctiveness of any group, being, or thing—its specific identity" (Fowler 2010, 353). This categorisation of him/herself is called 'identification'. Serpe and Stryker (2011, 233) observe that two basic components need to be presented to define identity; a person needs to be assigned to a certain position or category in a society, and the person needs to internalise him or herself to the associated anticipation.

The significance of studying dress in relation to identity is that dress can represent developments in people's lifestyles and social changes and also preserve the identity of individuals and cultural symbolism (Roach-Higgins, Eicher, and Johnson 1995, xi; ibid., 5). Dress can also be a sign of "socializing and enculturating children into adulthood" (Eicher 2000, 61) that conveys distinctive ethnic, social, economic, religious and tribal characteristics, along with the gender status of a wearer. It is indeed a process of creating one's own identity. Other studies show that an encounter with other ethnic groups has resulted in the creation of new ethnic dress for the reason that people wanted to emphasise the differences between themselves and others upon the basis of economic and cultural differences in dress (ibid., 64).

At the same time, these differences in dress can be transferred and merged into other groups in the community, and this can result in a new identification being ascribed to dress. If a collective dress is to emerge that embodies a certain identity, then it is essential for individuals to interact and communicate with people outside their own communities. This perspective is called symbolic interactionism. The symbolic interaction theory sees identity as a product of "social interaction in various social, physical, and biological

settings" (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1995, 12). Because dress can play the role of an intermediary communication tool, people express their personal status and obtain other peoples' personal information, and sometimes even expect to fulfil a social behaviour or role (ibid., 101); but, more importantly, these associated meanings and symbolisations need to be understood within specific social and cultural contexts.

Dress has been a substantial visible communication tool in relation to identity. For example, in Macedonia where ethnic, language, cultural, and class identity establish clear group divisions within society, for instance, when *dopii*—Christian inhabitants—migrated to Macedonia while wearing European style of dress—which were judged to be revealing by the community standard—conservative locals rejected and despised them (Cowan 1990, 44). Indeed, their way of dressing, which did not fit into the local moral code, promoted further disgust towards migrants amongst the residents. In addition, dress can also indicate the wearer's relation to ethnic, religious, political, gender and socio-economic groups.

In the case of the Palestinians, transformation from collective memories into national identity is the central part of survival. In comparison to the other forms of cultural products including verbal narratives, Moors argues that "these [the embroidered] dresses function as material proof of a Palestinian historical presence and document the existence of a Palestinian cultural heritage" (2000, 874). Moreover, depicting different designs of these dresses that embody their geographical circumstances are reflected on postcards and this can serve as evidence of Palestinian inhabitation of the Israeli occupied areas (ibid., 874). Vereni observes that the concept of 'identity' proposed by the nation implies "the sameness of a nation at all times and under all circumstances" (2000, 49). In addition, the *Kaffiyah*, the traditional male headscarf, was a symbol of both opposition and support for

Palestinians in the international community (Swedenburg 2003, 35). This distinctive black-and-white pattern printed scarf later became so popular in the fashion scene that I can even recall having seen young Japanese boys and girls adopt the scarf in their daily fashion—however in this instance their intention was not to indicate political support for Palestinians but rather to be part of an on-going fashion trend. Similarly, a symbolic meaning attached to particular dress or clothing can be invented and promoted through national narratives, which I investigate by drawing on Hobsbawm's "invented tradition" ([1983] 2013, 1) in Chapter 8.

The impact of economic development on changes in popular designs of dress cannot be overlooked. Palestinian women in each region learnt their own needle techniques from neighbours and schools. Yet, with the advancement of transportation facilities, a specific embroidery design from Bethlehem spread to other areas (Moors 2000, 875). Moreover, embroidery programs were introduced by nationalist institutions to Palestinian women who live in the occupied Palestinian territory and Palestinian refugee communities in neighboring countries. This enabled participants to preserve their tradition and provide financial support. This was a turning point in the purposes for embroidering traditional dress, which switched from personal use to selling. However, this also means that preferable designs of embroideries are no longer in the hands of makers but are instead held by buyers (ibid., 875-77).

Dress is also perceived to be a material object that takes a mysterious power or the spirit of a wearer: for example, in the case of India, some people believe that each component of cloth such as fabric, characteristic, and colour possesses a spirit (Bayly 1986, 287). This is further illustrated when, for example, a sterile woman eats the ash of a fecund woman's breast cloth when issuing a prayer for pregnancy; alternatively, when a Hindu

woman marries again after the death of her previous husband, she would bury her clothes and belongings outside of the territory of new husband's village in order to avoid bad incidents that may be caused by the previous husband's sprit (ibid., 278-88). These rituals are based on the idea of sprit dwelling within cloth that could bring good luck as well as bad luck to a wearer and the surroundings. One future avenue of research might concern itself with the fate of used face masks after the wearer's death.

Face mask is the most conspicuous item of dress, as the face generates visual attention when people encounter and communicate with each other. Jeremy Keenan who analyses the veiling practice amongst Tuareg men in the North Africa observes that "the veiling of Tuareg men is not only an ancient custom but has probably always been the most dominant symbol of 'Tuaregness'" (2003, 97). The veil called *check*, however, symbolises puberty, maleness as well as being a non-Arab in the Arab majority area (ibid., 97). This significant distinctive characteristic of veiling can also be perceived negatively, although this depends on the social and political circumstances that apply on each occasion. For example, during the transaction period in Algeria that extended from the pre to post-colonial era, many Tuareg men renounced the veiling practice for their own security, and this eliminated their distinctive indicator and identity. Today, young men wear the veil out of respect during visits or family gatherings when elder men are present, or as a traditional symbol during cultural festivals and rituals (ibid., 98).

While dress plays an important part in expressing individual identity, the symbolic meanings of dress differ in accordance with social, political, and religious influences, sometimes even within the same community. This research, in investigating relationships between symbolic meanings of dress and identities, provides further insight into complex

social divisions and unity. Furthermore, it also identifies and explores how different forms of agency are exercised during the process of expressing individual identities.

1.5.3 Tradition and Modernity

The binaries of the concepts between tradition and modernity have increasingly become important when discussing people's perceptions of the face mask, especially with regard to its declining use amongst women. The term 'modern' comes from a Latin word of 'modernus' and was first introduced in the late fifth century "to distinguish the present" (Habermas [1993]2014, 98). However, this term has repeatedly been used to refer to varieties of contents/social phenomena, which include "the state of living in the modern present, the process of industrialisation and technological development, and the period after the European Enlightenment" (Schedneck 2013, 34). In these contexts, the term modern is used to connotate "a transition from the old to new" (Habermas [1993]2014, 98).

Scholars such as Fukuyama and Giddens, who applied classical theories of modernisation originally developed by Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, adopted a Eurocentric view towards modernity and therefore took the view that industrial development in western Europe was the beginning of modernisation (Fukuyama [1992]2006, 68). Giddens provides further clarification by defining modernity as "modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (Giddens [1990]1992, 1). These contributions, which present Europe as a homogeneous example to be followed, have been criticised by a number of scholars including Kesselman (1973,

149), Wiarda (1981, 167), Bhambra ([2007]2009, 2), and Connell ([2007]2009), who contend that modernity and Westernisation had not proven to be compatible (Eisenstadt [2002]2017, 1-3; Ashcroft 2009, 83). Instead, they argue that there has never been "one single homogenous conception of modernity" (Wittrock 2000, 58), and proceed to suggest that modernity is plural, and its definition differs in accordance with each cultural setting (Dirlik 2003, 279; Ashcroft 2009, 83). This confirms that the concept of 'modernities' needs to be unpacked and understood in specific cultural contexts.

In the case of Iran, tensions between 'modernity' and 'tradition' have influenced Iranian politics and society since the mid-nineteenth century (Jahanbegloo 2004, x-xi). While 'modernity' is seen as liberal and enlightened, 'tradition' is instead dark and backward (ibid., x). However, throughout Iranian history, relations between the two have been complex and ambiguous, and the state's definitions of the two have also changed over time. For example, between 1921 and 1941, Iran, under the leadership of Reza Shah Pahlavi, adopted a Western style of modernity and established a 'modern' state and society (Cronin 2003, 1-2). By the late nineteenth century, a number of Iranian intellectuals, such as Jamshid Behnam, sought to advance Iranian national identity by separating a Western-oriented concept of modernity from an Iranian counterpart (*tajaddod*). He said:

> "[National identity is] different from the meaning of the term in the West, where modernity is a socio-logical concept, and a philosophical idea conceived in a different cultural context. Iranian intellectuals' desire for *tajaddod* [renewal] was derived from Iran's lagging behind and Western civilization's advancement, and *tajaddod* was intended to create the best incorporation of national culture with modern values and beliefs. In other words, one should define modernization in

Iran as the desire for change and innovation, shaped by temporal conditions and national identity" (ibid., xiii).

This interpretation of 'modernity' within the Iranian cultural context is also reflected in the attitude of the current Iranian regime. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the government has, in rejecting the influence of Western modernity and imperialism, sought to develop society through modern education, infrastructure, and democratisation (ibid., xiv). Yet, it is important to note that individual perceptions of modernity and tradition may differ from the understanding of the state. This is particularly true of women on Qeshm Island, whose distinction of 'modern' and 'traditional' is often associated with changes in their lifestyles (see Chapters 7.1 and 8.1).

In the case of the UAE, the distinction between modernity and tradition in society tends to be clearly defined and widely shared among the nationals because the government has utilised and promoted the concept as part of their nation-building project (see Chapter 8.2). The discovery of oil and leadership provided by Sheikh Zayed Al-Nahyan, the founder of the state, during the 1960s are often referred to as the historical events that divide Emirati past and present (Schedneck 2013, 21; El Mutwalli 2015, 91-92). Although there is the issue of an 'invented' past and tradition, which I discuss further in Chapter 8, objects and practices that existed prior to the rapid socio-economic transformation of society are often considered to be 'traditional'. Although the dichotomy of tradition and modernity poses some critical questions, I aim to gain insight into how my respondents in the Gulf, particularly on Qeshm Island and in the UAE, perceive and consider these concepts and associated meanings in relation to the face-mask tradition.

1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis uses the face mask to explore socio-cultural identities expressed by women on Qeshm Island and in the UAE, and it is structured into nine chapters. Chapters Five, Six, Seven, and Eight analyse the main empirical, ethnographic data gathered on Qeshm Island and the UAE between 2016 and 2018. As the themes of Chapters Five and Six share many commonalities, each aspect is presented by combining data from both Qeshm Island and the UAE and analysing them thematically. On the contrary, the themes of Chapters Seven and Eight are case specific, therefore they engage each case study separately in its specific socio-cultural context.

Chapter Two describes how ethnographic data on women's perspectives and their practices of the face-mask tradition were collected in order to examine the possible relationships between them. It explains the method of inquiry, selection of research sites, ethical considerations, and my position as a researcher. Chapter Three provides background information on the communities and people of Qeshm Island and the UAE. The literature is engaged and my own experiences of living amongst local peoples are set out in more detail, with the intention of depicting the various aspects of societies where masked women live. Chapter Four critically discusses the current hypothesis for the origins of the face mask, and explains how the tradition has been adapted and developed in the Persian Gulf and the Western Indian Ocean by accommodating itself to local settings and cultural contexts.

This study, in complementing the early research on individual areas with new ethnographic material, provides an overall perspective of the cross-national aspect of this tradition, and this attests to diverse cultural exchanges between these areas. Chapter Five sheds light on materials and methods of production of the face mask by analysing them

in the context of changing social and fashion trends. This chapter also considers how face masking has created shared memories for families and facilitated everyday life interactions and personal relationships. Chapter Six identifies the diverse roles and symbolic meanings that the face mask has embodied and represented in Qeshmi and Emirati society. It also illustrates how each woman has utilised the distinctive characteristics of the materials and designs of the mask to present her individual identity and sense of belonging. In Chapter Seven, unacknowledged agency and women's negotiation of acts of masking and unmasking are investigated in more detail. These findings are placed in the context of the political and socio-economic changes affecting women's roles and views in society with the intention of analysing the reasons that lie behind the decline of the tradition. Chapter Eight examines how the face mask has been deliberately cultivated to represent a particular history, past, and identity, thereby being co-opted as forms of heritage in Iran's and the UAE's state narratives. It begins by outlining the history of the government's attitudes towards masking custom, and also highlights its impact on shaping public perceptions and the use of the mask amongst women.

Chapter 2: Methods and Methodology

2.1 Feminist Anthropology

Emerging alongside the women's liberation movement, feminist anthropology came to prominence nearly fifty years ago as feminist anthropologists sought answers to their own problems by observing 'other' women (Lewin 2006, 1). However, over time they came to realise that the problems that women face do not always apply across different parts of the world, and therefore started to study women's perspectives and views with the intention of engaging different social and cultural contexts.

There are differences between 'the anthropology of women' and 'feminist anthropology'. The former seeks to research women by using any methodological and theoretical approach, while the latter instead aspires to address any research subject from a women's perspective (Ardener 1985, 24). Since the 1970s, researchers have increasingly come to focus on the 'anthropology of woman'; however, as Moore (1988, 1-2) identifies, there are three main male biases that arise when discussing issues that relate to women: 1) the tendency to overlook the importance of gender relations; 2) the tendency to view a woman as secondary; and 3) the orientation towards views strongly rooted in Western culture. The notion that a 'woman writes about woman' does not only add different views and interpretations of anthropological work to the existing literature as, to the same extent, it provides access to women whose voices have been ignored in male-oriented scholarship. This is exceptionally important in the Persian Gulf region where the conservative society has not encouraged women to interact with men, with the exception of those inside their own families.

Other scholars also identify the importance of feminist anthropology by shedding light on gender power. Anderson (2004) observes differences in sexual experiences and realities that have taken on a systematic character, and proceeds to assert that it is essential to include women's insights to gain a whole picture of society. Lewin (2006) also accentuates the gendered role of ethnographers by observing that data collected from men and women leads to different conclusions. Slocum (1975, 49) further acknowledges gender biases in anthropology by observing that historically male researchers have tended to only collect data from male participants, producing a result for an entire 'population' that excludes female views.

This exclusion of a particular group in society has been expanded in the theory of the 'muted group', which Edwin Ardener introduced in 1975. This recognises that expressions and modes of thought are consistently structured and controlled by a superior group: when this group is male, it both highlights the problem of male biases in the field, and also problematises male-dominated academic scholarship as a whole (Moore 1988, 4).

Shapiro however questions "the it-takes-one-to-know-one position" (1981, 124-25), on the basis that it raises questions of validity and reliability in relation to data collected by female researchers that relates to male subjects. Brown and Jordanova (1982, 393) argue that the biological difference between a man and woman does not support a social superiority based on gender. As they note, this applies because this power relationship is constructed by surrounding culture and society and is not genetic. In feminist anthropology, a biological and physical gender difference is not viewed in essentialist terms; rather, significant differences and divisions are instead attributed to inequalities in socially constructed experiences.

Despite gender biases and discriminations in the field, women have conducted significant qualitative research on dress. Alice Fletcher and Francis La Flesche (1911) collect various types of dress worn by the Omaha tribe in North America and demonstrated the significance of each model. Meanwhile, Hilda Kuper (1973) observed Swazi costume and its symbolic social implications. Since 1989 the literature on the anthropology of dress, including the veil and mask, has been written exclusively by women (Eicher 2000, 66). These remarkable developments that have reached out into the unknown and contributed new findings to the field. In focusing in particular on the Middle East region, Shelagh Weir (1989) conducted in-depth fieldwork that engaged Palestinian costume and textiles while Annelies Moors (2000) examined the relations between embroidered Palestinian dress and nationalism by observing images of Maha Saca's postcards. Fadwa El Guindi (1999) and Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood (2008; with Willem Vogelsang 2016) also identified various interpretations of veiling practice.

Yet, until then, anthropological research in the Middle East had been mostly carried out by male researchers, and the only available anthropological records that depicted women's lifestyles and their daily socio-cultural practices had been mostly written by the wives of these male anthropologists. For example, Elizabeth Fernea (1965) who travelled to the South of Iraq after her husband conducted fieldwork there later published her experiences with women in a memoir.[7] Despite her ethnographic contribution, some scholars such as Lewin (2006, 5), criticise such contributions on the grounds that material

[7] For more literature on the work of wives of anthropologists, see Leonardo (1991, 6).

provided by non-academics cannot be interpreted as yielding credible ethnographic data: in other words, it was not included in academic research as a primary source.

It is frequently misunderstood that any study that includes the words 'feminism' or 'feminist' intentionally skews analysis towards women by, for example, seeking to problematise gender discrimination against women. However, this is not an accurate reflection of feminist anthropology. Furthermore, it should also be noted that my intention in adopting a feminist anthropological framework in this research is not to discover how women in the Gulf have been oppressed or mistreated, and nor is it to identify how outsiders can rescue women from discrimination or male-dominated society; rather, it is instead to uncover truth about the face mask's long-lasting cultures and practices. Because the face-mask tradition has been practised and preserved amongst women since the early sixteenth century (Chapter 4), the investigation of women's individual perspectives and uses of the mask, both of which have not been extensively studied in the academic scholarship, may challenge many long-established assumptions about the tradition.

The more I come to appreciate the rich cultures and traditions of women in the Persian Gulf region, the more I become aware of the importance of strengthening women's voices. This has encouraged me to take a feminist anthropologist position to deconstruct women's history; taking into their perceptions and views will enable me to challenge persistent male biases that have become ingrained in the tradition. In addition, my status as a researcher from Japan sets me apart from Western anthropologists and therefore helps me to build different relationships with local women, and this will in turn enable me to contribute new perspectives and findings to the field.

2.2 Self-Ethnography

The identity and social characteristics of a researcher can strongly influence the collection and analysis of data, especially in qualitative research. The impact of these influences can be limited to some extent by fieldworkers, and the identification of the researcher's status and fundamental position can help to minimise confusion arising in relation to the accuracy of collected data (Silverman [1993] 2006, 84-85). In this section, I intend to demonstrate how my own identities—origin, gender, ethnic, and age—had provided impetus for the study and orientated me towards the specific topic being studied. Similarly, my personal experience and events in advance of this study also defined my positionality.

I first encountered masked women when I conducted field research for my Master's thesis (M.A. in Gulf Studies) in Qatar. Some Qatari respondents claimed that the face mask was a disappearing tradition of the Gulf Arab states. It was only later that I found out that the tradition is also practised by elder women in southern Iran, although most of the masked women are over fifty and only speak Arabic or Persian with local accents. As I gained in-depth knowledge about the Gulf's disappearing rituals and customs, I began to realise that many of the perspectives that they shared had been neither documented nor analysed in local or international academic research.

In addition to this paucity of ethnographic work on Gulf women, the face mask also became a focal point of my PhD research for another reason. Specialising in Gulf Studies while living in the Gulf caused me to question my own perspectives of the Gulf. Gulf Studies or research on the Gulf means a study of different aspects of the Persian Gulf which includes politics, economy, religion, society, culture, literature and so forth. However, with regard to regional politics, Gulf Studies has often been examined from the perspective of specialists in the Gulf Arab states and not necessarily from an Iranian

perspective. In addition, being surrounded by and exclusively exchanging opinions with Sunni *Khalījis* meant that my ideas about Iran and Shiite people—which was unconsciously constructed—tended to be negative and biased. This made me think about my attitude towards research and the research subject.

In August 2014, I travelled to Iran by myself and spent around two weeks in big cities such as Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Bandar Abbas. When I visited a littoral area of southern Iran, I was surprised that the architecture, food, clothes, people, rituals, and culture are very similar to historical Gulf countries. After visiting Minab and Hormoz Island and seeing different types of face masks that were both similar to and different from those in Gulf countries, I thought it would be interesting to look at this shared material culture from both sides of the Gulf.

By visiting both littoral of the Persian Gulf, I also became aware of ethical and methodological obstacles that impeded the efforts of both local and foreign researchers to conduct research on women in the Gulf (also see Chapter 1). Local researchers often face social barriers (sectarian, tribal, socio-economic, class, and ethnic differences), and these can easily complicate relations between researchers and respondents. This becomes more problematic when collecting personal and sensitive information, as this requires the building of mutual trust. Even after the data has been collected, its interpretation and analysis will be subject to question because the local researcher's ability to be objective is always called into question. Although local researchers have deep knowledge of shared cultures and the advantage of acquired language skills, ethical considerations always arise when conducting qualitative research in small and conservative communities, such as the ones engaged in this study.

These social barriers are less of a problem for foreign researchers, but there is a significant language barrier and initial difficulties can arise in obtaining permission to interview women. In Gulf society, having a face-to-face conversation with elderly women is particularly challenging as they are often shy or introverted, and may be reluctant to meet and talk with people outside their close kinship groups. For example, when I notified my friends or respondents that I would like to interview their grandmothers, elder aunts, or female relatives, they often assumed that elderly women would not accept this offer or would not want to share their experiences. However, when I visited the women themselves and explained my interests and the purpose of my study, they were usually cooperative and happy to share their thoughts and experiences. In fact, after the interview, their daughters or granddaughters who attended often told me that they had never heard some of the stories that these women shared. These kinds of experiences reconfirm my advantage as a foreign, female researcher, along with my unique position in contributing to the few existing literary sources by adding these women's voices. Yet I need to acknowledge that I am an outsider studying a foreign culture. That is to say, I have to be careful not to fall into the "romanticism" or "tourism" trap of failing to adopt a critical analysis from the viewpoint of a researcher (Silverman [1993] 2006, 6).

Being neither Arab nor Persian, but holding a locally favoured status of being Japanese, certainly provided me with advantages during my field research. Attitudes and perceptions of Japan and Japanese people have been uniquely constructed through the spread of popular culture, technology, and history in both the Gulf Arab states and Iran. For example, since the 1990s, many Japanese animations, such as 'Captain Majid', were introduced to Gulf society and the majority of people in their forties and fifties grew up watching them, and therefore feel a cultural connection with Japan. Japanese anime,

manga, and drama are also remarkably popular amongst young generations in the region.[8] In the case of Iran, *Oshin* (a Japanese girl's name), a famous Japanese serialised drama, was broadcast in Iran in 1983 and became a huge hit. Some Iranian respondents told me that they wanted to name their children after *Oshin*, and there is still a quarter in the local market in Bandar Abbas called *Oshin.*

Perceptions of the Japanese had also been established by the high quality of Japanese products, and many respondents told me that their parents only allowed them to purchase expensive products if they were made in Japan. This trust of Japanese products was transmitted in their perceptions that the Japanese were trustworthy or had advanced technology that they look up to. In addition, rapid Japanese economic development in the aftermath of World War II was often cited as a good example to follow and therefore as eliciting respect. For example, the story was featured in *Khawāṭr*, one of Saudi Arabia's most popular TV programmes, which was broadcast in the Arab world during Ramadan in 2010. The programme also introduced Japanese leading-edge technology, education, and culture, while also providing insight into social morality conducted in public. Some Japanese diplomats in the Gulf region told me that after this TV programme, many *Khalīji* families tried to send their children to Japanese schools in the Gulf Arab states. These socio-cultural and economic relations have uniformly built positive perceptions of the Japanese, and this was a key element in the success of this research.

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[8] *Comic Con*, a three-day-event, introduces upcoming films, animation, and manga, and also enables visitors to cosplay their favourite anime characters, thereby increasing the affection feel towards Japan. The biggest Comic Con festival in the Middle East is annually held in Dubai, and this was the sixth year the festival has been held. This year, it hosted more than 70,000 people (in comparison Saudi Arabic hosted a Comic Con for the first time this February that attracted over 22,000 visitors (http://www.mefcc.com/).

My nationality, however, was not the only factor that enabled me to integrate into the community easily. Gender and other variables of a researcher ultimately affect relationships with one's respondents and the implementation of research. In my case, my status as a young woman also helped me to secure access to an unknown world behind the veil. In the Gulf states and southern Iran, gender segregation applies to both public and private spaces: for example, in a house, guest rooms are strictly separated for women and men with an independent entrance. Male entrance into the women's sphere is culturally and religiously prohibited (although it is easier for women to enter the men's sphere). Talking to the opposite sex outside immediate family members in public is perceived to be an inappropriate and shameful act—so even if a male researcher could interview a local woman, ethical concerns would always arise.

In addition, paying respect to elders is a substantial part of the *Khalīji* culture, and this creates a great sense of distance between generations. I therefore believe that my status as a young Japanese Arabic/Persian-speaker woman helped me create a comfortable atmosphere for respondents, especially young women. At the same time, seeing the attitude of a young foreign woman such as myself, who was enthusiastic to learn about their culture and traditions, inspired many elder women, and, as a consequence, they were very keen to cooperate with my research.

The longer I spent with locals, the more I realised that I was receiving preferential treatment in the society. My nationality, gender, language skills, and age did play a significant role, and, more importantly, the fact that I came from outside the community helped them feel that it was safe to openly talk about their lives. This would not be possible if I was *Khalīji*, because this would then create an awareness of sectarian, socio-

economic, tribal, class, and gender barriers that might threaten them or put them in an uncomfortable position (see also Chapter 3).

I was often invited to visit my friends' families where men and women sat and ate together, and sometimes I occasionally stayed over in their houses for a few days. During the visits, women used to tell me about their marriage lives, work, studies, relationships with families in-law, children, and sometimes even about their sexual encounters or love stories before marriage, which are taboo in the society. In my case, as Silverman ([1993] 2006, 84) has previously discussed, my female gender identity secured privileged access to my research subjects. My age reduced the formality of the research setting and environment and turned out to be an advantage. Although occasional language barriers were encountered during research conversations, these experiences inspired me to study and write about women in the Gulf.

I therefore chose the topic, research focus, and research method by observing my advantage as a Japanese young female researcher and making the best use of my language skills and drawing on a large network of contacts in the region. After initially asking how I could contribute to the existing literature within the field of Gulf Studies, I then analysed myself and the surrounding circumstances. I have a personal interest in the subject along with a deep respect for it. Overall, a study of the female face mask that engaged with littoral areas on both sides of the Persian Gulf was selected to discover the shared material culture and traditional rituals that specifically belong to the women of the region and are disappearing over time.

2.3 Choice of Method

Ethnography is the method of data collection that is used in this study.[9] In being used alongside interviews and participatory observation, an ethnographic work also includes content analysis of secondary sources (Gordon 2016, 4). Levi-Strauss observes that ethnography is:

> "[T]he observation and analysis of human groups considered as individual entities (the groups are often selected, for theoretical and practical reasons unrelated to the nature of the research involved, from those societies that differ most from our own). Ethnography thus aims at recording as accurately as possible the respective modes of life of various groups" (1963, 2).

The purpose of this research is to document and analyse women's perceptions and practices of the face-mask tradition in the Persian Gulf, a subject that has not been gained adequate attention nor been sufficiently engaged by the field of Gulf Studies. Going to the field by myself and living among the communities, which is defined as participation observation, was indeed one of the aims of this research as it is 'attending to mundane detail' (Silverman [1993] 2006, 68). Through ethnographic research, I was able to obtain women's perspectives and also observe their everyday interactions with others and practices, and this provided insight that is often difficult to obtain from interviews.

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[9] The word "ethnography" consists of two separate words—"ethno" and "graph"—which mean "folk" and "writing" (Silverman [1993] 2006, 67). Ethnography is further defined as synonym for fieldwork and participant observation—by using these methods, researchers attempt to spend "long periods watching people, coupled with talking to them about what they are doing, thinking, and saying, designed to see how they understand their world" (Delamont 2004, 218).

A study sample was not restricted only to women in a certain age group; but because masking is practised amongst relatively *old generations*, reflecting *their* views was one of the study's main aims. There are also two substantial reasons why ethnographic research and an interview method were relevant to this specific study. First, the respondents tend to live in rural areas, and their sphere of activity was inevitably limited to a smaller range. Most of them did not have access to the internet, and some were also illiterate; as a result, the research required face-to-face interviews at site.

Second, the face mask is a living tradition that cannot be fully understood only by words or numbers, the focus of quantitative research. Indeed, the observation of the way in which the face mask is adopted, used, and performed in a ritual in the studied communities was another vital aspect of this research. This involved geographical, religious, cultural, ethnic, and tribal consideration of the place/s where the research was conducted. For this reason, ethnographic research and the face-to-face interview method were considered to be best-suited to this study.

For the interviews, I used semi-structured interviews in order to easily start off conversations and standardise data I intended to collect, and this format also allowed respondents to talk openly. However, as I usually spent a longer period of time with respondents, interviews tended to be less structured in any—it was, sometimes the case that I gained relevant information outside formal or semiformal interview settings, such as during meals and short conversations in the kitchen or when shopping.

2.4 Preliminary Research

Preliminary field research included familiarising myself with culture and manner, extending personal contacts, building entrée and rapport with promising participants, and organising logistic arrangements—these formal and informal activities took place in all Gulf Arab states and Iran between 2010 and 2016. I believed 'going back' to the field and building a sense of familiarity with people that I study was important as it would help to guarantee the accuracy and quality of data. In addition, prior to undertaking the full-scale fieldwork, I conducted pilot interviews in the UAE and Qatar in March and April 2016.

2.5 Choice of the Sample Areas—the Comparative Approach

In conducting my literature review, I identified that the face-mask tradition has been practised in a wider region, including the eastern part of Tanzania, Zanzibar, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Failaka Island of Kuwait, and the coastal areas of southern Iran. However, as women in some of these places have stopped wearing the mask, I sought to identify places where the face-mask tradition is still practised. For example, there have been no inhabitants on Failaka Island after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and women have also stopped wearing the mask in East Africa. Political and security issues also arose in Yemen and Saudi Arabia during my initial fieldwork period. Accordingly, my initial plan for the geographic locations for sampling included Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman, and Iran. Within these sampling locations, I identified who and where the face mask has been used in order to obtain a general idea of the distributions of the face-mask tradition and its symbolic characteristics, including the representation of ethnic, sectarian, tribal, socio-economic, or geographical groups. I therefore conducted field research in the coastal areas between Bushehr and Guater in

Iran, between Sohar and Salalah as well as Musandam region in Oman, and main cities in the UAE and Qatar (see Appendices 1, 2, 3, and 4 for the list of fieldwork places).

However, as time went by and I completed the fieldwork in Iran and some parts of the UAE, Oman, and Qatar, I realised that there was a great range of diverse meanings and functions of the face mask in the Persian Gulf region, and also noted that historical and socio-political backgrounds had greatly contributed to these differences.

Considering the purpose of a doctoral thesis, which is to pursue and analyse the studied subject deeply within the given time period (three years), I decided to take a comparative approach and focus on two areas as case studies, specifically the southern Iranian coast and the eastern Arabian Peninsula. Results drawn from these sampling areas were not entirely generalisable as a result of various cultural and social differences in these regions. I drew on the insight that sampling is "the process of selecting a few (a sample) from a bigger group (the sampling population) to become the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group" (Kumar 2011, 193). This helped me to understand that a comparative study between each area of the Gulf littoral would provide understandings beyond interpretations limited by national paradigms.

While many of the previous studies have examined the face-mask tradition based on small-scale samplings or within a specific community of a country, the impact of social connectivity across the Persian Gulf on the mask tradition has not been closely studied. The Persian Gulf has been perceived as a body of water or physical as well as socio-politically constructed space separating the littoral communities or regions. However, an in-depth comparative study based on multi-sited ethnographic research enables me to not

only investigate the diversity and complexity of the face-mask tradition being distinctive to each individual community, but also highlight the commonalities and connectivity of the tradition across the Gulf. It is hoped that shedding light on aspects which previous research has not fully explored, including the changes in the products over a period of time, agencies involved in the act of (un)masking, and the impact of the state attitudes towards the mask tradition, will further offer new perspectives and questions relevant for the field of Gulf Studies.

The UAE and Qeshm Island of Iran were selected as the case studies for this research project on the basis of three considerations, specifically: 1) the richness of the data derived from the number of women wearing the face mask; 2) varieties of material characteristics; and 3) generational changes relating to the face-mask tradition. However, it should also be recognised that the UAE and Qeshm Island have been closely connected on a multitude of levels, including migration and the exchange of goods and services, with these being attributable to different government policies and the 'modernisation' process. Upon this basis, I observed that both would provide good case studies to compare the impact of the different government attitudes on the face-mask tradition. The analysis and discussion of this thesis are therefore mainly based on ethnographic data collected from the UAE and Iran's Qeshm Island.

2.6 Data Collection

With regard to data collection, the study population for this research was women in the Persian Gulf, who were engaged with the intention of fully understanding the symbolic meanings and functions of the mask in the local context. The main intention of engaging women who have experienced masking as samples of this study was to explore their

voices and experiences, and to thereby gain precise information relating to mask materials, the mask-making process, associated rituals and beliefs, and agency around (un)masking.

I spent a total of fourteen months in both littoral of the Persian Gulf. I was based in Iran between April-December 2016; in the UAE between March-April 2016, February-April 2017, and February-March 2018; in Qatar during April 2016; and in Oman between March-April 2016 and February-March 2017. During the fieldwork, I mostly stayed with local families and travelled to neighbouring villages or towns for interviews. I also attended socio-cultural events such as local weddings and family gatherings, as well as religious rituals such as a theatrical performance during *ʿĀshūrā'* (Chapter 3).

Most of the sample was selected based on non-probability sampling which includes both judgement and snowball sampling (Kumar 2011, 206). However, in places where there was no previous information about whether women wore the mask, or I could not find any gatekeepers, I then went to these places, mostly villages, and knocked on the doors of houses to gain respondents.

The number of female participants interviewed was between two and ten in each town or city of the littoral area of Iran, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman (a list of fieldwork places is provided in Appendices 1, 2, 3, and 4). However, participants or respondents were not strictly limited to the sample size as extending the variation of a studied sample helped me to identify important cause-and-effect and incorporate much more diverse perspectives. Nevertheless, I conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions with a total of 61 women (36 of whom had experienced masking) on Qeshm Island, and 71 women (30 of whom had experienced masking) in the UAE. While I use an allocated number for the respondent when citing the interview conversation in

the text, the details of the interviews conducted on Qeshm Island and the UAE, including the brief description of the respondent, the interview location, and the date, are all listed in Appendix 9. Although a total of more than 280 women were interviewed for this research, I undertook an in-depth analysis of data obtained from the UAE and Qeshm Island for the purpose of this thesis.

I usually started off interviews by introducing myself, the research topic, and information on consent and confidentiality. As part of my research was *to document* the surviving material culture, I also attempted to record or videotaped the interviews either by using a private high-quality voice recorder or camera (although this was subject to the respondents' permission); otherwise I took field notes during the interviews, and subsequently transcribed. I also photographed the face masks of the respondents—with or without the wearer, and, if possible, I purchased masks from the respondents who were local seamstresses. As a result, I have collected more than 300 masks from the field, most of which were either gifted by the local women or purchased by me.

Most of the interviews were conducted informally between me and an individual respondent. Yet, as most of them took place in their houses, other family members, especially daughters, were around and less occasionally male family members would enter the room to greet me. As interviews usually took more than two hours, meals, small snacks, and drinks were served and sometimes the respondents took a short nap between interviews. Interviews were conducted in Arabic, Persian, or English without the help of local translators. This was also the case where other languages, such as Balochi and Laraki (Kumzari) were used, as interviewees could also speak Persian. However, on occasions when communication difficulties arose, I sought help in translation with the intention of avoiding any misunderstanding or oversight. For example, when I

interviewed an old woman in Minab of Iran, she spoke only Minabi, which is a dialect spoken amongst people of Minab. Although we had conversations in Persian, I sought to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. I therefore asked my friend who organised and attended the interview to translate the recorded responses, and these were then later transcribed by me.

I also went back to some of the respondents for clarification of certain points or to request additional information, and this was done by either visiting them or contacting them through social media. When the respondents themselves were not able to communicate with me, I asked their daughters to ask questions instead. As I spent extensive periods with some respondents by being hosted or visiting them weekly, they treated me as their daughter, sister, or friend. In order to protect the respondents, I chose to anonymise their names by adopting pseudonyms unless they requested their names to be cited (as was, for example, the case with Zīnat from Salakh village on Qeshm Island).

With regard to secondary data analysis, I used descriptions of exhibition and historical backgrounds provided by government and private museums as well as cultural centres in the studied cities. A range of other sources, including popular books by local authors, local newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, posters, advertisements, children books, and circulated images on social media, were all analysed and discussed alongside the primary sources.

2.7 Ethics

The protection of participants' identity and privacy are the first priority in research. Consent from participants is especially important when photographing and recording are involved and should be obtained before beginning an observation or interview. In recognising the unfamiliarity and anxiety of participants with regard to academic research and ethical issues, I always began with a brief description of my research and myself. I often I explained my research and ethical concerns not only to participants or respondents, but also to their families. This was to make sure that participants or respondents fully understood their rights and the purpose of the research. It also ensured that, if they had any later concerns, both they and their family members would be able to contact me.

I prepared an informed consent form, which was written in Arabic, Persian, and English, and which was also reviewed by the University's Institutional Review Board (See the consent forms in Appendices 5, 6, and 7). However, I decided to take oral consent as for many of my respondents the signing of an official consent form made them feel uncomfortable or suspicious, and might even, in certain political situations, induce feelings of terror and a fear of harm (Thorne 2004, 160). Although some interviewees gave me permission to photograph their masked faces, I informed them that I would use pseudonyms when referring to the information given in the interviews. This would help them to feel more comfortable when talking about personal experiences and views. In addition, because the research engaged participants over the age of eighteen, there was no need to take the requirements of under-age participants into account.

Chapter 3: Visiting the Fields: Communities and People of Qeshm Island and the UAE

"[A] collection of photographs of men does not reflect the history of the country because it excludes women."

An Emirati student from Zayed University who was part of the book project later published as *Lest We Forget: Emirati Family Photographs 1950-1999* (Almutawa 2014).

Introduction

The communities in which I conducted field research have been often described by numbers and statistics which fail to grasp the living conditions and daily interactions. In addition, very little ethnographic research has been done while living with the local populations, particularly women, both on Qeshm Island and in the UAE. However, as the relationships between the face mask and women, which my research focuses on, are largely influenced and shaped by these social circumstances, it is important to shed light on the lived experiences of the people I encountered during the research. As an ethnographer who was fortunate to be welcomed to these communities and live with local families, this chapter also illustrates my fieldwork experience and the relationships between me as a researcher and the people who so kindly and generously contributed to my work. This chapter is broadly divided into two sections: the cases of Qeshm Island and the UAE—both contribute to the significant contextual information relating to complex societies that indirectly informs the nuanced use of clothing and adornment, including the face mask.

3.1 The Case of Qeshm Island

3.1.1 Geographical Background

I sat and watched women wrapped from head to knee in colourful floral printed fabric along with vivid coloured traditional trousers embellished in the handwoven stripes around the bottom of their legs. Men with Western T-shirts and jeans showing off their naturally or gymnastically built arm muscles also passed by me. They were going in all directions—some talking on the phone, some screaming things in different dialects, some guiding people and cars to anchored ferries, and some drivers honking at each other to move on. They all bewilderingly appeared in the dark, only lit by several high-powered orange lights installed on the top of simple concrete buildings and a few lampposts.

After leaving my Iranian brother Shaya, who was more concerned about my safety for the coming trip and hesitated to leave me alone at the port at night, I was excited to set foot on Qeshm, the historical island. However, at the same time I was worried about finding a method of transportation to a village where I was supposed to stay for a few days. All these thoughts and urgent plans occupied my mind while I was overlooking lights on the island from Bandar Pol, a port on Iran's mainland. I asked a group of men standing idly on the wharf which ferry would leave first for the island, and they pointed me towards one ferry which was taking cars in, and had passengers-to-be in front of it, waiting for instructions from the staff on the quay. After cramming as many cars as possible into the ferry, the waiting passengers, including me, were allowed to occupy the narrow spaces between the cars. The ferry started moving. It was already dark, but it was not difficult to estimate the short distance to the island as I could spot some lights from its port.

Qeshm Island, which is the largest Iranian island in the Persian Gulf, stretches out across the Strait of Hormuz, the most important oil transit point through which around 30% of the world's seaborne-traded crude oil passes every year (U.S. Energy information Administration, 2017). The shape of the island is said to be similar to that of a dolphin: the length from west to east is over 120 kilometres, and the distance from its north to south is around 35 kilometres (Anonby 2015, 172) (Fig. 3.1). It consists of three cities and fifty-seven villages, which accommodate approximately 120,000 inhabitants (UNESCO 2017), and the greatest population density is concentrated in Qeshm City and Dargahan. The island's historical importance is clearly evidenced in its colonial history: since the fifteenth century, Portuguese, English, Dutch, and Arabs have occupied the island and exerted a great influence on the inhabitants' lives and cultures. Today, its topographical uniqueness, ease of access, and special area as a trade and industrial free zone attracts tourists, especially Iranians from the mainland (Parsa and Keivani 2002, 196-97).

(Fig. 3.1) Map of Qeshm Island. Retrieved from Goole Maps.

The ferry trip did not take more than thirty minutes, but before the arrival I needed to find

someone trustworthy to help me find a means of transportation to the village of Bandar-e-Doulab for me. All the passengers seemed to be local, and from the very beginning they were staring at me and observing my behaviour. I approached a lady in local dress holding the hand of her small daughter, and expressed my concern about finding a way to the village. Once the ferry reached the port of Qeshm Island, and the ferry ramp was lowered to the quay, the lady asked me to follow her. When we got close to a local taxi station, she told me to wait behind a wall. She smiled and explained that taxi drivers would charge a lot more if they saw a foreign woman alone. From a distance, I watched her enter the middle of a group of wildly gesturing men and negotiate a taxi ride for me. Her explanation had definitely been correct.

During the taxi journey, darkness settled over the island. Soft gleams of light were the only guidepost informing passing travellers of the existence of small villages. My sleepy eyes could only detect the faint outlines of flare stacks in the distance. For good or bad, the typical loud Bandari music was off and the driver was uncommonly quiet. Being alone with a male private taxi driver made me imagine the worst scenarios, however travel fatigue emerged, and I could not fight off the drowsiness and in the end I closed my eyes.

3.1.2 Political and Economic Background

Most of the attractions and shopping centres are located in Qeshm City, in the eastern part of the island, however if one goes a short distance from the city, dried land and rocky mountains stretch as far as the eye can see (Figs. 3.2, 3.3). Many Iranians from other cities migrated to the island in search of better work opportunities and mainly settled around Qeshm City. There are also a small number of foreign workers, including Afghans, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. The inhabitants of Qeshm Island were historically Sunnis,

and most of the migrants are Shiites. Qeshm City was ‘Shiitenised’ or ‘nationalised’ by the Shiite government of Iran—this was achieved by building a huge Shiite mosque and changing the names of streets and roundabouts, which were then given Persian names or those of renowned Iranians such as ‘Imam Khomeini’. Although the island became part of Iran during the Safavid era, this Shiitenisation is relatively new as the government’s active engagement with community development only began in the 1990s. This included the establishment of an infrastructure and tax-free zone when neighbouring Gulf Arab countries began to be actively involved in the trade and export of oil and gas. This made an important contribution to their economic development. Increasing political and sectarian tension in the region in recent years have resulted in it acquiring greater strategic importance.

(Fig. 3.2) Inside a shopping mall in Qeshm City. There are many imported goods from Dubai. Photo taken July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.3) A road on Qeshm Island. There were traffic lights except in Qeshm City itself, and empty roads, such as this one, connect remote villages. Photo taken in October 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

Locals are mostly employed in fishing, trading, the building of traditional wooden ship (*Lenj*) building and ecotourism (Figs. 3.4, 3.5). Since UNESCO launched a GeoPark on the island in 2010, which is the first time this occurred in the Middle East, some local and international organisations began projects with the intention of preserving traditional cultures and customs. One ongoing project focused on sustainable development is supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and this has meant that some officials and locals have become fairly familiar with the Japanese people.

(Fig. 3.4) Building a traditional wooden ship (*Lenj*) near Laft village. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.5) Chahkuh Gorge Geosite, located in the northwest part of the island near West Chahu Village. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

Despite the island's geographical importance, local people face economic difficulties. According to JICA's official report[10], the average monthly income per local household is roughly $310 (USD) and the unemployment rate is 13%. This is higher than anywhere in Iran, according to 2008 World Bank figures, which estimated the upper rate of unemployment in the country to be 10%.[11] Large Qeshmi families (which have an average of five or six members) further exacerbate these negative impacts. Many respondents expressed the view that this was attributable to the fact that the island's inhabitants belong neither to the Shiite branch of Islam and nor are they ethnically Persian, with these two groups holding most of the governing positions in the country. Respondents further highlighted this as being a factor in the underdevelopment of infrastructure such as roads, medical services, and good quality education. They also linked this with unfair treatment in both the public and private sectors.[12] Most locals confirmed that their issues led to unstable living conditions and expressed concern about their children's future. As a consequence, those who live in the coastal areas of southern Iran rely on neighbouring countries with shared ethnic and religious commonalities.

Many Qeshmis have experience of working in the Gulf Arab countries and some have families there. One of the unstated sources of income is smuggling, which sometimes involves transporting drugs and people to the UAE or Oman, and importing alcohol and products unavailable in Iran. Since it takes approximately two hours and a half to get to

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[10] https://www.jica.go.jp/project/iran/003/outline/index.html
[11] Though JICA's official report referred to the 2008 World Bank figures for the Iran's employment rate, the 2017 International Labour Organization analysis states it as 12.1% (International Labour Organization 2019).
[12] Some of the local stories that described the everyday lives of Qeshmi people, including the economic difficulties they experienced, were featured in the western media (Brett 2014; Tehran Bureau Correspondent 2015).

the opposite side of the Persian Gulf by speed boat, this has been increasingly common amongst people in the coastal areas of southern Iran (Yassavoli 1993, 131). Many smugglers have been arrested and jailed for several years. Particularly over the last few years the Oman and UAE coastguard have become stricter and the risks have increased. As a result, many of the smugglers are now former smugglers.

During my fieldwork in southern Iran, I was based in Bandar Abbas, and I would take a ferry from the port, which operated from the port of Qeshm City every thirty minutes on a daily basis except when the sea was rough (Fig. 3.6). As I was taking the ferry almost every week and sometimes a few times a week, ticket officers and ferry staff became very familiar with me and we often chatted about the weather and my plans for that visit to the island. The ferry is not gender segregated but as the company wants to fill all the seats, the staff would arrange the passengers based on gender preference. Available transportation on the island is either by shared or private taxi. Going to towns like Dargahan and Ramkan, is relatively easy using shared taxies but travel to many villages is often only possible via private taxi. There are two main roads that link the city to the rest of the places on the island: one is more industrialised and leads to Dargahan, while the other is a quiet coastal road that leads to Suza. When traveling on the latter, I saw sand dunes on the right and recalled the conversations with my friends who had told me how these dunes were cultivated, leaving no space for the wild rabbits and gazelles that used to be there (Fig. 3.7). Across the sea, I could also see the tallest mountain on Larak Island where Larakis collect natural mountain honey and believe that *jins*, described as 'a mythical race of supernatural creatures', still live.

(Fig. 3.6) The Bandar Abbas port where daily ferries run between Bandar Abbas and Qeshm Island. Photo taken in August 2014. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.7) Sand dunes near Qeshm City, which have shrunk due to the expansion of the city. Photo taken in October 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

Qeshm Island has several unique faces. Ochre and greyish ranging limestone-made mountains frame the world's longest salt cave, the largest Mangrove forest in the Middle East, several valleys and a semi-high plateau, which have all attracted rare species such as Indo-Pacific dolphins, Hawksbill sea turtles, great egrets, western reef herons, Dalmatian pelicans and flamingos (Fig. 3.8). The man-made landscape is also fascinating. There are traditional squire houses with wind catchers (*badgīr*), and on the roads, the local men in their off-white long dress, *thaub* or *lebāse Omani*, transport their women, dressed in colourful chador and wearing *shirwal*, on motorbike. Local taxi drivers were usually hesitant to turn on the Qeshmi music when they took customers. However, after becoming aware of the purpose of my stay and seeing my physical reaction to the music, they would play it at full volume and start singing while we both danced in the car. Qeshmis speak their own dialect which is identified as 'Keshmi'—this is part of a southwestern Iranian dialect close to Bandari (Anonby 2015, 186).

(Fig. 3.8) The Salakh Anticline just behind Salakh village. Photo taken in October 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

On the island, I usually stayed in my friends' houses in Qeshm City, Bandar-e-Doulab, or Salakh village. From there, I would visit other villages to conduct interviews which would often end with a family meal. In summer, the temperatures usually exceeded 40^0 C and humid air from the Persian Gulf made people feel even hotter. In order to survive in this frequently intolerable heat and humidity, daily activities usually took place prior to 7 am and after 5 pm (Fig. 3.9). When I conducted my short-fieldwork in July, contrary to my plan and despite my excited anticipation, my local friends advised me to "take it easy" and sleep until the late afternoon by convincing me that nobody would be outside, especially in the afternoon when most of the shops were closed, and the entire village seemed abandoned. The inhabitants seemed to believe that global warming was affecting their lives. Many could recall sitting under the wind catcher (*badgīr*) which operated as a natural air conditioner and was sufficient to cool them (Fig. 3.10). However, more recent weather changes have made life unbearable without several air conditioners in a house. Due to the difficult climate, the number of visitors to the island usually declines in summer and tourist income declines in due proportion. The weather conditions also affect local celebrations such as weddings and public rituals, and they tend to take place during winter except for some fixed-date holidays and religious events including Ramadan and *ʿĀshūrā*[13].

[13] *ʿĀshūrā* marks the death anniversary of Husain ibn Ali who is the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed. It is important day, especially for Shiite Muslims who participate in special ceremonies and rituals to remember the event.

(Fig. 3.9) The centre of Tabl village on a summer afternoon. All the shops were closed and only a few people were outside. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.10) Traditional houses with wind catchers in Laft village. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

Since people's lives rely heavily on tourism during a limited time of the year, many locals—particularly in villages where tourist attractions are located, like Borke Khalaf, Laft, Tabl, Salakh, and Shibderaz—have interacted and became familiar with foreign visitors and tourists. Women in those villages also sell their handicrafts, such as a well-known embroidery called *Golabatoon Doozi*, which are a very important source of income for Qeshmi families. For that reason, visitors and tourists are often perceived as a direct source of income, and their attitude towards these visitors has changed from simply welcoming 'guests' to a more mercantile relationship. When I visited the villages that closely engaged with tourism, the women seemed familiar with being interviewed and photographed, however they also expected me to purchase their products in return. In comparison, in either geographically distant or non-touristy villages, women hesitated to talk to me or be interviewed at the beginning, however after a while they would easily welcome me inside their home and were eager to show me their traditional dress and manufacturing tools, which allowed me to ask more questions in a less restrained environment; this made for more interesting conversations than I had held with the more extrinsically motivated women in other villages.

3.1.3 People and Society

Today, people on the island recognise themselves as Qeshmis who are ethnically different from Arabs; however, Lorimer ([1908] 1915, 1550) states that the inhabitants—who number18,500—are all Arabs who speak Arabic, with the exception of those descended from a small number of Persians who arrived in 1908. Anonby's respondents suggest that Qeshmis are mixture of migrants from the mainland including people from Lar, Minab, and Bastak, with European and Indian influence also being evidenced (2015, 174)—this

however is still debatable. I do agree that the native inhabitants of the island do not purely emerge from one ethnic origin because many traders and migrants had worked together in the past. When I was on the island, locals told me that blue eyes are the evidence of European influence; in the Paiposht village, girls are well-known for their beautiful greenish or bluish eyes that are said to be of Portuguese descent.

Throughout my fieldwork, I did not encounter anyone who explicitly claimed that they were Arab. However, when I asked interviewees if they were Arab, they were not offended, as Persians usually are. However, they always emphasised that they were Qeshmis, which was referred to as an ethnicity distinct from either Arab or Persian. This was also reflected in their language. While Arab-Iranians in the coastal areas, such as Kish Island, Bandar Charak, and Bandar Kong, expressed their Arab ethnicity and sometimes even preferred to speak with me in Arabic, elder Qeshmis who spoke Gulf Arabic told me that they had spent their childhoods, or had worked, in the Arab Gulf countries and had learnt Arabic then. Since they are not Arab, their children do not speak Arabic. Anonby (2015, 176) affirms that while Qeshmis have, as a result of the educational system and media, a strong religious and cultural attachment to the Arabic and Bandari language, younger generations tend to speak a dialect much closer to Persian.

Qeshmis, however, have much in common with the countries of the eastern Arabian Peninsula, and this is reflected both in the wearing of male and female dress and in its nomenclature. Today many young men wear western casual dress, and at offices in Qeshm City the men wear suits while older generations in villages still wear a white long one-piece shirt, *thaub* or *lebāse Omani*, and turban (Fig. 3.11). Meanwhile, women (mostly non-Qeshmi) who work in governmental or private offices wear a uniform-like attire—a simple dark coloured *manto*, black long pants, and a black fixed *ḥijāb*. Local

women continue to wear traditional dress; however, its fabric and material have shifted to become much cheaper and comfortable. For instance, older local women still wear a *kandūra*, a knee-length one piece with ornate stitching, and embroidered pants, *shirwal*, underneath (Fig. 3.12). Previously, women used real gold or silver threads to decorate their dress—thus, their old dresses are comparatively heavy and require extra care when washing. On the other hand, young Qeshmi women in villages also wear a *kandūra*, but now it is made of breathable cloth and some patterns are already either printed or machine-sewed. Many local women also wrap a long rectangular one-piece fabric, *Chador Bandari*, around themselves when going out and leggings are often replaced by traditional *shirwal*s for daily use.

(Fig. 3.11) A Qeshmi man shopping for food in Qeshm City. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.12) An elderly woman sitting outside her house in Daraku village. Photo taken in December 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

Music is also a very important part of Qeshmi society and in any ceremonial events there would be a band performance with local musical instruments. They would predominantly play either Qeshmi or Bandari music and also some *Khalīji* (Gulf Arab) music. Local drivers often have their favourite Qeshmi or Bandari songs in their own USB to listen to in the car. Dancing style is one custom that is peculiar to Qeshm Island and Bandar Abbas. Dancers extend their arms to either side and shake their shoulders and move around to the accompaniment of music. The genders are usually separate during public ceremonies, but the same dance forms are used. Some people told me that the dance style came from East Africa and had been adapted to the local culture.

Food is one aspect that is similar to the Gulf countries. Because many are employed in

fishing, a regular main meal consists of rice and seafood—fish, and sometimes prawns and clams—which is served in stew or kabab style (Fig. 3.13). Meals are usually prepared by women, but men also participate in setting the table. Firstly, they spread a plastic sheet on the ground and put main dishes in big plates in the middle. Then family members sit around on the sheet and select their portion from small plates to eat. People used to directly eat from the big plate(s) with the right hand, and this custom is still practised by elderly men. However, today many people place their own small plate in front of them and use a fork and spoon. Soft drinks like Pepsi and Miranda are regularly served along with jugs of cold water. After a meal, black tea is often served with sugar, but in the morning, they tend to prepare tea with milk. One of the distinct dishes in the Gulf region is a *ragag*, a thin crispy bread, that is often coated with *mahyawa*, a salty anchovy sauce. In southern Iranian communities also use *surag*, another type of fish sauce, which is rarely seen in the Gulf Arab states.

(Fig. 3.13) Lunch prepared by a local woman in Shib Deraz village. The lunch consisted of roasted fishes, rice, vegetables cooked with tomato sauce, and dates. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

Nearby Qeshm Island, there are three closely-related Iranian islands—Hormoz, Larak and Hengam Islands, which have similar cultures and customs and limited foreign influence (Qeshm Free Area Tourism 2016). Hengam Island has the strongest connection to Qeshm Island because of its close geographical proximity. In the past, Hengam Island had 700 Arabic-speaking inhabitants (Najmabadi 1988, 69; Anonby 2015, 175). Some locals from Shib Deraz, the nearest village on Qeshm Island, claimed that all the native inhabitants of Hengam Island migrated to the UAE around 40 years ago. After this event, people from Minab moved to the island and resettled there. Hengam Island is also known as 'Dolphin Island' because groups of Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins inhabit the seas around it, and dolphin-watching tours are organised as part of Qeshm Island's tourism. Though geographically Hengam Island is a separate island, it is generally treated as part of Qeshm Island.

3.2 The Case of the United Arab Emirates

3.2.1 Climate and Geographical Background

I could not help hearing the male Asian migrant workers sitting on trolleys and chatting with each other when I busied myself pushing my own baggage trolley to the exit while taking off my warm winter coat. Stepping out the exit of the Dubai International Airport and making my way to the rental car parking did not excite me but instead made me nervous. Though I had been there many times, I always had someone to drive for me; however, this time I was the only driver. It was only a Sri Lankan man who spoke Japanese and kindly arranged a relatively new SUV car that made me feel a little better.

I set up a destination to Ajman on Google Maps while texting my Emirati friend that I was on my way. Warm wind from open windows and the mild morning sunlight of the Gulf welcomed me, but my mind was already preoccupied with careful driving.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which was previously known as the Trucial States, gained its independence from the British in 1971. It covers an area of 71,023 square kilometres, a size that means it is comparable to Austria, and forms a constitutional federation of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah (Fenelon 1976, 1; Government.ae 2018b) (see the map in Fig. 3.14).

The UAE, which is located in the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, shares land borders with Oman to the north and east, which extend for approximately 450 kilometres; meanwhile its land border with Saudi Arabia on the south extends for approximately 530 kilometres. It faces Qatar to the southwest and Iran to the north, which is separated from the UAE by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. The UAE also borders the strategically important Strait of Hormoz, through which 90 percent of all Persian Gulf crude oil has to transit in order to reach the Indian Ocean (Talmadge 2008, 82). While Abu Dhabi is the UAE's capital, Dubai has continued to be its main trading centre and tourist attraction. The population is intensively concentrated in Abu Dhabi, which accounts for 84 percent of the nation's land, Dubai, and Sharjah, and most governmental institutions and workplaces are located in these cities (Peck 1986, 19). The official religion is Islam and a majority of the citizens are Sunni Muslims, although other religions are allowed to practise (McCoy 2008, 75; Government.ae 2018b).

(Fig. 3.14) Map of the United Arab Emirates (Nations Online Project 2018).[14]

I took the Sheikh Zayed Road that leads north, to the northern Emirates, leaving behind the elaborately designed giant shopping malls and the traditional port area of Deira in Dubai. I then passed between rows of pale-orange-coloured residential apartments in Sharjah, the UAE's commuting town, which led to Ajman, where I had been invited to stay.

I eventually arrived at an ochre house in the middle of a residential area, which was located along with other huge houses just beside the main road. Faraḥ waited for me behind the entrance door of the house as she had just got out of the bed and had not

[14] https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/united_arab_emirates_map.htm

bothered to cover her hair. She hugged me in her pyjamas and showed me into her younger sister's room upstairs, who was married and had left the house. Once I had settled in, we sat on a small sofa in the room and I told Faraḥ that I was fine with finding a hotel if her family felt uncomfortable about having me in the house where her unmarried brothers still lived. She said it was not the first time that she had hosted foreigners in her house but since none of the former guests spoke Arabic, her family, especially her parents, rarely interacted with them. I left the matter for a while as it would depend on her family's reaction to the idea of accommodating me. What struck me was that she mentioned that her grandparents are originally from Qeshm Island and had moved to the Emirates before its independence. This news excited me as a person who had stayed on Qeshm Island as a researcher investigating material culture and people's lives.

Our loud voices were heard outside the half-opened door of my room and attracted her father's curiosity. Arabic greetings and jokes were exchanged, and he said he was looking forward to having lunch with me later. Soon enough, Faraḥ's mother, dressed in her light pink one-piece *jilābīyya*, caught sight of us and short Arabic greetings were also exchanged. The mother covered her face with hands and expressed her embarrassment at me seeing her in her sleepwear and without makeup. Faraḥ and I convinced her that it was not a problem as I would be part of her family.

Later, over lunch, I saw other family members, and Faraḥ told them that I had visited different parts of southern Iran including Qeshm Island. The father—a retired schoolteacher—asked me many questions that related to my research and perspectives of the Gulf community. I struggled to answer these questions in Arabic as I had not spoken Arabic for almost a year. Meanwhile, her mother seemed unfamiliar with the nature of my research, but when she saw a pile of photographs of Qeshmi women with their face

masks, she told me that we could go to her mother's house that night and interview both her mother and aunt who wear the face mask.

My visit to Faraḥ's maternal grandparents' house was overwhelming. Our plan to visit the house was previously spread through the family group chat on WhatsApp and my desire to eat traditional local breads (locally called *raghāgh)* and with homemade fish sauces (*mahiyāwa* and *mālaḥ* (*sūrāgh*)) had been widely circulated and they planned to make it for dinner (Figs. 3.15, 3.16). I was invited to the living room where family members usually gathered and ate. The grandparents and uncles started testing me to see if I could name some of the villages of Qeshm Island as they wanted to be sure about my knowledge of the island. After I recalled 10 or 11 village names and described their geographical locations and provided short historical backgrounds, the grandfather spoke to me in Persian. Other members of the family stood around and listened to our conversations carefully without understanding. Instead, they began conversations in *ʿAjami* [15] and Arabic. The interrogation ended when the grandfather criticised his children's and grandchildren's lack of Persian language skills. The grandparents asked Faraḥ's mother how long I would be staying at her house and told her to bring me over again at the weekend when all the relatives would gather together. It was not only indirect permission for Faraḥ's family to host me for a month, but it was also a clear acknowledgement that I was being accepted into the innermost family circle.

[15] *ʿAjami* (*Achomī* or *Lārisutānī*) is a language spoken by people in southern Iran. It is particularly prominent in Fars Province as well as among immigrants who originated in the area.

(Fig. 3.15) *Raghāgh*, a local bread, with *mālaḥ* (*sūrāgh*), a red fish sauce, on top of it. Photo taken in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.16) Sauces for *raghāgh*: a red fish sauce, *mālaḥ* (*sūrāgh*) on the left; a brown fish sauce, *mahiyāwa*, on the right; and melted butter below. Photo taken in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

The months that I stayed—February and March—are considered to be the best months of the year. From April onwards, the weather usually gets hotter and humid, and this results in high temperatures ranging between 38˚C and 50˚C during the day, which often last until October. In the winter season, people prefer to gather and sit outside. In their private space they would arrange tables and chairs or put out a rush mat in the garden and gather to have barbecue or drink tea or coffee. In the public space, they would go to open-air cafés to smoke *shīsha* or walk along the corniche. In rural areas such as Ras al-Khaimah or Fujairah, old men would frequently gather in front of mosques and old women would congregate in front of houses. The lifestyles of the local people also differ in accordance with the geographical area and their economic condition. These areas can be divided into four geographical regions, specifically the coast, desert, upland plain, and mountain.

The coastal areas, where most of the population live, have been influenced by various cultures and people from outside the country (Fig. 3.17). For example, in Deira, the historical trading port of Dubai, Iranian and Indian influence is indicated in the architecture (including wind-towers), place-names (such as *Bastakiya*), languages, and goods carried by trading ships, with element attesting to a multicultural society (Figs. 3.18, 3.19, 3.20). The close connection between the sea and the people is also reflected on the dining table. Seafood, mainly fish, is the most favoured food amongst people in the coastal area (Fig. 3.21). When cooking *machibūs*—one of the most popular rice dishes of the Emirates—local people serve it with fish or prawn, while Bedouins often prefer meat such as lamb, chicken or camel.

(Fig. 3.17) A coastal road in Ras al-Khaimah. Photo taken in February 2014. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.18) Renovated wind-towers, *bādgīr* (singular), in Deira, Dubai. Photo taken in February 2015. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.19) Trading ships importing goods to Deira, Dubai. Photo taken in February 2014. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.20) Inside a trading ship. Traders from India, Pakistan, and Iran spend weeks or months aboard. Photo taken in February 2014. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.21) Friday lunch at Al Dhaid. The main dish was biriyani with kingfish. Photo taken in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

The western part of the UAE, most of which is under the rule of Abu Dhabi, is a desert area that is known as Rub al-Khali (the Empty Quarter) (Fenelon 1976, 4). There are other minor deserts, and the colour of each one differs. However, the colour and scale of Rub al-Khali, the desert of the inner part of the UAE, is incomparable; if one takes a road to Al Ain or the deeper southwest, an immense field of golden brown-coloured dunes extends over the horizon, and wind-blown sands make the entire area look like a sea of waves (Fig. 3.22). The climate of the desert area is very dry, but people have maintained their lives by drawing water from oases and wells. Al Ain, where the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founder of the UAE, spent most of his life, has its own underground irrigation system, and this supports the agriculture and the growing of date

palms in particular (Fig. 3.23). One of the research participants (116) told me that many *burquʿ* factories are located in Al Ain because its dry climate helps the fabric colour stay longer (see Chapter 5).

(Fig. 3.22) A desert besides the road to Al Ain. Photo taken in August 2010. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.23) Plantation of date palms in Al Ain. Balochi and Pakistani workers were taking care of the place while living nearby. Photo taken in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

Upon heading along the road leading to Ras al-Khaimah or eastern Sharjah, just to the west of the Hajar Mountains, the traveller is confronted by a fertile land. The regional rainfall and ground water from the mountains allow vegetation to grow; even in the 1980s, when the UAE had only 5 percent of arable fields, half of the state's livestock, including fruits and vegetables, came from this part of Ras al-Khaimah (Peck 1986, 12). Today, local markets called 'Friday Market' sell fruits, vegetables, tableware and carpets, and have become a famous tourist destination in the northern Emirates.

The mountain area is in the country's northwest, and it is connected to the Sultanate of Oman (Fig. 3.24). The peaks of these mountains reach as high as 2,100 and 2,400 meters (Fenelon 1976, 4). The grey, rocky mountains supply a sufficient amount of water to the wadis, and seasonal floods can easily occur. My friend Anoud (110), who lives in the mountain area, showed me a wide ditch behind her house—less than 10 meters away—which protects houses and small shops in the area from seasonal floods. When I asked Anoud and her family if they are scared of floods, they laughed at me and suggested that I should come back on rainy days so that I can swim in the 'natural pool' with them. They proudly declared how often they swim while keeping their clothes on.

Many foreign tourists as well as some locals living in the desert area in the southwest do not know the UAE has real mountains. Faraḥ told me that the husband she had recently married, who was in his mid-30s and from Abu Dhabi, had never been to the northern Emirates until that time. She said it had been ridiculous to see him looking around at the mountains in open-mouthed astonishment. Although new highways have been constructed to accommodate motor vehicles and trucks throughout the country, enabling travel from Abu Dhabi to the mountain areas of Ras al-Khaimah or Sharjah in less than 3 hours, many locals tend to stay within their own communities. This disassociation of

individual communities is often expressed in the view that Gulf society is a mixing rather than a melting pot. Many locals, however, in particular those from the northern Emirates, choose to visit Fujairah for their summer vacations. It is a few degrees cooler than other parts of the country both because it is the only emirate that does not face the Persian Gulf and because of the presence of the Hajar Mountains (Peck 1986, 10).

(Fig. 3.24) A mountain view in Masafi, Ras al-Khaimah. Photo taken in February 2014. (Image: Manami Goto)

3.2.2 Historical and Economic Background

Historically, different foreign powers had an interest in controlling the Persian Gulf region, including the area covered by the contemporary UAE. Since the sixteenth century, the Portuguese, Dutch, and British were present in the region, and they had the aim of securing trade routes between Europe and Asia. The early nineteenth century is a particularly important historical period because this is when the powerful ruling clan of Qasim, who were known as the Qawasim, ruled the coast-lines of both sides of the Gulf

and established bases in Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Lengeh in Iran (Peck 1986, 28). Due to a growing interest in establishing a monopoly over the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, a confrontation between the Qawasim and the British began to escalate. In 1820, after defeating the Qawasim, the British established dominance in the Trucial States by forming a strategic alliance with the Bani Yas tribe, who controlled the inland area of the state and were a rival of the maritime-based Qawasim (ibid., 32). In the contemporary UAE, two of the most influential families—Al Nahyan of the Abu Dhabi emirate and Al Maktum of the Dubai emirate—can trace their roots back to Bani Yas tribe, who originated in Najd, the central part of Saudi Arabia (McCoy 2008, 76).

Before the 1930s, most people in the area of the contemporary UAE were lived in challenging conditions, relying on limited economic resources: their main livelihood was based on fishing, cultivation of dates, and limited vegetables and fruits; in addition to the breeding of livestock (such as camels, sheep, and goats), trade and boat-building (Peck 1986, 92; al-Sayegh 2001, 23; Bristol-Rhys 2007, 23-24; Rugh 2007, 5). Only a few merchants and sheikhs became wealthier after the British imposed the 1853 Treaty of Perpetual Peace, which expanded the pearl industry in the Gulf (Peck 1986, 92). However, this economic growth was heavily affected by a global economic depression and the introduction of Japanese cultured pearls to the market in the 1920s and 1930s (ibid., 92; Rugh 2007, 8). Although local residents experienced severe poverty and economic difficulties during this period, some actually viewed this historical event positively and told me that it was destiny that they found oil after the Japanese discovery of cultivated pearls.

In the 1930s, foreign companies such as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company began oil exploration, but the first crude oil was not exported until 1962 from Das Island (Heard-

Bey 2001, 119; Rugh 2007, 8). Since the early 1970s, wealth from oil revenues has rapidly improved the lives of local people, and the modernisation of the newly established state has been promoted by labour imported from neighbouring Arab states and territories such as Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Sudan, along with Southeast Asian countries including Iran, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines (Khalaf and Alkobaisi 1999, 284) (Fig. 3.25).

The first population census covering all the seven emirates was taken in 1968 and it recorded the total population as 180,000; the second, which was conducted seven years later, indicated that this figure had risen to 655,937 (Fenelon 1976, 6). By 2017, this figure had increased ten-fold, reaching 6,072,475, with international migrants accounting for 88.4 percent of this total (United Nations 2017, 28; Country Watch 2018, 3).

While citizens have enjoyed social benefits such as free healthcare, education, and housing, and have relied heavily on foreign workers for domestic and public work, these workers—who constitute 95 percent of the workforce—have suffered from legal and physical discrimination (Keane and McGeehan 2008, 82). Improvement of the situation of foreign workers has been repeatedly demanded by both the international community and human right organisations (Sönmez et al. 2011).

(Fig. 3.25) Skyscrapers besides Sheikh Zayed Road in Dubai, a view from Burj Khalifa. Photo taken in August 2010. (Image: Manami Goto)

3.2.3 People and Society

Although the foreign population consists of people from various national and ethnic backgrounds, the country's citizenry also has a high level of ethnic diversity. Federal Law 17 establishes that a person who can prove that they have been resident in the state's territory since 1925 is entitled to obtain the citizenship (Jamal 2015, 602). However, in some cases, those who could not get citizenship on the basis of the law obtained it later. For example, long-term residents, such as those from Yemen, Balochistan, India, Pakistan, or Persia (Iran), who joined the armed forces or contributed to state-building under the close supervision of the ruling family, had the advantage of being naturalised (Al Zarooni 2013; Alqadi 2015, 62). The majority of naturalised citizens seems to be from Persia—

ʿAjam, *Hawla (Huwila)*, and Balochi.[16] On the other hand, those who could not obtain citizenship became stateless, and were known as '*bidoon*' or '*bidūn*' (without). The estimated number of the *bidoon* is reported to be 100,000 although the government claims the actual figure is closer to 10,000 (Alqadi 2015, 97).

Male and female slaves originally from Zanzibar and other eastern African towns represented other groups who managed to gain citizenship. They had been sold to work as pearl divers or servants in the Gulf, with the highest recorded number of slaves traded in a year estimated at 12,000 people (al-Sayegh 2001, 20; Rugh 2007, 7). Despite the Treaty of 1839, which banned the slave trade, slaves were brought into the Trucial States through Buraimi by the Bani Yas, and this continued until the 1950s when an economic crisis hit the wealthy ruling and merchant families (Rugh 2007, 7, 104).

However, as a result of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which gave rise to a desire to define national identity in opposition to growing western influence, these Iranian subjects became problematic. This is reflected in the national narrative of history and culture, social benefits, and even employment, that often represent and prioritise Bedouin Arab tribes, who keep close ties with the ruling families. Although each emirate has a ruler that controls its own territory, there is an arrangement, which reflects economic advantage, for political power to be predominantly shared between the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. It is very easy for locals to recognise socio-political or economic class by referring to a person's tribe or family name.

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[16] Persian merchants and craftsmen who settled in the Gulf states are known as *ʿAjam*; and tribal Arab Sunnis who once lived on the coastal area of southern Persia and latter resettled in the Gulf states are known as *Hawla* (Nagy 2006, 128-29; Manami Goto, field notes).

These invisible social differences were often expressed in the conversations I had with people in the UAE. In referring to the fact that I was hosted by an 'Iranian' Emirati family in Ajman, people would comment that the only reason I could stay with a 'local' host was the fact that they were an Emirati family with an Iranian background. In the eyes of the Arab Emirati, this meant that they were too openminded and not 'traditional' like native Arabs (e.g. Nagy, 2006). Some people even expressed pity for me and suggested that I should move to their houses as they are 'true' Emiratis who could show me the 'real' Emirati cultures and customs. This kind of attitude was more common in the inner parts of the country like Al Ain or the mountainous area.

At the same time, I noticed that many people with Iranian/Persian backgrounds tended to hide their own identities or family history. For example, an Emirati friend whose family name indicates an Iranian-Pakistani origin refused to admit that his family speaks Persian until I visited his house and spoke with his grandmother and mother in this language. Another friend of mine whose family also migrated from the opposite side of the Gulf acknowledged his Balochi background. Yet when I asked which village or town his family originated from, he suspiciously responded, "Are you asking this question to know whether my family has *pure* tribal blood?" (emphasis added). I denied this intention and explained that the questions were part of my research. My feeling was a mixture of sadness and anger because this person, who is in a socially disfavoured position but who studied abroad for more than eight years, applied the same socio-politically constructed categories to himself and felt ashamed of his own identity.

Interestingly, former slave families who can trace their origins back to East Africa seem to face less discriminatory attitudes in society as they are not perceived to present a religio-political threat to the state. When I asked local people about citizens with slave

backgrounds or African origins, people often expressed the view that "[t]hey are like us, no difference." It was also observed that: "We eat together and live together; they are part of the family," and: "They do not face difficulties in employment and they have huge houses. They are treated like other Arabs not like us [ʿ*Ajam*]." However, when I asked if tribal Arab or ʿ*Ajam* families intermarry with the former slave families, the answer was always "No." These conversations made me think about how deep-rooted ethnopolitical or religious issues are and how such social categories become crucial and more sensitive when it comes to marriage.

Many local residents of the UAE still prefer the customary practice of arranged marriage—preferably between paternal cousins—within the same ethnic or tribal groups (Al-Gazali et al. 1997; Rugh 2007, 28). Yet, in reality, men often marry women from outside these groups, especially from the same region or the countries which have long-trading connections such as Yemen, Oman, India, and Iran (Bristol-Rhys 2007, 31). Although today many governmental and private institutions are gender-mixed, romantic relationships before marriage are illegal for both citizens and non-citizens of the country. If you are found to live or stay at hotels with a member of the opposite sex who is outside the kinship group, you may be arrested (Piecowye 2011, 821-22). In reality, however, it is not uncommon for members of younger generations to conduct a hidden relationship; yet, when they decide to get married, they would ask their siblings, friends, or mothers for help in establishing personal contacts with each other's family members. For example, my male Emirati friend introduced his girlfriend to his younger sister, and his sister recommended the girl to her mother as her brother's potential marriage partner. In this way, they can marry a person of their choice without breaking the traditional social rules and dishonouring their families and tribes.

At the same time, in order to cope with the growing number of international marriages, the UAE government officially encourages Emirati men to marry Emirati women (Rashad, Osman, and Roudi-Fahimi 2005, 6; Bristol-Rhys 2007; Government.ae 2018a). Their initiatives include providing rewards and extra benefits to the men who marry local women, establishing marriage funds to help local couples with the ever-increasing cost of dowries, while requiring official permission from nationals wanting to marry foreigners (Bristol-Rhys 2007, 27; Government.ae 2018a). It is legally and socially easier for men (in comparison to women) to marry those who are from socio-economically lower classes, different families or tribes, or even different nationalities (Soffan 1980, 20).

However, despite social restrictions and marital preferences, marriage and family formation are still considered to be a very important cultural practice, constituting the fundamental bedrock of social values and unity amongst Emiratis (Fig. 3.26). It is sometimes fascinating to see how many extensive family members the individual Emirati keeps close relations with. Through living, visiting, and observing these people throughout the country, their lives between tradition and modernity are reflected in values, cultures, and choices that appeared, from my perspective, to be ever-evolving (Fig. 3.27).

(Fig. 3.26) A decorated house of either a bride or groom in Ras al-Khaimah in February 2014. Traditionally, when a family member of the household is engaged, his/her family decorates the house with lights to celebrate and inform the community about the marriage. In the past, simple Egyptian-style hanging lamps were used; however, due to the influx of the wealth and introduction of new products, locals started to decorate an entire house with string lights. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 3.27) On my way home in Ajman in March 2018. The entrance of the highway is designed to prevent camels from crossing. (Image: Manami Goto)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have critically discussed matters that relate to various aspects of the communities on Qeshm Island and the UAE, where I conducted extensive field research. Depicting people's everyday lives while living amongst them is crucial for this research as the use of the mask is often influenced by the social settings surrounding women, thus it is important for readers to understand local contexts as part of their exploration of the face-mask tradition.

Moreover, as this research seeks to make a comparative study between the case of Qeshm Island and the UAE, the differences (economic advancement, wealth, geographical landscape, and demographical diversity) and similarities (climate, food, family relationships, and religion) become essential to creating a full understanding of local environments and are a significant aspect of this study. There have been continuous interactions and connections at various levels between people of the two areas, and this has impacted the use of the mask tradition.

In preparation for specific case studies that critically interrogate the research questions, the next chapter places the origins and distribution of various types of face masks within a wider regional framework of reference by examining literature on the face mask that engages both the Persian Gulf and the Western Indian Ocean.

Chapter 4: Narratives of the Origins: Adopting and Reshaping the Face masks

"Culture is ultimately lost when we stop telling the stories of who we are, where we have been, how we arrived here, what we once knew, what we wish we knew; when we stop our retelling of the past, our imagining of the future, and the long, long task of inventing an identity every single second of our lives" (Miranda 2013, xiv).

Introduction

The existing literature on face masks in the Persian Gulf region is predominantly based on a few observations that are linked to specific places (Abu Saud 1984; Anjamrūz 1992; Al Azzi 1990; Chatty 1997; Dickson [1949] 1967; El Mutwalli 2015; Ferdinand 1993; Kanafani 1983; Khaṭībīzādhe 2010; Mirhoseini 2015; Wikan [1982] 1991) or nationalistic research (Al Shomely 2016). The limited information currently available and observations of previous studies do not allow for confident assertions to be made about the origin of the face mask, although efforts have been made to build some hypotheses. The main reasons for this lack of documentation are illiteracy amongst locals, especially women, and the fact that European travelers, on whom the history of the Gulf heavily relies, lacked both interest and access to local women. Dr. Jane Bristol-Rhys, in an interview with *The National*, the UAE government-owned newspaper[17], explained that "[t]he only written records here [the United Arab Emirates] were made by the British, and

[17] The National was acquired by International Media Investments and relaunched as a private concern in 2017 (The National 2019).

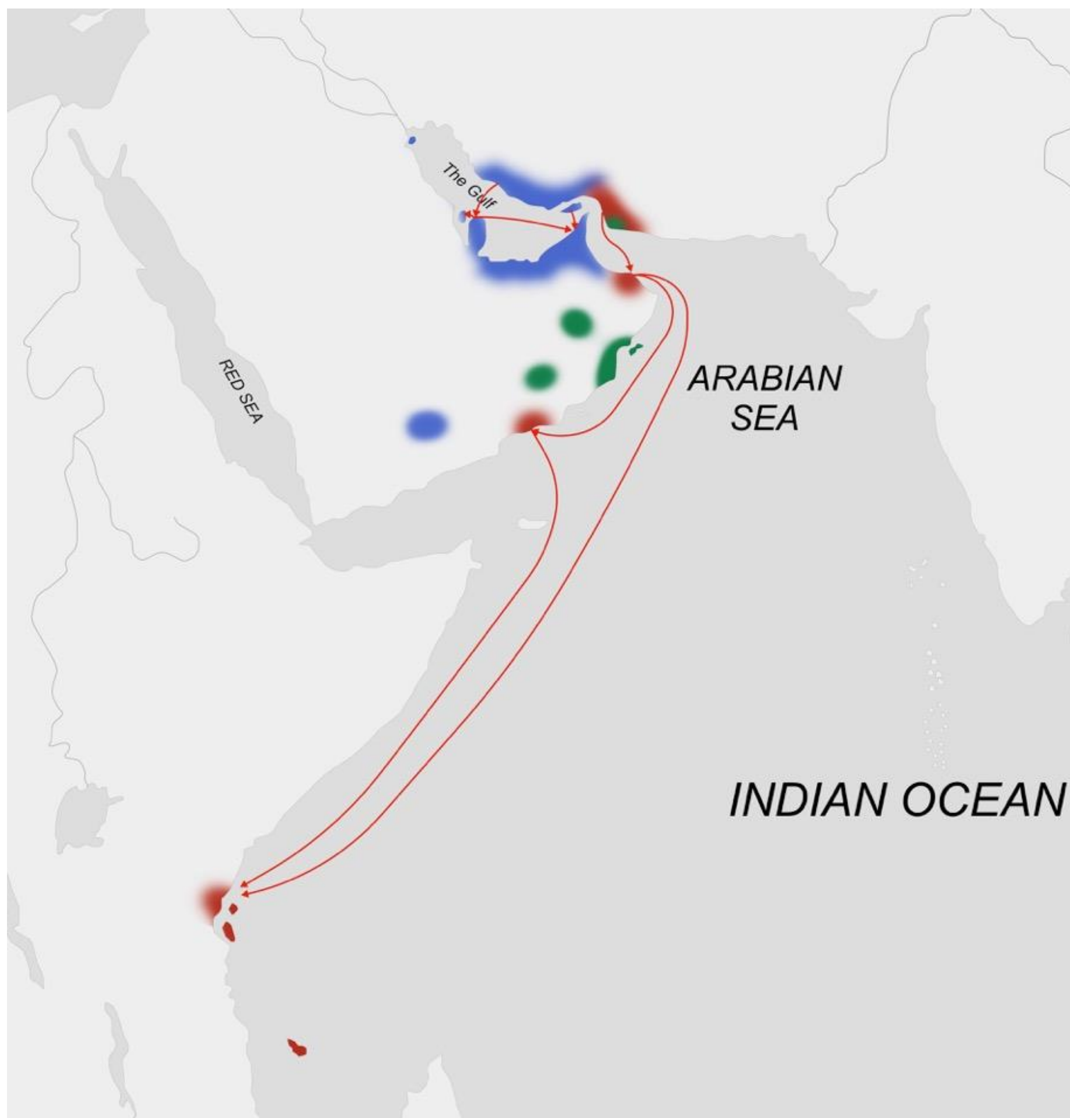
often the British men would not have access to the local women and so a lot of the women-related heritage was not recorded" (Ghazal 2009).

Additionally, gender segregation as local custom established a great distance between western visitors and female locals—for this reason, "the early explorers were mainly men who were, according to etiquette, kept apart from the local women" (Morris and Shelton 1997, 56).

Small sample sizes and a lack of comparative analysis have been a serious limitation for many earlier studies that sought to identify the origins of the face mask. One of the most widely accepted hypotheses contends that the face mask originated in Iran and was later introduced to Eastern Arabia, while other researchers believe it originated in the Arabian Peninsula or India. Though these contributions will be carefully engaged in the following sections, my own research on the subject suggests this is a more complicated subject. While a number of the existing accounts indicate that Balochi migrants introduced the face mask into Eastern Arabia, the findings of my field research, in combination with the historical and scholarly literature, suggest that transmission and adoption took place in various different ways through people rather than in a monopolistic way.

However, at the same time, my data suggest that there were possibly two primary routes taken by the face mask to reach eastern Arabia and later to East Africa from today's southern Iran (Fig. 4.1). On one route, individuals, who were mainly ethnic Arabs, moved around across the Persian Gulf, between the upper Hormozgan and Eastern Arabia in particular, and introduced a golden/indigo face mask to eastern Arabian Peninsula from southern Iran. On the other route, Balochi migrant women, whose men were often hired as soldiers or servants in eastern Arabia, brought their custom of wearing colourful rectangular face masks with them.

These hypotheses are drawn through the collection of oral literature and examination of the geographical distribution of face masks and the common features amongst them, which are further discussed in following sections. The first part of this chapter discusses the origins of the face mask, and the second part explores the distributions of face masks, in addition to the various uses and symbolic meanings that are embedded in different types of the masks.



(Fig. 4.1) A map of the Persian Gulf and the Western Indian Ocean, that sets out the two major routes across which the face mask may possibly have been introduced from southern Iran to the rest of the region. The colours vary in accordance with different face masks (see Fig. 4.40). Map produced by Alessandro Ghidoni based on my research data.

4.1 The Origins of the Face Mask

With regard to the origins of the face mask, there are three discrete pieces of evidence emerging from the research that situates its origin being in southern Iran. First, there is almost no oral history in the eastern Arabian Peninsula that recounts why and how the face mask was crafted for the first time (El Mutwalli 2015, 270); however, people do nonetheless often recall the face mask being imported to their societies from Iran or elsewhere (Al Azzi 1990, 20; Chatty 1997, 138; Al Shomely 2016, 38). Meanwhile, in southern Iran, especially Qeshm Island, folklore related to the face mask including its motive and development, is commonly shared, particularly amongst elder generations. Secondly, the distribution of face masks in the Persian Gulf and the Western Indian Ocean more generally indicate that women who have worn the face mask reside in coastal cities in eastern Arabian Peninsula where people have historically traded with southern Iran. Finally, the face covering that the majority of nomadic Bedouin families in the Arabian Peninsula have worn is a simple or decorated *cloth-type veil* (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008). There is distinctive difference between this veil and the face mask that was adopted by coastal people. Thus, it is unlikely that the *cloth-type veil*s were developed into the face mask and introduced into southern Iran. Yet, there is a scholarly literature argues that the face mask originated in the Arabian Peninsula.

One example is provided by Anjamrūz, an Iranian researcher, who has written a book on the face mask, which argues from a historical and linguistic perspective that the face mask must have originated in Arabia. This is because: 1) face veiling is not a traditional Persian custom; and 2) the face mask is known as the "*batule*" or "*burquʿ*" which, he claims, is an Arabic word (Anjamrūz 1992, 19). Meanwhile, Mirhoseyni, who is originally from Bandar Abbas and conducted his anthropological research on the face mask as part of his

master's thesis in Iran, takes Anjamrūz's view and offers additional information which suggests that the *burquʿ* was brought to Persia during the era of Shapur I (240-270 BC) and Shapur II (309-379 BC) when Persians captured Arabs and located them in today's Khuzestan Province (2015, 4).

However, there are several serious weaknesses with the above reasoning. For example, Anjamrūz's analysis does not take account of diverse ethnicities who have lived in today's Iranian territory, nor does he examine local traditions or customs that may be formed by non-Persian minorities in Iran; instead, he asserts his view of bipolarisation of cultural belongings—either Persian or Arab. While the current literature suggests that the use of the face veil on the Iranian Plateau dates back to the twelfth century, Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang argue that this does not prove that women were not veiling their faces prior to the period because women's lives were not recorded earlier than the twelfth century (2008, 151-52; Floor 2011, 20). At the same time, Anjamrūz's view asserts that the face mask is 'a modified version of the *veil*' and does not consider the face mask as an individual object and a specific socio-cultural background.

Another weakness is the assumption presented by Mirhoseyni. As my field data illustrates in the following section, there is no record that women (neither ethnic Arab nor Persian) in Khuzestan Province have worn the face mask. Although a cloth-type veil is commonly used in Khuzestan Province today, Mirhoseyni fails to provide a comprehensive explanation for the links between the cloth-type veil and the face mask. Without resolving these contradictions, it is difficult to say that the face mask traces its roots back to Arabia. Nevertheless, their arguments demonstrated that the face mask was only worn in southern Iran.

While Anjamrūz and Mirhoseyni see the tradition of the face mask or veiling in the

Persian Gulf as one inherited from the ancient Arab practice, the hypothesis that the face mask originated outside the Arabian Peninsula has been supported by other scholars who studied the face mask in the Gulf Arab states (Abu Saud 1984; Al Azzi 1990; Chatty 1997; Rajab 1998; El Mutwalli 2015). These scholars, however, form this conclusion based solely on their fieldwork in the Gulf Arab states and do not extensively study masking traditions in Iran and surrounding areas. For example, Abu Saud points out similarities between a Qatari face mask and a face mask worn in Siraf (Bandar Tahiri) in Iran and assumes that the face mask was originally "a Persian form of face covering" that was imported into the eastern Arabian Peninsula from the port of Siraf (1984, 58). Chatty also advances the same view that the mask originated in Iran, but she presumes that Balochis migrants, who traveled from the Makran coast[18] to the Gulf states, introduced the face mask (1997, 138).

While Abu Saud and Chatty believe Iran to be the origin, Al Azzi and Rajab claim it is instead India. Al Azzi finds a linguistic correlation between the '*baṭūla*' (face mask) and '*batulu*'(a singular form) and '*batula*'(a plural form): both terms are used to describe Urdu textiles in Sanskrit and other Indian languages, and this suggests the origin as being in south India (1990, 22).[19] This, however, does not offer an adequate explanation for how the face mask was derived from these Urdu textiles in south India where women

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[18] Though Chatty writes the 'Makram' coast, this was probably intended to mean the 'Makran' coast (1997, 138).

[19] Rajab (1998) concludes that the face mask, '*baṭūla*', originated in Gujrat in India. He states: "[the face mask has] entered Oman about 200 years ago from Gujrat in India, via Balochistan and Persia. The 'fashion' spread amongst certain tribes and townswomen in Oman" (52). I, however, assume that this assumption was based on Al Azzi's (1990) hypothesis that there is a relationship between the face mask and Urdu textiles. This is based on the reasoning that "Batulu (singular) and Batula (plural have, since the fourth century A.D in North west India (Gujart) and middle and South India, been repeatedly used with textile terms in Sanskrit and Indian languages to describe Urdu textiles or textiles" (22-23).

have not veiled their faces with a face mask. The aforementioned scholars further claim that the face mask was thus brought from outside and adopted in eastern Arabia, but their hypotheses are still unable to provide any comprehensive explanation of the origin of the face mask.

While these scholars attempt to identify the origin of the face mask by observing the diffusion of masks, others discuss how the mask came to exist in the first instance. Yassavoli and Khaṭībīzādh, whose research focuses on Iran, claim that the practice of wearing the face mask first began as a result of the Portuguese conquest. The Portuguese came to the region and occupied Hormoz Island in 1520, retaining a presence up until 1622 when Shah Abbas the Great regained the territory, including contemporary Bandar Abbas (Yassavoli 1993, 130). In referring to the face mask, Yassavoli states:

> "The Iranians maintain that no religious taboo explains the wearing of these masks: rather is it a fashion which originates from the period of the Portuguese occupation when ladies wished to walk about unrecognized or simply to protect their complexion from the scorching sun…" (1993, 132).

In echoing Yassavoli, Khaṭībīzādh (169), who was a local teacher in Bandar Abbas and owns a tailor's shop, explained to me (and also in his book) that the *burquʿ* began appearing at the time of the Portuguese occupation of the region in the early sixteenth century, when it took the form of the *ḥijāb*—sense of covering—that offered protection from the sun (2010, 25). Since then, the *burquʿ* has evolved into today's shape, although the colour and design depend on the wearer's facial features and indicate the geographical location of residence along with ethnicity (Maḥbtī 2010, 73). Although the face mask was known in the Hormozgan area as '*basūle*' or '*batūle*', each distinctive design of face masks is named after a place or ethnic group, with examples including '*muqāmī*',

‘*ḥumīrānī*’, ‘‘*arabī*’, ‘*qaṭarī*’, and ‘*sikānī*’ (ibid.).

The opinions and explanations that interview respondents in Iran expressed with regard to the origin of the face mask were diverse, but many of them confirmed that the masking practice started during the Portuguese conquest of southern Iran. For example, Mrs. Askari (151), who took a deep and special interest in the local customs and handicrafts of Hormozgan around Bandar Abbas and was also known as ‘a local historian’, said to me that women in southern Iran concealed their faces with a cloth-type veil before the arrival of the Portuguese. However, due to Portuguese tyrannical attitudes towards local women, a simple cloth covering the entire face was replaced with a face mask imitating a male mustache to deceive the Portuguese. In my interview, she said:

> “The origin of the *burquʿ* started when the Portuguese entered Iran and attacked different parts of Hormozgan Province like Qeshm [Island], Hormoz [Island], and Bandar Lengeh, and they became under the control of the Portuguese.[20] Because Portuguese soldiers were harassing women, people made the shape [of the *burquʿ*] look like a mustache. When you look at the *burquʿ* of Qeshm Island, it has a shape of a mustache. That is because from far away a wearer looks like a man not a woman!”

A similar story was cited by Brennan (2016), who said that a seamstress from the Salakh village of Qeshm Island explained to him that “it [the mask] was designed centuries ago to fool invaders, so they would mistake women for male soldiers.” One of my respondents

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[20] Bandar Lengeh is an officially registered name in Iran today. However, historically it was often referred as Lengeh but there are also other names indicating the same place, such as ‘Talanga’, ‘Ling’, ‘Lenge’, and ‘Lundsje’ (Floor 2010, 29-34).

(168) in Qatar also told me that "Portuguese solders chopped the noses of women so that they used the *baṭūla* [face mask] to hide their faces," and Abu Saud also records a narrative that the face mask was designed to scare the Portuguese away (1984, 57).

Despite the lack of documentation, the people of Qeshm Island believed that the face mask was first crafted on the island before the practice of covering girls and women's faces with the face mask spread to neighboring areas (Manami Goto, field notes). Amongst all my respondents the only exception to the common belief that the *burquʿ* originated with the Portuguese invasion was offered by a local male journalist (171) from Bandar Kong who alleged the face mask was a negative legacy of the British occupation of southern Iran. He believed the face mask was introduced by a British captain in Bandar Kong who wanted to distinguish local women's origins through different forms and styles of masks. He also explained that the word '*baṭūla*' was named after the first face mask seamstress, *Baṭūl*. Although this claim is not substantiated by any previous research, it provides a new historical perspective and suggests that further investigation, including the historical records of the former Portuguese and British colonisers, is needed to deepen understanding of the face mask's origins.

Therefore, although there is still a lack of documentation that relates to the origin of the face mask, much local literature and folklore suggests that the face mask originated in southern Iran, namely Qeshm Island, and emerged during the Portuguese conquest in the early sixteenth century. This hypothesis is further supported through the investigation of the distribution of the face mask and the composition of the wearers, with specific reference to ethnic, religious, and residential aspects. The following section therefore first provides a brief overview of the distribution and different types of the face mask in Iran, and then considers their relationships with masks used by women in the eastern Arabian

Peninsula and East Africa.

4.2 The Distribution of Various Types of Face Mask

4.2.1 The Case of Iran

No previous study has closely investigated the distribution of different types of face mask in Iran. The lack of such an overall picture of the distribution of the face mask has led to some misleading conclusions. For example, Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang claim that the types of face mask can be distinguished on the basis of three factors: religious background, ethnic origin, and residential location (2008, 177). However, the face masks that are described as being worn by 'Shiite' are in fact mainly worn by Sunni Balochis (Manami Goto, field notes). Furthermore, in Minab where Vogelsang-Eastwood conducted her fieldwork, the majority of young Shiite Minabis do not conceal their faces (ibid.). I further explore this point in the following section.

Upon the basis of my field research in coastal areas between Bandar Bushehr and Guater as well as other pasts of Iran, I came to the conclusion that the face mask is only used in the coastal areas of southern Iran (Fig. 4.2).[21] As part of this research, I have identified geographical locations, types of face masks used, and personal backgrounds of the wearers.

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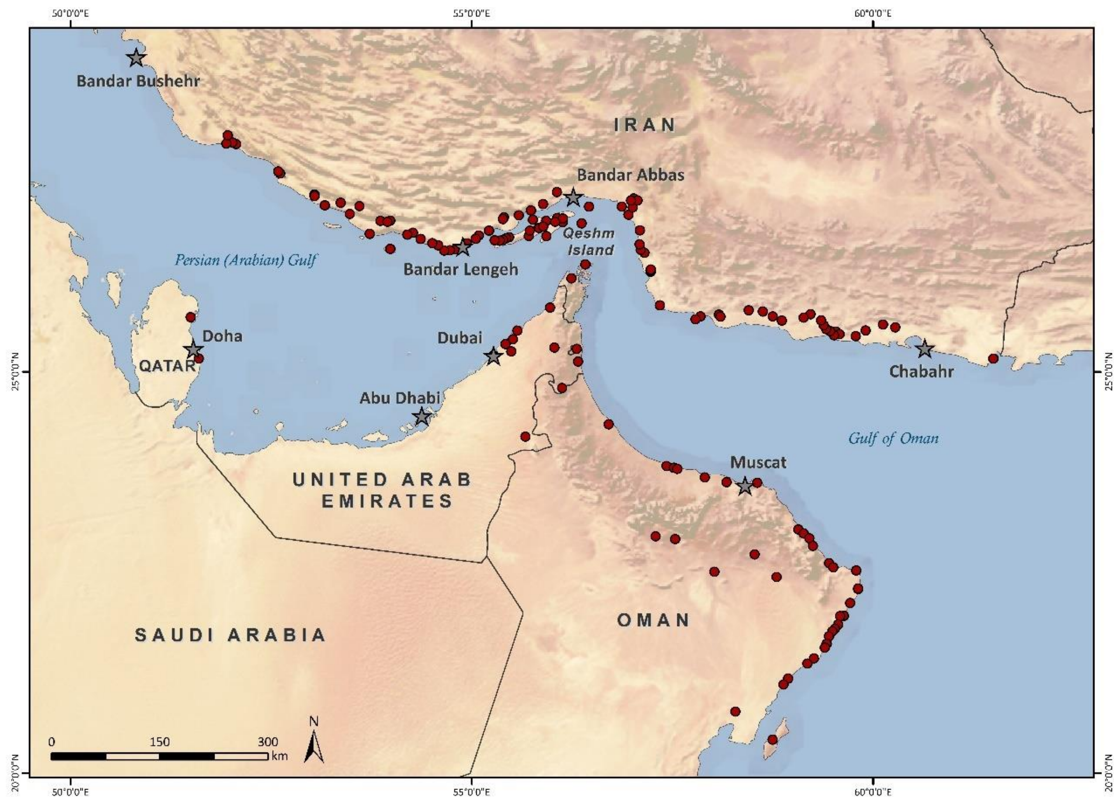
[21] I visited Tabriz, Sanandaj, Marivan, Kermanshah, Hamedan, Rasht, Qazvin, Karaj, Tehran, Ramsar, Gorgan, Bandar Torkaman, Qom, Kashan, Isfahan, Shiraz, Kerman, and Bandar Bushehr. I also interviewed people from other cities, such as Ahvaz, Abadan, Bam, and Mashhad, to see if there are other parts of Iran where the face mask is used.

The northernmost place where the masking practice was recognised during my fieldwork was a village called Banak in Bushehr Province, where the residents were mostly Sunni who speak Emirati Arabic for general communication purposes (Figs. 4.3, 4.4). Here an old masked woman (152) said to me that she obtained her face masks from the UAE, specifically from Dubai, and used them for occasions such as weddings. She also mentioned that she wore the face mask even at a wedding in Shiraz, where some people were not familiar with masking custom, but she was proud to present herself in this traditional dress that is strongly connected to her identity. An interesting finding is that in neighbouring Shiite villages, such as Dorahak and Dayyer, women did not use the face mask (Manami Goto, field notes) (Fig. 4.5).

This finding also contradicts Abu Saud's assumption that the face mask was worn in Abadan and Bandar Bushehr (1984, 58). Historians (153, 154) who worked at the Iranology Foundation—Bushehr Branch—and a history professor (155) at the Persian Gulf University in Bushehr also denied in my interviews that the face mask was neither worn in Bushehr nor north of the area. This was further confirmed by a scholar (172) and women from Abadan (Manami Goto, field notes). Upon careful consideration of the interview responses (173, 174), one conceivable reason why women in the area north of Banak village, including Bandar Bushehr and Abadan, do not wear the mask is because of the Shiite dominance and the strong influence of Iraq over the culture.[22] The majority of the population in these places are either Persian Shiites or Arab Shiites, and Shiite women tend not to cover their faces (for politicisation of face covering, see Chapter 8.1).

[22] In Iraq, the use of the face mask has not been reported but there are accounts referring to the widespread use of face veils, which are often cloth-type (more information is provided in Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008).

Moreover, as these areas are located near the Iraqi border, many Iraqis, especially Shiites, migrated to Abadan during the Iran-Iraq war. Together with historical influence, this war had a far-reaching impact on the customs and traditions of Iran's border areas.



(Fig. 4.2) The fieldwork map in southern Iran's littoral area. Red dots indicate the places where I conducted interviews: the star on the left indicates 'Bandar Bushehr' and the right red dot indicates 'Guater'. Map produced by Nadia Khalaf based on my research data.

(Fig. 4.3) Woman wearing the golden/indigo face mask in the Banak village. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 4.4) Woman in the traditional Arab Gulf dress and face mask in Banak village. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 4.5) Map of a Sunni village, Banak, and its neighbouring Shiite villages, Darahak and Dayyer. Retrieved from Google Maps.

In villages and towns on the Gulf littoral between Banak village and Bandar Abbas, as well as the islands in the Persian Gulf, women generally wore the golden/indigo face mask; many of them were Sunni, including both Arabs and Persians, and they often had families living in the Gulf Arab states.[23]

The southernmost place where the face mask is still a part of the local tradition is a village called *Gazīdar*, which is located in Sistan and Balucistan Province, approximately 45 kilometers from the border of Hormozgan Province. The villagers were Sunni and

[23] These places include Bandar-e Kangan, Bandar Siraf, Jam, Shirinoo, Nakh Taghi, Asaloyeh, Koshkonar, Gavbandi, Parsian, Baghestan, Dehnow Domtir, Behdeh, Homairan, Rastagh, Ghadeer Kuhi, Jabri, Ziarat, Bandar-e Shivoo, Moghdan, Bandar-e-Mogham, Chiruyeh, Bandar-e Charak, Armak, Chah Mosallam, Bandar Moghuyeh, Bandar-e Divan, Bustaneh, Mullu, Bandar-e Shenas, Bandar Lenghe, Bandar Kong, Gezir, Merakan, Podol, Hormoud, Bandar Moallem, Bandar Hameyran, Hashem Hudu, Berkeh-ye Soflin, Kanakh, Lashtaghan Bala, Bandar Khamir, Bandar-e Pol, Gachin Bala, Chahu, Tazian, Suru, Kish Island, Qeshm Island, Hengam Island , Hormoz Island, and Larak Island.

ethnically Baloch, and wore the Baloch face mask (Fig. 4.6). When I visited the village, a villager (156) told me that in the village the face mask belonged to girls and women younger than forty-years-old.

> 'This [the Baloch face mask] is a thing belonging to girls. For example, if a woman reaches forty, she can't wear this. […] When people see it [a woman wearing the face mask], they would say "Why are you wearing this? This is for youth!" […] For example, see the ladies there. One of them is my sister. She has kids. She doesn't have a permission to wear it. But her kids, small ones, can wear it.'

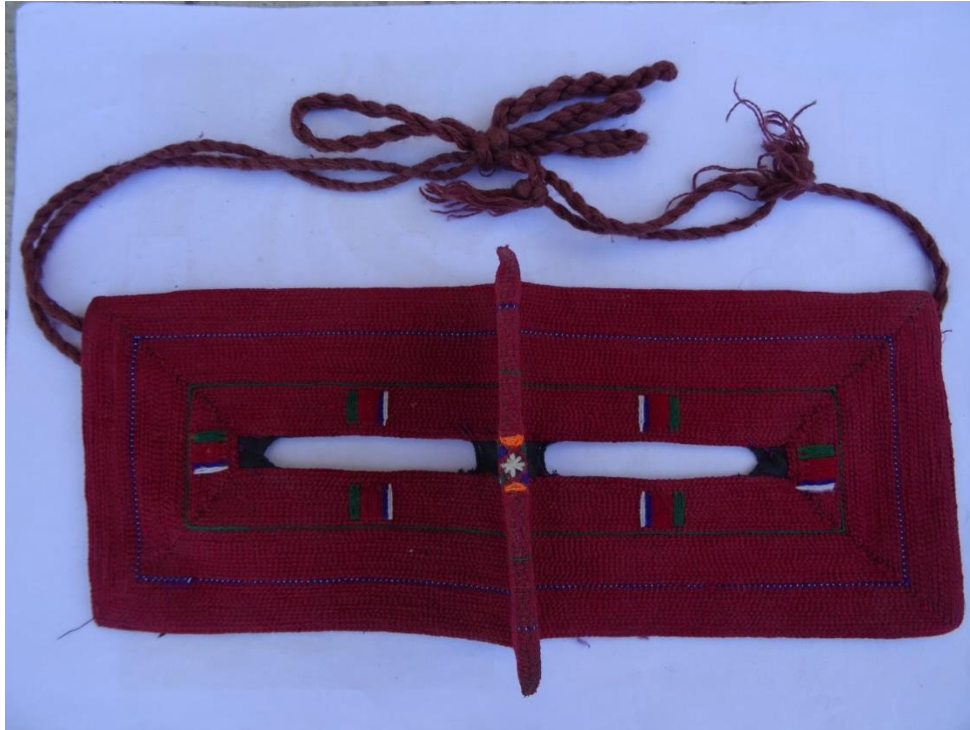
In *Gazīdar*, some distinct characteristics are embedded to distinguish girls' and women's masks: "Women who are old and more aged use *burqu*ʿs which are less blight and simple. On the contrary, girls' *burqu*ʿs are more chic, sharp [colour], and beautiful." The villagers also told me that in Baloch culture, red colour symbolises happiness and fortune, and people therefore prefer to wear red coloured dresses during ceremonies and special occasions.

(Fig. 4.6) Girls in *Gazīdar* village wearing the Baloch face mask. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

Although *Gazīdar* village was the southmost place where the face-mask tradition was still practised in 2016, there were other places in Sistan and Baluchistan Province where, for a time, the face mask became popular as a fashion item. For example, when I attended a post-wedding gathering held at *Lalū Bāzār* village, one of the women, who was originally from *Fatḥ ʿalī Kalāt* village, recalled a face mask boom between the 1920s and 70s in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. This Baloch woman, *Sabrkhatūn*, (157) told me that "there was a time when the *burquʿ* become popular fashion. But as many women stayed at home after marriage, they found no necessity of wearing the mask to cover their faces. So they stopped wearing it."

She further affirmed that because of the influence of Arabs in recent years, some Baloch women in Pakistan and Iran began wearing the *niqāb* (a black face veil); however, wearing a face mask was neither a part of Baloch culture in her village (*Fatḥ ʿalī Kalāt* village) nor in the neighbouring areas: for example, her grandmother did not wear a face mask. Thus, women in these areas only wore the face mask, made of different coloured fabrics, during the fashion boom, and this is why both she and her mother had worn face masks. According to her, during the period, face masks were usually manufactured in a town close to *Īrānshahr* called *Bampūr*, and she told me that her relatives from *Qaṣr-e-qand*, *Sārbūk*, and *Nīkshahr* used to go there to purchase face masks for her. Various coloured face masks were available at that time, such as red, green, white, brown, and blue; but for a black colour, there was a face mask made of silk that was imported from Pakistan.

In addition, during the fieldwork I also met some girls who began to mask themselves out of fashion. For example, in a village called Jaliyan, which is located about 100 kilometres south of *Gazīdar* village, two girls (158, 159) were wearing the Baloch face mask. Although none of the other girls and women in the village wore masks, these two masked girls told me that they saw many masked women in big cities and recently decided to adopt the face mask in accordance with fashion (Fig. 4.7)



(Fig. 4.7) A Baloch face mask worn by a girl in Jaliyan for fashion. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

The collected field data indicates that in villages and towns between the south of Bandar Abbas and Gazidar village, many Balochi women wore the Baloch face mask. The only exception I found was a few Jaski women[24] who wore a black face mask similar to the Omani Bedouin face mask (Fig. 4.8).[25] For the historical record, the Balochi face mask was seen in Bandar Abbas in 1875[26]: "Many of the women bore upon their faces by way of covering, a half-mask of stiffened cotton upon a bamboo frame, finished with a metal ornament upon the nose, and supported upon the face by a string passing over the head"

[24] Women in Bandar-e Jask.
[25] The places where I identified that the face-mask tradition was still being still in practiced included Hasan Langi-ye Bala, Shamil, Minab, Gurzang, Gishnou, Zohooki, Gorazuiyeh, Kolahi, Bandar-e Kargan, Sarshif, Kouhestak, Binni, Shahid Mardan, Gerouk, Sirik, Mishi, Sikuyee, Bazreh, Posht Band, Kargoshi, Kuhmobarak, Gavbandi, Bandar-e Jask, Mohammed Abad Yakdar, Yakdar, Gabrik, Milani Guli, Par Kuh, Himan, Zitkdaf, Lirdaf, Kāshi, Sandsar, and Zarābād.
[26] Arnold and his wife left London in 1875, thus they were probably in Bandar Abbas in either 1875 or 1876.

(Arnold 1877, 245-46).

(Fig. 4.8) A Jaski woman wearing a black face mask that is similar to the mask from the *Al Wusta* region.[27] Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

The examination of my field data made it possible to draw two significant conclusions in relation to the face mask. First, regarding the distribution of face mask, the border of usage in Iran is almost equivalent to the boundary of Hormozgan Province with a great concentration around the coastal areas. In other words, the distribution of face masks represents the material culture of the specific geographical area that has had strong historical links with the Gulf Arab states and does not represent specific religious (Sunni

[27] An example of the face mask in the Al Wusta region, see Stehlin-Alzadjali (2010, 136-39).

or Shiite) or ethnic backgrounds. For example, with regard to ethnicity, despite the fact that some people in Iran claim that the face mask belongs to Arabs, my data illustrates that the face mask was worn by Arab, Persian, and Balochi women. On the contrary, Arabs in Khuzestan Province as well as the majority of Balochi women in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, and the Baluchistan area of Pakistan did not wear the mask (see the map of ethnic composition of Iran in Figs. 4.10, 4.11).

Another element is religious denomination. Although I agree that the divergence in the religious denominations—Sunni and Shiite—has some influence on the use of the face mask, masking is not solely practised by Sunni women. For example, in Minab, where the majority is Shiite, both Sunni and Shitte women commonly wore the Balochi face mask in the past; this contrasts with the current situation, as many young Shiite Minabi women do not conceal their faces. Fatime (160), an eighty-five-year-old Shiite Minabi woman, observed that economic status rather than religious sect was the common trait among masked women in Minab in the past. She said:

> "In the past, when women were poor, they needed to go out to fetch water or buy things by themselves, so they made *burqu'*s by themselves and wore them whenever they went out. But rich women had maids at home and they didn't go out, so they didn't wear the *burqu'*."[28]

Another example is in the predominant Sunni areas such as Kurdistan Province and Sistan and Baluchistan Province of Iran, where the face mask is not generally encountered. This

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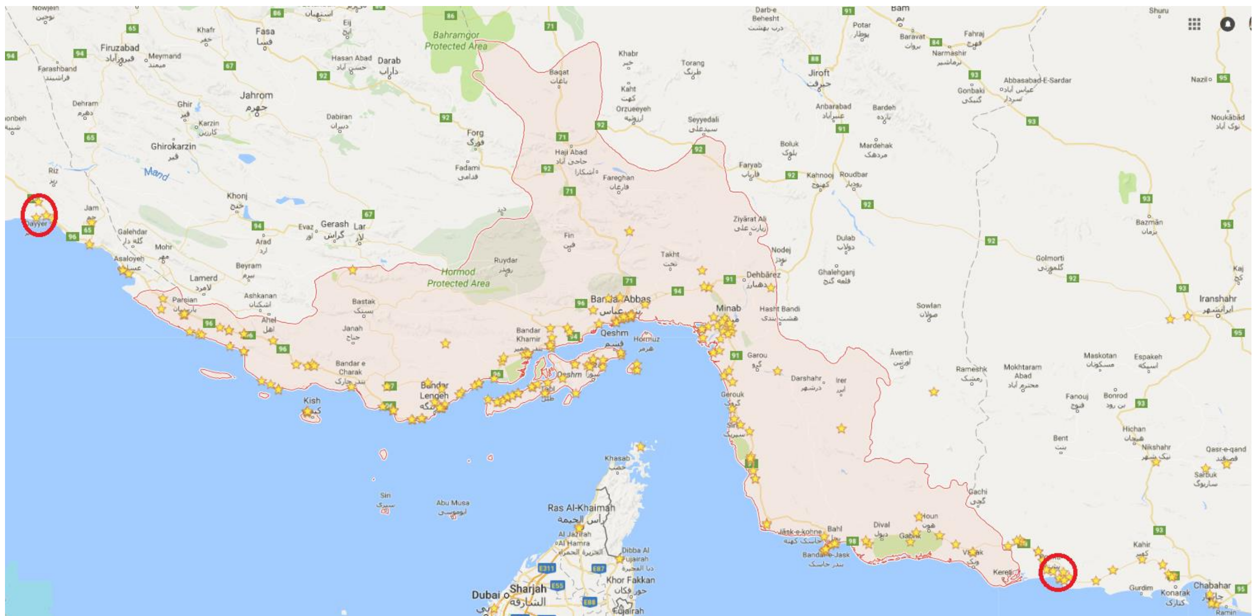
[28] Cursetjee, who travelled to the Persian Gulf region between 1916 and 1917, also notes that women were barely seen on the street, with the exception of a few from the lower classes of the society ([1918] 1994, 34).

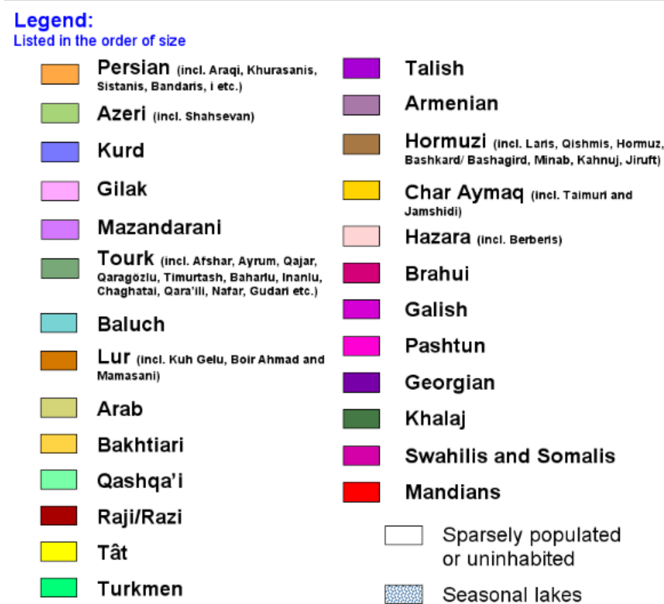
confirms that the distribution of the face-mask tradition in Iran has a regional rather than an ethnic or religious aspect.



(Fig. 4.9) Map with the boundary of Hormozgan Province: the yellow dots indicate the places where field research was conducted in 2016. Retrieved from Google Maps.

(Fig. 4.10) The overall ethnic composition map of Iran (Izady 2016).[29]

[29] http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Iran_Ethnic_lg.png.



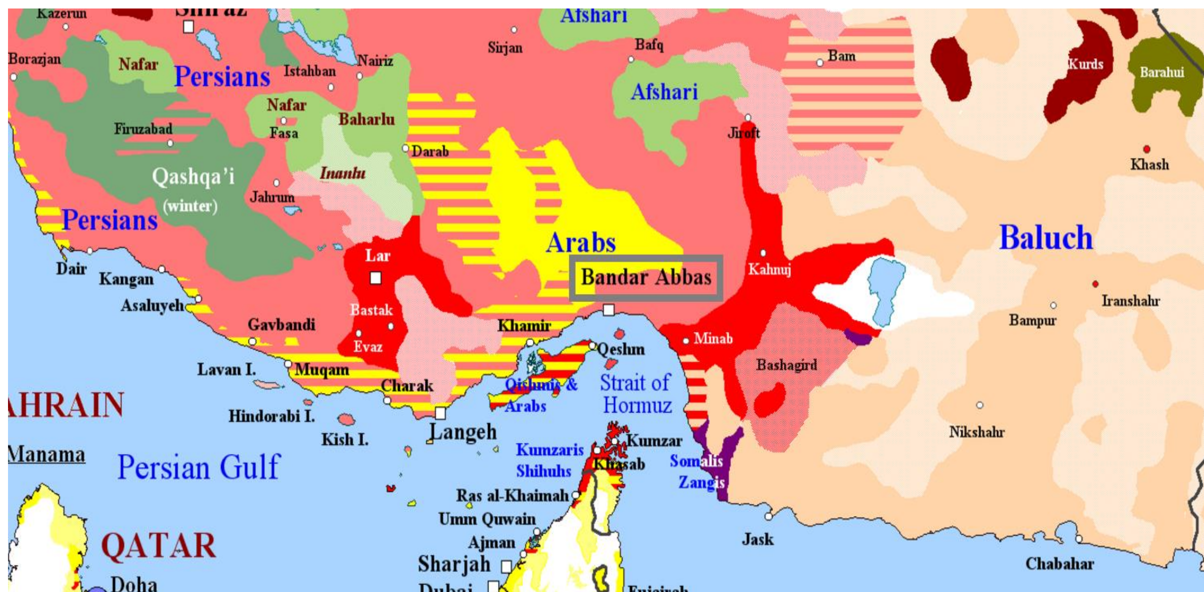
(Fig. 4.11) List of labels for Figure 4.10.

The second significant outcome that my field data illustrates is that within Hormozgan Province, different types of face masks imply certain ethnic affiliations. The face masks used in southern Iran are roughly divided into two types: the golden/indigo face mask and the Balochi face mask. Although during my interviews I included questions about personal demographics, comparing the results of the fieldwork with the ethnic composition of Iran (Figs. 4.12, 4.13) clarifies the relation between the types of face mask and the ethnic affiliation of the wearer. As previously mentioned, Bandar Abbas is the boundary that divides the wearing of the two types of face masks. The golden/indigo face mask is found in Bandar Abbas and the northern half of Hormozgan Province whereas the Balochi face mask is seen in places to the south of Bandar Abbas (Fig. 4.14). By comparing this distinction against the ethnic composition map (Figs. 4.12, 4.13), it seems that the golden/indigo face mask is affiliated to Arab, coastal Persian, and Hormuzi; in contrast, the Balochi face mask is affiliated to Balochi of Hormozgan Province.

To conclude, in Iran, the tradition of the face mask has been inherited in the coastal areas

of Hormozgan Province, which came to represent the regional material culture. Moreover, the face masks in Iran can be largely divided into two types which indicate the ethnic identity of the wearer.

On the basis of the above findings, the following sections demonstrate the distributions of these two face masks (the golden/indigo face mask and the Balochi face mask) in the Persian Gulf as well as the wider region. It further illustrates two major routes through which these two different types of face masks may have been introduced to eastern Arabian Peninsula from Iran. These hypotheses are established upon: 1) similarities in shape and material composition of the face mask; and 2) historical interactions and immigrations between certain places in Iran and the eastern Arabian Peninsula as well as East Africa.



(Fig. 4.12) The ethnic composition map of the Persian Gulf (Izady 2014-2017).[30] The emphasis on Bandar Abbas is added.

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[30] http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Gulf_Ethnicity_lg.png.

Persian Gulf Region: Ethnic Composition (traditional Western view)

Only those inhabiting the eight countries bordering directly on the Gulf, but excluding the expatriate workers

© M. I

1. Indo-European, Iranic peoples

Group	Population
Persians (various groups)	45.0m
Kurds	13.1m
Baluch	1.9m
Lur, Koh Gilu, Boirahmad, Mamasani, etc.	2.3m
Bakhtiyari	1.2m
Hormuzi (incl. Bashagirdi, Lari, Qishmi, Minabi, Kumzari-Laraki, Shihuh, etc.)	0.9m
Other Iranic peoples	6.7m

2. Indo-European, Indic peoples

Group	Population
Gujaratis (in Oman)	0.06m
Khoja, Sindhi (in Oman)	0.1m

3. Semitic peoples

Group	Population
Arabs (various groups)	44.1m
Mandian	0.25m
Other Semitic (Assyrians, Chaldeans, etc.)	1.2m

4. Turkic peoples

Group	Population
Azeris	10.5m
Qashqa'i	1.1m
Turcomans (Iraq)	0.5m
Other Turkic (Afshar, Baharlu, Qaragozlu, Aynanlu, Nafars, Turkmens, etc.)	2.93m

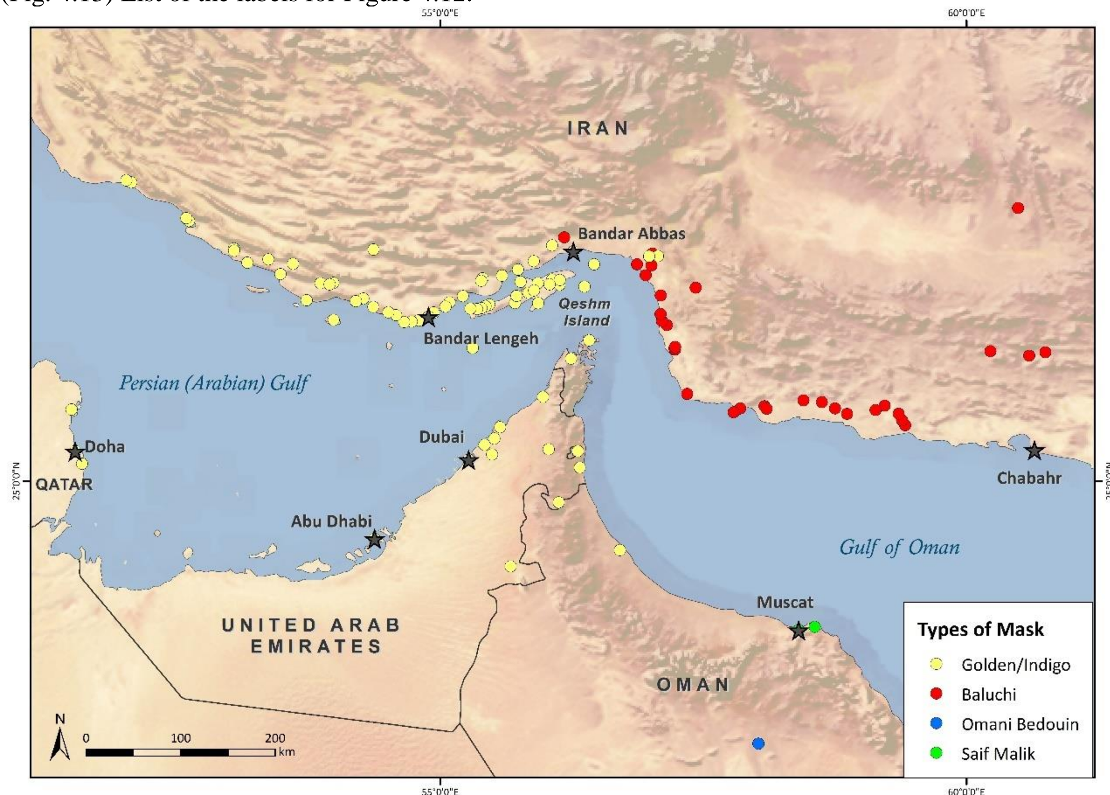
5. Others

Group	Population
Somalis, Zanzibaris, etc.	0.1m
Barahuis	0.02m

Remark: A majority of the inhabitants of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE , and about a third of those in Saudi Arabia and a quarter of those in Oman are expatriate workers,. These are not depicted nor counted on this map.

For problems with definition of ethnicity in the Gulf and Middle East, see "Observations" at http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Mid_East_Ethnic_lg.png

(Fig. 4.13) List of the labels for Figure 4.12.

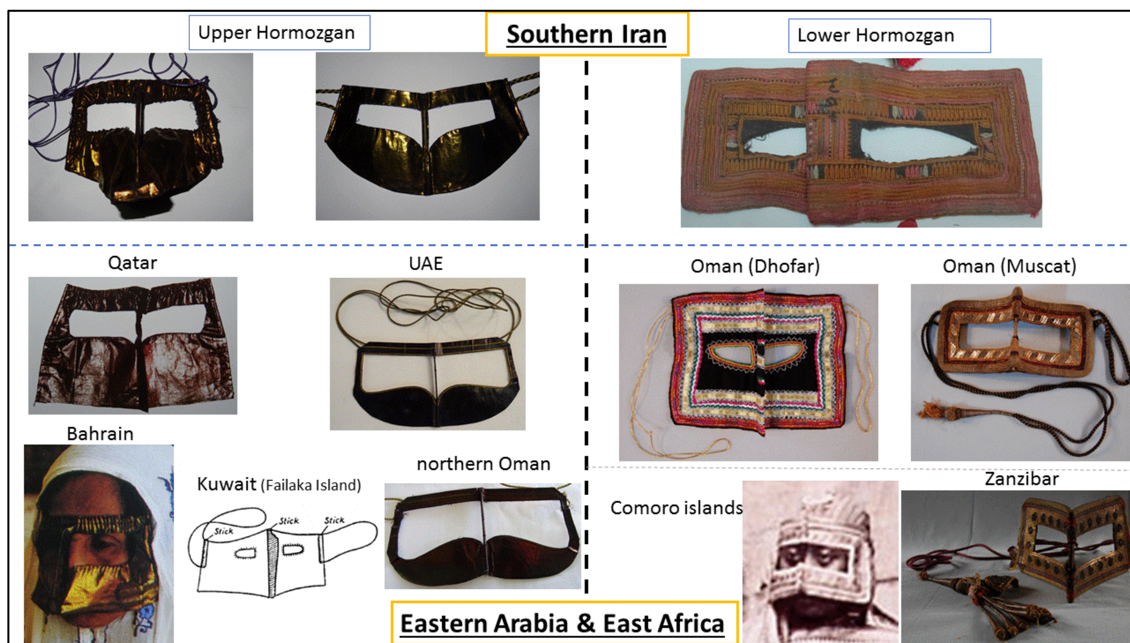


(Fig. 4.14) A map indicating the different types of masks used in southern Iran. Map produced by Nadia Khalaf based on my research data.

4.2.2 The Face Mask between the Upper Hormozgan and Eastern Arabian Peninsula

It is straightforward to visually point out similarities of face masks between the coastal areas of Hormozgan Province and eastern Arabian Peninsula, namely the UAE, Qatar,

Bahrain, Failaka Island of Kuwait, and northern Oman (Fig. 4.15). As has already been explained, face masks in these areas are classified into two major types: the golden/indigo face mask and the colorfully embroidered face mask (the Baloch and *saif malik* face masks). In this section, a closer engagement with the golden/indigo face mask worn in the upper part of Hormozgan Province of Iran and eastern Arabian Peninsula (including the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Failaka Island of Kuwait, and northern Oman) could facilitate a deeper analysis of the possible route by which the face mask was brought into Eastern Arabia from the upper Hormozgan.



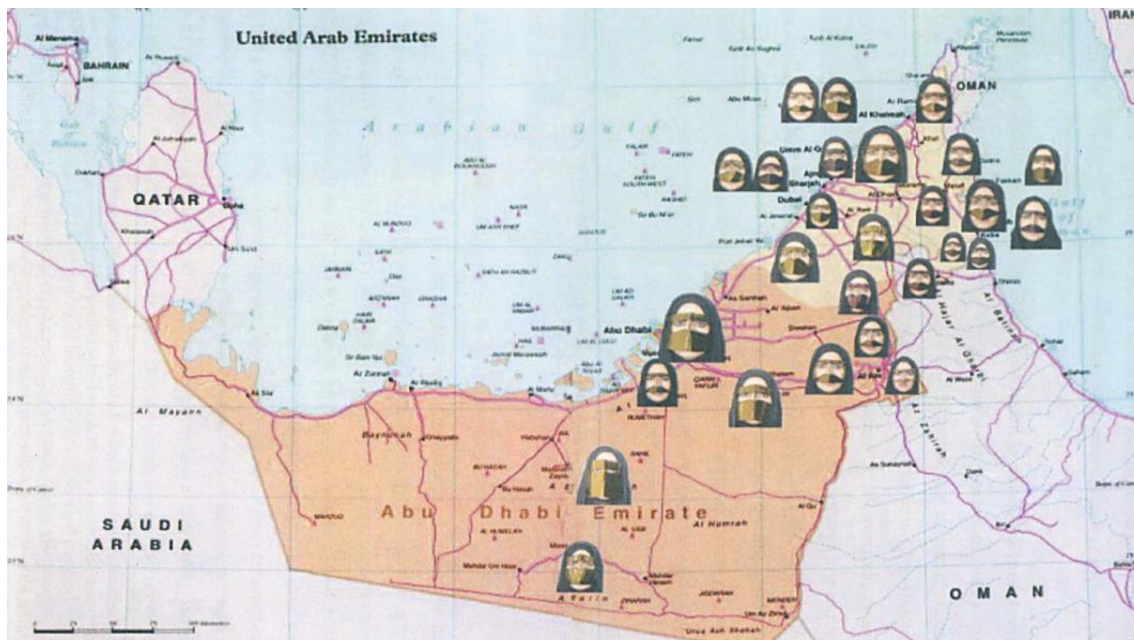
(Fig. 4.15) Visually illustrating the distribution of face masks in southern Iran, Eastern Arabia, and East Africa. Variously collated from (Charnay 1863 (Fig. 4.37); Dickson [1949] 1967, 155; Jenner 1984, 69; Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 144; The British Museum 2018a (Fig. 4.29); The British Museum 2018b (Fig. 4.30); The British Museum 2018c).

After the Portuguese withdrew from the region, despite other foreign powers such as the Dutch and British seeking to increase their power in the Persian Gulf, the Qawasim, who had trade and naval facilities, became a major maritime power in the Gulf with support from Oman during the eighteenth century (Al-Otabi 1989, 23-24). Their bases were located in contemporary Ras al-Khaimah, Sharja, and Lengeh, although they also

controlled Umm al-Quwain, Al-Hamra Island, Al-Rams, Buhabil, Ajman, Shinas, Khor Fakkan, and Khor Kalba on the Arab side of the Persian Gulf, Bandar-e Laft on Qeshm Island, Kish Island, Bandar Kong, Ras Al-Heti on the Persian side, and the area between Bandar Abbas and Karachi (by the early nineteenth century) (ibid., 25; Onley 2009; Floor 2010, 40). These places principally coincide with communities where the use of the golden/indigo face mask was identified in my fieldwork and by other researchers (Al Azzi 1990, 19; Chatty 1997, 137). Although the Qawasim were defeated by the British, populations around the Persian Gulf continued to interact and exchange goods under a British Protectorate. By the early twentieth century, popular trade routes in the Western Indian Ocean were established in Bombay and Muscat or Bombay-Karachi-Muscat from these trading points, and local people continued to sail to Bandar Abbas, Lingah, Dubai, and to Kuwait and Basra (Cursetjee [1994] 1918, 46-47). Many of these traders had families on both littorals of the Gulf and continued to intermarry, exchange goods, cultures, religious beliefs, and settle (Onley 2009; Manami Goto, field notes). As part of these continuous interchanges, the face mask was most probably introduced to Eastern Arabian, and there are some visual examples that support this claim.

In the case of the UAE, a map of the country complied with various different styles of face masks illustrates that the masking population concentrate in the northern coastal areas overlooking the Persian Gulf (Al Shomely 2016, 104) (Fig. 4.16). After the veil ban began in Iran in 1936, many ethnic Arabs, who resided on the Iranian shore including the islands, emigrated to the UAE where they could continue to practise their masking custom—Emiratis still refer to this event as '*kashif al-ḥijāb*' (meaning 'revealing what is under the hijab') (El Mutwalli 2015, 57) (see Chapterz 7 and 8). There are some cases, such as in Larak Island and Hengam Island, where people from an entire village moved

from the Iranian side and resettled in the UAE in order to either escape from political restriction or seek better economic opportunities (Manami Goto, field notes). A masked woman who was said to have been photographed in the UAE around the 1950s probably came from around Bandar Lengeh (El Mutwalli 2015, 275; Manami Goto, field notes) (Fig. 4.17). This is because the oblong face mask consists of straight narrow frames with very revealing eye holes, characteristics that define the face mask worn in the Bandar Lengeh area (Fig. 4.18). Conversely, this type of mask is not commonly seen in the UAE (Manami Goto, field notes). This masked woman was perhaps newly arrived and was photographed before she adopted Emirati styles of face mask, with the intention of integrating into her new community (see Chapter 6 and 7.2). This was often the case for masked women who emigrated from Iran (Manami Goto, field notes).



(Fig. 4.16) The UAE map reflecting different styles of face masks and their locations (Al Shomely 2016, 104).

(Fig. 4.17) A masked woman, who probably came from the Bandar Lengeh area of Iran, photographed in the UAE during the 1950s (El Mutwalli 2015, 275). Photo reproduced from El Mutwalli (ibid.).

(Fig. 4.18) A face mask commonly used around the Bandar Lengeh area. Photo taken in Bandar Kong in Dec 2016.

In the case of Qatar, it appears that the face mask was brought directly by people from the Iranian side of the Gulf because the golden/indigo face mask was found to be used by Persian migrant women who came to Qatar along with their merchant husbands; furthermore, it became common amongst urban or non-Bedouin women (Abu Saud 1984, 52; Al Azzi 1990, 19). A good visual example supporting this hypothesis is the face mask (Fig. 4.19) which was collected in Qatar, which dates back to the 1960s and which is now preserved in Moesgaad Museum in Denmark (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 145). According to Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang, this face mask was crafted by a female Persian seamstress living in Qatar (2008, 144).

When this mask is compared to the typical face mask used in Qatar, there are clear differences, which are evidenced in the shape of the outer frame and eye-holes. This is apart from the fact that masks are both made from an indigo-dyed cotton with added golden colour on the surface (see Fig. 4.20 for a typical Qatari face mask). The face mask crafted by a Persian woman is shaped like a diamond and has almond eye holes that are much smaller than that of a typical Qatari mask. A typical Qatari face mask is cut into a trapezoid shape and the eye-holes are rectangular, and therefore their stitching skills differ depending on the shapes they create (Manami Goto, field notes). I cannot, however, confirm if the seamstress of this face mask was 'Persian' as Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang claim. This is because many women who wear this type of mask on the Iranian side are ethnically Arab but hold Iranian nationality. It is visually recognisable from its shape that the face mask is identical to the one worn in the upper part of Hormozgan Province such as Bandar Taheri (Fig. 4.21).

As there is still demand for face masks in Qatar despite the decline in the number of wearers, women from the upper part of Hormozgan who emigrated to Qatar, such as this

seamstress, continue to take up their jobs as face-mask seamstresses in order to financially support their families (Manami Goto, field notes). The high-quality manufacturing skill of women on the Iranian coast, in places such as Bandar Lengeh and Bandar Abbas, was already well-known in the Gulf (Al Azzi 1990, 19).

(Fig. 4.19) *Burquʿ* collected in Qatar (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 145). Photo reproduced from Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang (ibid.).

(Fig. 4.20) A typical Qatari face mask, *baṭūla* (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 144). Photo reproduced from Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang (ibid.).

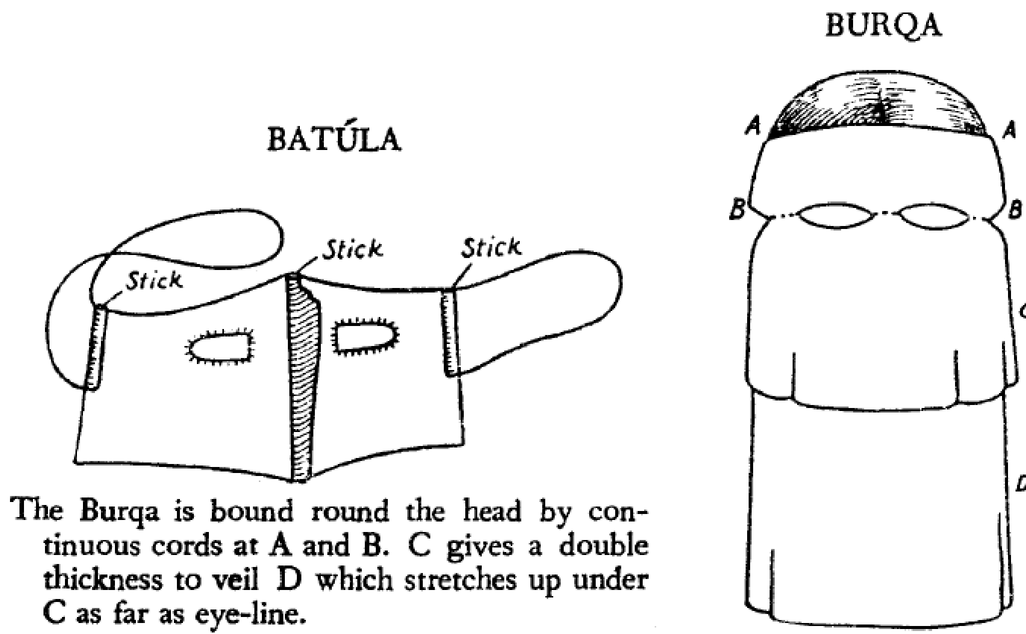
(Fig. 4.21) Masked woman in Siraf (Bandar Tahri) (Maʿsoomī 2005, 315). Photo reproduced from Maʿsoomī (ibid.).

These visual examples indicate direct interactions between the upper Hormozgan and Eastern Arabia. Women who came to the Gulf continued to engage with the face-mask tradition. Some of my respondents (84, 85) who emigrated from southern Iran to the Gulf

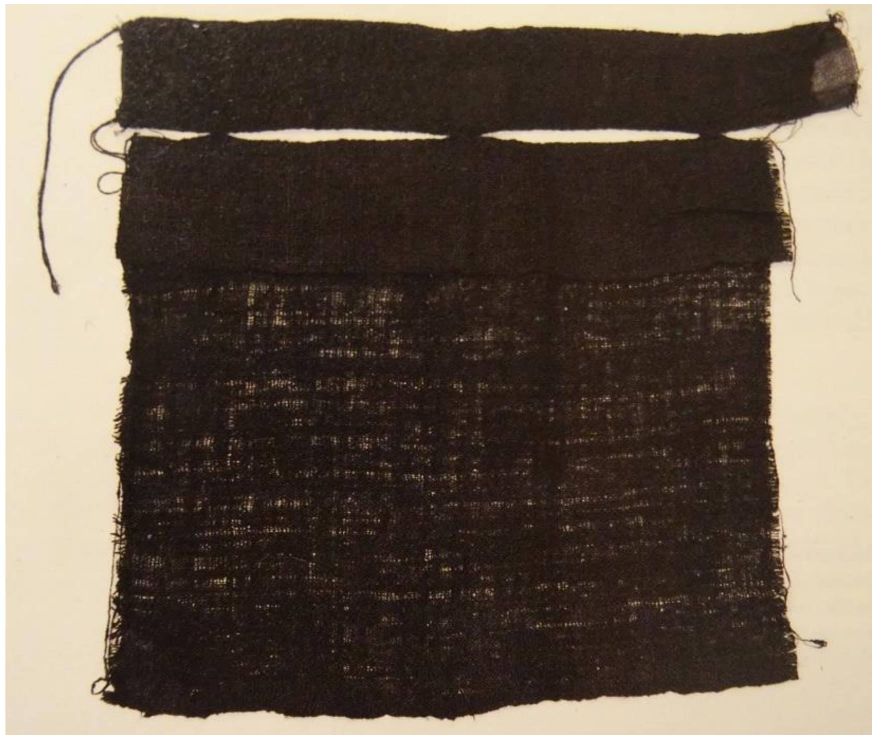
Arab states told me that they arrived in the Gulf states while wearing face masks from their previous hometowns in Iran; however, they then later adopted face masks commonly used in their new homes (see Chapters 6 and 7). This was because the face mask visually presented the wearer's personal information, and the wearing of an 'appropriate' mask was expected in society as a means of integrating into the community.

4.2.2.1 The Distribution of the Face Mask within Eastern Arabia

In the case of the eastern Arabian Peninsula, the types and styles of face masks differ in accordance with ethnic, tribal, sectarian, and social class groups. Harold Richard Patrick Dickson, who was a British colonial administrator in the Middle East and who gathered his data mainly from Bedouins of Arab towns in Kuwait between 1929 and 1936 ([1949] 1967, 9), observes that the *baṭūla* was only worn by women on Kuwait's Failaka Island while women in Kuwait's mainland instead wore a black veil (ibid., 154-55) (see his sketch in Fig. 4.22). Since the majority of residents in the mainland were Bedouins holding strong family ties with the Bedouins of the north and central parts of the Arabian Peninsula, cloth-type face veils such as the *burquʿ* or *bushīya* were used to cover women's faces (Scarce 1985, 76) (Figs. 4.23, 4.24).



(Fig. 4.22) Dickson's sketch of the face mask and veil used by women in Kuwait (Dickson [1949] 1967, 155).



(Fig. 4.23) A cloth-type face veil known as the *burquʿ* that is used in Kuwait's mainland (Scarce 1985, 77). Photo reproduced from Scarce (ibid.).

(Fig. 4.24) A face veil known as the *būshīya* in Kuwait, which covers the wearer's face completely (Scarce 1985, 77). Photo reproduced from Scarce (ibid.).

In Qatar, the face covering practice originated among urban women; however, in the past, Bedouin women, who traditionally did not cover their faces, adopted the veil on moving to the city as they encountered many strangers outside of their kinships (Abu Saud 1984, 51).[31] Qatar's economic development in the nineteenth century, which was sustained by the pearl industry and trading, resulted in more foreigners arriving in the country and, as a consequence, it became increasingly essential for women to conceal their faces in order

[31] This dividing line between village and city is also seen in Marrakesh. For example, one working-class woman responded that the veil was not necessary in a village because the villagers are regarded as one extended family. This did not apply outside the village because there is a mutual Islamic understanding that "veiling is sunnah" (Fernea and Fernea 1995, 243).

to protect their “virtue and honour” (ibid., 52). Abu Saud concludes that it was this development that motivated Qatari women to assume the face mask (ibid.).

It seems, however, that Qatari women in the south and north adopted different types of face mask. According to Ferdinand, two types of face coverings could be found in Qatar prior to the country’s modernisation: one in the north in an Al Naim Bedouin family and the other in the south in an Al Murrah family (1993, 316-17). The face covering used in the north was locally called the *baṭūla*—the golden/indigo face mask—which represented the tradition of settlers in the southern part of the Gulf (ibid.). This golden/indigo face mask made of stiff, indigo-dyed Calico-woven cotton fabric was also commonly used by women from non-slave families in Doha (ibid.). Women wearing this type of mask usually purchased it at the *sūq* rather than sewing it themselves (ibid., 317).

In contrast to this, the face covering used in the south was known as the *burquʿ*, which is pronounced *burqaʿ* or *bargaʿ*, and it was made of the same fabric as the golden/indigo face mask but without the lustrous golden coating, and a wooden peg was placed on the nose part (ibid.). Unlike the north, women in the south hand-sewed their own masks, with the exception of Al Murrah women, who used the veil type of *burquʿ*—a black translucent cloth. It is assumed that the face covering—the *burquʿ*—in the south signified a strong link with Bedouins of the eastern and central parts of the Arabian Peninsula (ibid., 299). Importantly, in the case of Qatar, the face mask, *baṭūla*, was commonly used by both Shiite and Sunni women (Goto 2015, 47-48), and this was confirmed by my Qatari female interviewees during my April 2016 fieldwork in Qatar.

On the contrary, in Bahrain, the face mask seems to show a marked tendency towards ethno-religious diversity within the country. This applies even though the face masks worn by Qataris in the north and Bahrainis (Arab Sunni) were identical (Al Azzi 1990,

20). It is unclear when and how the face mask first appeared in Bahrain, but Bent and Bent's record evidences the use of the face mask in Bahrain between January and February 1889 (Bent 2010, 8-11). In their book *Southern Arabia*, they present the face mask seen in Bahrain in the following terms:

> "The *battra* is a kind of mask, more resembling a bridle than anything else. In shape it is like two diamond-frames made of gold and coloured braids, fastened together by two of their lower edges. This middle strip comes down the nose and covers the mouth, and the sides come between the ears and eyes. It offers very little concealment, but is very becoming to most of its wearers, particularly if they happen to be negresses [*sic*]. On their heads would be baskets with dates or citrons, and now and again a particularly modest one would dart behind a palm-tree until dangerous animal man had gone by [….] Here some of the women wear the Arabian *buttra* or mask, which, while it hides their features, gives their eyes full play. They are very inquisitive" (Bent and Bent 1900, 16-17)

This description does not only illustrate the characteristics of the face mask, such as a projecting part of the nose and less pronounced concealment of the face, which distinguishes it from the flat cloth-type veil commonly used in the central and western part of the Arabian Peninsula. To the same extent, it also captures the racial and economic aspects of the wearers. The term 'negresses' may not indicate absolute racial or ethnic groups, but it suggests that, on the basis of skin colour, they have African backgrounds. This description also illustrates that the masked women were engaged in outside work, whether as sellers or carriers of products. Another point that can be extracted from this text is that the face mask has two functions in one: a "dual function of concealment and seeing; of hiding the women's features yet highlighting the beauty of the eyes" (Al

Shomely 2016, 48). Although Bent and Bent's passage does not mention any religious or ethnic affiliations on the part of the wearers, scholarship on Bahrain since 1960 has referred to more complicated relationships between the use of the face mask and the wearer's identities.

As was the case with Qatar, urban women in Bahrain wore a fixed face covering (probably meaning the mask) while village women would arrange their face covering whenever it was necessary (Al-Rumaihi 1973, 271). Hansen, whose fieldwork took place in Bahrain in 1960, observes that Arab women in Manama and Muharraq were the ones who wore the blue-black *baṭūla*—probably indigo-dyed—both inside and outside of their homes in Bahrain, while village women, as in *Sār*, never covered their faces and enjoyed a great degree of freedom because of their strict intermarriage habits which made the village one big extended family (1967, 131-32). As Karimi, whose fieldwork took place between 1995 and 1998, observes, the *baṭūla* was worn by either Bahrna (Arab Shiite) or Sunni Arab women and never by Ajam (Persian Shiite) or Hwala (Persian Sunni) women (2003, 120). Karimi further demonstrates that "those who wear the *batūla* share an Arab ethnic identity that distinguishes them from non-Arab Bahrainis, hence making sectarian divisions appear insignificant *vis-à-vis* ethnic unity" (ibid.). This statement suggests the wearing of the *baṭūla* is not intended to express political statements, but instead seeks to emphasise ethno-political identities. Although the political significance of dress in Bahrain should not be ignored, I am more predisposed to the view that the adoption of the *baṭūla* by certain groups in Bahrain was more of a natural process.

If the face mask—*burquʿ* or *baṭūla*—originated in southern Iran and was later brought into the Arabian Peninsula, it would be natural for the face mask to be introduced into Bahrain by immigrants. As a matter of fact, the Portuguese occupied the island of Bahrain

between 1521 and 1602; however, more importantly, the ruling family of Bahrain, Al Khalifa, of the Bani Utbah clan who conquered and has controlled Bahrain since 1783, was from Zubarah, which is located in the north of contemporary Qatar (Karimi 2003, 51; AlSulaiti 2009, 34). The insight that women in northern Qatar have used the face mask locally known as the *baṭūla* provides a reason why the type as well as shape and designation of the mask are the same in northern Qatar and Bahrain. Furthermore, there is historical and political evidence that supports this line of argument.

When the Al Khalifa family and people of Zubarah of Qatar attacked Bahrain, they strategically targeted Muharraq and Manama in order to bring their forts under their control (Abu Hakima 1965; Rahman [2005] 2010, 24). After 1810, they built their settlements around the Arad area of Muharraq, and other tribes and people also settled around the residence of the ruling family (AlSulaiti 2009, 37). At the same time, Al Khalifa made Muharraq their capital and established a commercial centre in Manama in 1819: "[T]hese settlements or neighbourhoods were distinctly identified based on their tribal allegiance and occupation" (ibid., 37-39). Some inhabitants of Zubarah later fled into Bahrain and settled among them (Zahlan 1979). The classifications of these new settlers were mainly Sunnis of Arab tribes who were either from the same Utub family or their alliances, or Shiites who specialised in important crafts such as sail makers, builders, goldsmiths and blacksmiths, along with slaves who settled in the outer part of the town (Fuccaro 2009, 22-23; AlSulaiti 2009, 40). The settlements around the residence of the ruling family were divided into smaller districts based on the type of crafts that people engaged in, and these districts were named after them, examples included Al-Hayaj or Al-Hayayej district (meaning 'sail maker or makers') and Al-Sagha district (meaning 'goldsmith') (AlSulaiti 2009, 40).

These historical facts obtained clearer meaning when I interviewed Prof. Baqer Al Najjar (175), a Professor of Sociology at the University of Bahrain, in April 2017. He clarified that wearers of the *baṭūla* are mostly Baḥrnas (indigenous Arab Shiite) living in the Al-Hayaj and Al-Hadaad districts and women in Al-Sagha district of Muharraq. Prof. Timothy Insoll (176), whose current research focuses on the Islamic archaeology of Bahrain, also told me that during his fieldwork in Bahrain he noticed that the *baṭūla* is still used amongst old Bahrna women in Muharraq. There were inhabitants in Bahrain prior to the arrival of Al Khalifa and their followers, and inhabitants who have lived other parts of Bahrain seem not to cover their faces with the *baṭūlas* (Manami Goto, field notes). It is therefore more convincing to think that the *baṭūla* was not adopted by Bahrna and Sunni Arab women to make a political statement of 'Arab unity', as Karimi states (2003, 120); rather it instead appears more likely that the custom of covering the face with the *baṭūla* was brought into Bahrain by the migration of Al Khalifa and their allies, and shared among people who lived and interacted with these migrants.

Although I agree with Karimi's statement that the *baṭūla* carries political connotations today, I disagree that it was created by the wearers of the *baṭūla*. This is because, first, the politicisation of the *baṭūla* was manipulated by the ruling family and the government to cultivate a material culture that would legitimise their power. Second, this attempt has been visualised by officially presenting only the material culture that coincides with the historical perspectives of the ruling family while neglecting that of the indigenes who are politically considered to be their enemies.[32] Today, masked women with the *baṭūla* are rarely seen in Bahrain, but the distribution of the *baṭūla* implies that the mask was an

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[32] For further discussion of this issue, see Karimi, *Dress and Identity*, 87-148.

imported product and custom from outsiders. Contrary to the cases of Qatar and Bahrain, where the face mask used seems to be unitary, Oman's regional dress represents its diversity, as embodied by its varied face masks.

In Oman, various face coverings are seen today, but there are also many women who do not conceal their faces.[33] Face masks, in particular, are however thought to be derived from two types of face mask—the golden/indigo face mask and the colourfully embroidered face mask. The former one has commonly been worn by women in the north of Oman, while the latter has almost disappeared, having last been seen in Dhofar in the 1990s. Because Muscat has been a geographical, political, and economic hub of Oman that links it to the Western Indian Ocean, both types of the face mask were recorded by foreign visitors to Muscat.

One of the oldest written records concerning the face mask is the record written by Lieut Wellsted who surveyed the southern and western coasts of Arabia, and paid an official visit to Muscat in 1835 (Wellsted 1837, 2-4). He observes:

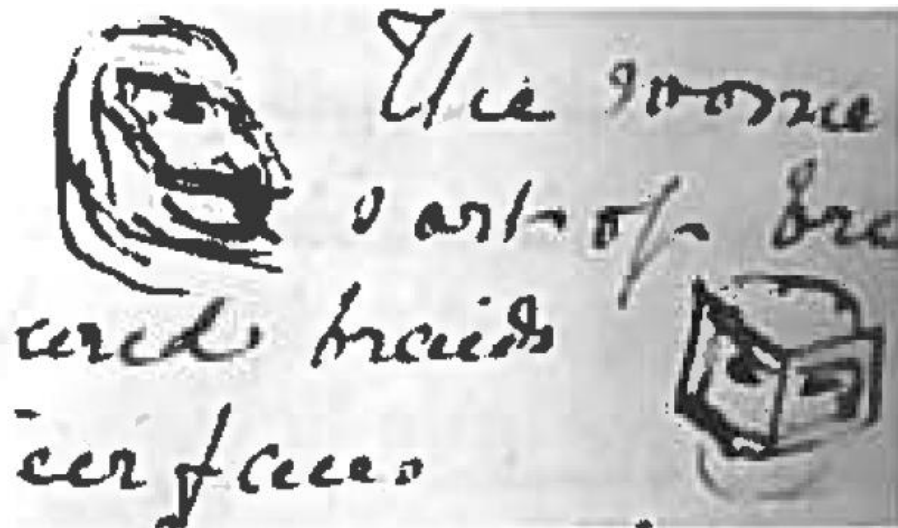
> "[…] females go with their faces uncovered; but at Maskat they wear a singular description of veil of an oblong form, about ten inches in length, and seven in breadth, embroidered with a gold border. In the middle, so as to cross in a vertical direction immediately over the nose, there is a piece of whalebone answering as a stiffener; and on either side of these two small apertures, through which they obtain a view of passing objects" (ibid., 351).

[33] Female relatives of the Sultan in Sohar did not adopt the *burquʿ* neither did aristocrats and settlers from Muscat in 1980s, and in main Shiite communities such as Matrah, Muscat, and Ruwi women also did not wear the face mask (Wikan [1982] 1991, 96; Chatty 1997, 138-39).

Another travelogue written by Ida Pfeiffer who visited Muscat in May 1848[34] also describes the way the face mask was worn by women. As reported by Pfeiffer, the women of Muscat wore a kind of mask made of blue-colour material, and the mask was attached to staples or iron chains which project the mask from the surface of the face—the mask does not touch the face (Pfeiffer 1859, 420). This face mask also had hole cuts between the forehead and nose in order for the wearer to see (ibid.). It seems that Wellsted and Pfeiffer refer to different types of masks in Muscat.

The existence of two different masks worn by different groups of people is further clarified by the accounts of James Theodore Bent and Mabel Bent, who also left a record on the face mask in Bahrain, after visiting Bahrain and Oman between January and February in 1889. Their description illustrates a face mask and the wearers in Oman. They observe: "The women with their mask-veils called battra, not unlike the masks worn with a domino [black people], pleased us immensely, so that we sought to possess a specimen" (Bent and Bent 1900, 66). Besides this note, Mabel Bent makes her own observation, and records it in her diary along with drawings of the face masks she saw there (Fig. 4.25). She further states: "The women wear a sort of bridle of gold-coloured braids on their faces: most becoming if you happen to be a nigger [*sic*]. No one stared at us or followed us and they seemed very quiet people, and altogether we enjoyed our visit to Muscat as much as we are disappointed in Karrachee." (Brisch 2010, 11; Bent 1889, n.d.).

[34] Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang state it was 1847 (2008, 131).



(Fig. 4.25) Mabel Bent's drawings of two different types of face mask in 1889 (Brisch 2010, 11). Photo reproduced from Brisch (ibid.).

The writings of Max von Oppenheim, who was in the Persian Gulf region in 1897, acknowledge the intimate connections between the littoral areas of the Persian Gulf by pointing out that the same type of the face mask was found on both sides. He notes that not all the inhabitants in Lengeh and Muscat were black people despite their dark skin, and many of the residents in Lengeh (Iran) were actually from the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula (von Oppenheim 1990, 319). According to his records, the women in Muscat wore small masks covering the half of the face with a whalebone in the middle and square eye holes, and the fabric of this face mask was usually simple black but sometimes decorated with red, blue, gold, or silver embroideries (ibid.). He further states that this face mask worn in Muscat was also seen in Bandar Lengeh at that time (ibid.).

In summary, there were two different face masks in Oman: (a) a face mask that was blue in colour fastened with iron springs or wires that was known as the *baṭūla*; and (b) a face mask that was a rectangular shape and brightly embroidered worn by women who were black. In Figure 4.25, the face mask of type (a) is similar to the upper left one, and type (b) is akin to the lower right. Figure 4.26 shows the actual image of two face masks

resembling type (a). Based on the analysis of the exiting literature, a face mask seen in Figure 4.27 has been used in Oman at least since 1850 (van der Wijk 2019)[35], which can be categorised as the type (a). The face mask on the left in Figure 4.26 has many points of similarity to the one worn in the eastern Arabian Peninsula (the golden/indigo face mask) up until today, especially the UAE (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 138; Al Shomely 2016, 49). The type (b) is the colourfully embroidered face mask and is similar to the Balochi face mask, which I discuss further in the next section.

In analysing the distribution of different types of face masks and the wearers' backgrounds in the cases of Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, this section illustrated how the use of the face mask is closely connected with the movement of particular people amongst these places as well as between the eastern Arabian Peninsula and Iran. These case studies also support the hypothesis that the golden/indigo mask was introduced to the eastern Arabian Peninsula from Iran's upper Hormozgan.

(Fig. 4.26) Two face masks collected in Oman before 2005: The right one was worn by Bedouins from the Sharqiya region (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 138). Photo reproduced from Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang (ibid.).

[35] http://www.omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d239_Omani_Masks.html

(Fig. 4.27) The face mask originated in central and northern Oman, dating back to the period between 1850 and 1950 (van der Wijk 2019).[36]

4.2.3 The Face Mask between the Lower Hormozgan, Oman, and East Africa

In a similar manner to the historical links between the upper Hormozgan and Eastern Arabia, there were intense trade and socio-cultural connections between the lower Hormozgan of Iran, Oman of Muscat, and East Africa, which was under the control of the Omani Empire between the 1830s and 1964 (Fair 2013, 19). The colourful rectangular face mask was one aspect that indicated this socio-historical relationship. As Figure 4.15 visually presents, similar characteristics shared amongst face masks of the lower Hormozgan (the Balochi face mask), Oman (*saif malik*), and East Africa (*barakoa*) provide clear evidence of this connection. This section therefore examines the distribution of this type of face mask, which suggests a possible hypothesis that the mask was

[36] http://www.omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d239_Omani_Masks.html

introduced from the lower Hormozgan to Muscat, and then onto East Africa. The associated meanings and use of this face mask in each geographical location are also analysed to illustrate how face masks have been adopted, modified, and fashioned.

The significant characteristics of these colourful rectangular face masks are: 1) they have a rectangular shape, covering the part of the face above the mouth; 2) they are traditionally hand-sewn with colourful cotton threads; and 3) according to Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang, they are often decorated with sequins, beads, braids, and pearls (2008, 138). These characteristics are visually identifiable in the photographed face masks of Bandar Abbas, Muscat, and Zanzibar (Figs. 4.28, 4.29, 4.30). In Iran, it is called *burquʿ* but people often recognise it as 'Balochi mask' as it is commonly worn by Balochis in the lower part of Hormozgan Province. In Oman, this type of mask is known as '*saif malik*', which literally means 'sword of king' in Arabic—this reflects the fact that the nose part of the face mask looks like a sword; meanwhile in East Africa the mask is known as '*barakoa*'.[37]

(Fig. 4.28) A hand-sewn face mask that is generally used by Balochi women in the lower Hormozgan, which was displayed in the Anthropology Museum in Bandar Abbas. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto).

[37] Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang explain this by observing that "the shape of the face veil is similar to the shape of the king's sword" (2008, 139).

(Fig. 4.29) A Muscat face mask—*saif malik*—dating back to the late nineteenth century (The British Museum 2018a).[38]

(Fig. 4.30) A Zanzibari face mask—*barakoa*—dating back in the 1920s, which is embroidered with silver filaments along with silver and golden sequins (The British Museum 2018b).[39]

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38 http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3345466&partId=1&object=23754&page=1

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As already discussed in Chapter 4.2.1, the colourfully embroidered face mask has been worn by Balochi women in the lower Hormozgan while this type of face mask was only seen in Muscat of Oman and East Africa where only 'Arab' women were allowed to wear it. Additionally, these geographical areas had strong links through Baloch migration and bilateral trade. Therefore, my hypothesis as well the conclusion of other scholars suggest that this type of face mask was introduced from the lower Hormozgan to Muscat and East Africa though these networks.

For example, there were some waves of migration of Balochis, especially men, from the lower Hormozgan to Oman, that were often semi-compulsory. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Portuguese hired Balochis of Iran as guards and located them in the eastern Arabian Peninsula (Deshti 2012, 155; Al Shomely 2016, 38). After the Portuguese withdrawal, the British were also involved in the migration of Balochis to the coastal cities of the eastern Arabian Peninsula. This had a political motivation: because the British wanted to remove the Qawasims who controlled the Persian Gulf at that time, they assisted the Sultan of Oman by providing Balochi armies for him in 1727 with the intention of enabling him to control the activities of Qawasims (Al Maʿazmī 2012, 77-79). While some of these Balochis settled in the eastern Arabian Peninsula, they also kept their connections with their home towns. It is therefore possible that these Balochi migrants took an important role in introducing their cultural traditions and customs. Yet, the migration of male Balochis was not the only factor contributing to developing the maritime material culture.

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http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3345466&partId=1&object=23754&page=1

An Iranian coastal town, Bandar Jask, where the Baluchi face mask has been worn, was an important transfer point for ships traveling between India, Iraq, Africa, and Europe, and in 1619, the English East India Company established its trading port there (Dashti 2012, 155). By the late eighteenth century, after Oman gained control of Jask, more active exchanges of people and goods began to take place between Jask and other cities and towns that Omani extended authority over (Walsh and Darke [2006] 2017, 18). These places included the East African coast from Mogadishu to the south of Cape Delgado in Mozambique, Zanzibar, Bandar Abbas, Qeshm Island, and Gwadar; as a result of these interactions, cultural, social, and economic relationships were greatly strengthened between these places (ibid.). This was reflected in the fact that intermarriages between Arab, Balochi, and "negrosa" (of African backgrounds) were very common in every stratum of society in Bandar Abbas (Floor 2011, 14), and this feature was also common in other places where these ethnic groups lived alongside each other.

In registering this diverse interaction between communities in these port towns and cities, Al Azzi suggests that the face-mask tradition was introduced to the Gulf Arab society by Balochi migrants (1990, 25). According to her, Balochi migrants and slave families in the Gulf had quite in-depth exchanges through business and marriage, and therefore women from slave backgrounds were the first ones who imitated masking custom, and it then spread first in the coastal areas before expanding to the rest of the Gulf (ibid.). Yet it is important to note that slave women were not socially permitted to adopt the face mask, and therefore the person who could adopt the mask was a woman who was married to a non-slave (in this case Balochi) man. Historical traces of intermarriages and settlements of these people can be still observed in these port towns and cities: for example, there is an African community comprising Somalis and Zanzibaris in the north of Bandar Jask

(see Figs. 4.12, 4.13), and some of them continue to practise their mother tongues (Somali and Swahili) and religion (African Traditional Religion) (Izady 2006-2016; Izady 2017).[40] Thus, the material culture and local customs of these trading ports, such as the face-mask tradition, were widely shared and influenced each other but, at the same time, were modified and fashioned in accordance with each local context.

For example, according to the historical accounts, women wearing the colouful rectangular mask in Oman were characterised as being Muscati or of African origin (Bent and Bent 1900, 16-17). However, at the same time, many photographs of women wearing this type of face mask were described as depictions of an 'Arab woman'. One of the photographs that Emile Allemann took in Muscat in 1898 is introduced in his article as "Arab women, Muscat" (1901) (Fig. 4.31).

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40 http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/GulfLanguageGeneral_lg.png; http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Iran_Religions_lg.png.

(Fig. 4.31) An Arab woman in Muscat wearing a '*saif malik*' mask in public, photograph taken in 1898 (Allemann 1901). Retrieved from a website of '*Oman and Zanzibar Virtual Museum*'.[41]

Other photographs of masked women in Muscat, which appeared in the *New York Times* Mid-Weed Pictorial in 1916, are also introduced as Arab women. For example, the caption of one photograph (Fig. 4.32) reads "[w]ith rings on her fingers and bells on her wrists—an Arab girl of Muscat" (1916, 15). Another caption further describes masked women as "[b]ehind the bars! Every women [*sic*] in Muscat is her own jailer—for modesty's sake" (ibid.) (Fig. 4.33).[42][43] While this Orientalist view seeks to depict the

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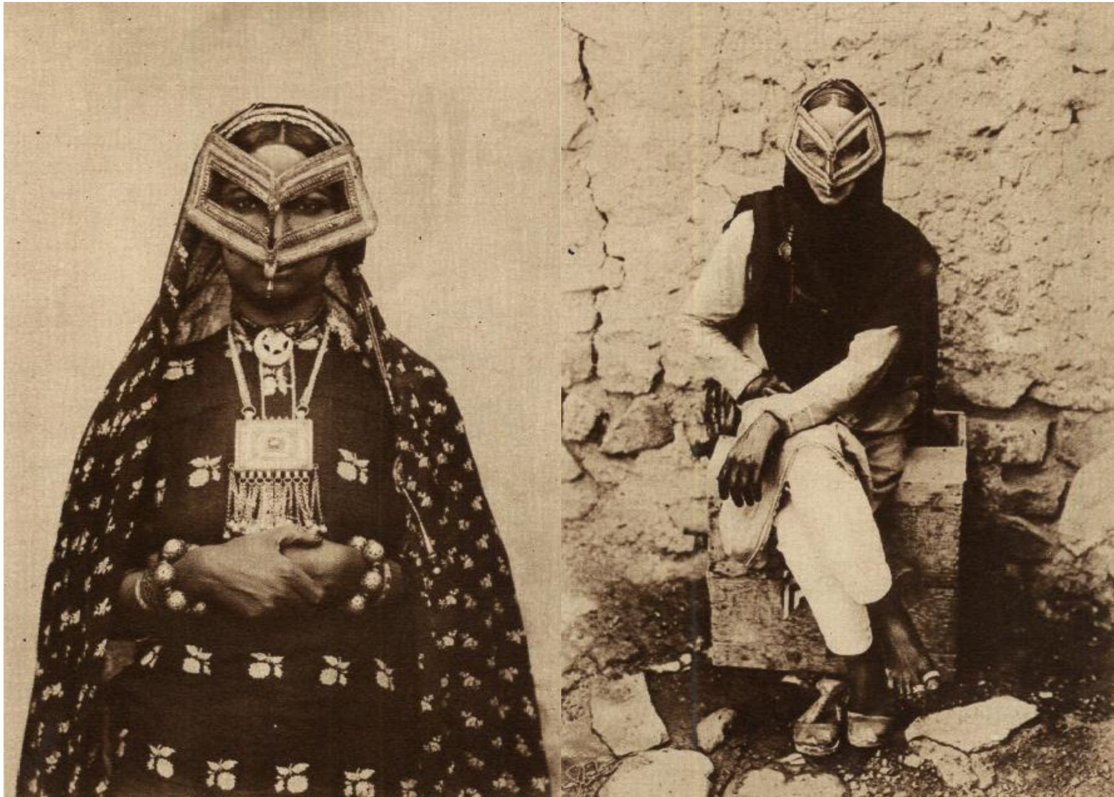
[41] http://omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d562.html.
[42] Stehlin-Alzadjali identifies the woman in Figure 4.33 as being from Muscat by referring to her shoes (2010, 65).
[43] The image (Fig. 4.32) was also used as a postcard and its caption reads "'ARAB WOMAN' MUSCAT" (Stehlin-Alzadjali 2010, 65).

mask as a symbol of oppression, this colourful rectangular mask was actually used to signify the wearer's prestigious social status. For example, the mask, known as *saif malik* was worn by Princess Salme (later known as Emily Ruete), the daughter of Sultan Said ibn Sultan, who controlled both Oman in the Arabian Peninsula and the coastal area of East Africa during this time (Figs. 4.34, 4.35).



(Fig. 4.32) Left: An Arab woman of Muscat wearing a face mask—*saif malik*—and lavish jewelries, photographed by A. R. Fernandez (The New York Times 1916, 15).
(Fig. 4.33) Right: A Muscati woman wearing a *saif malik* face mask, photographed by A. R. Fernandez (The New York Times 1916, 15).

(Fig. 4.34) Left: Princess Salme wearing a face mask known as a '*borakoa*' (in Zanzibar) and '*saif malik*' (in Oman) (Fair 2001, Fig. 2.5.). Photo reproduced from Fair (ibid.).
(Fig. 4.35) Right: Princess Salme holding a face mask, photographed around 1868 (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, Fig. 10.16.). Photo reproduced from Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang (ibid.).

In Oman and Eastern Africa, the wearing of the face mask had symbolic meanings that related to ethnicity and socio-economic status. In order to fully understand these connotations embodied in the colourful rectangular mask (*saif malik* or *baraoka*), the use of the face mask in East Africa will now be further examined. Though there had been trade connections between the Persian Gulf, particularly Oman, and East Africa, intense relationships were established when the ruler of Oman, Seyyid Said, moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar in the 1830s. This Omani rule of East Africa was eventually ended in 1964 as a result of the Zanzibar revolution (Fair 2013, 19; Patterson 2013, 8).

In Zanzibar, dress played a crucial role in visually indicating people's class and status, and a face mask was considered to be a symbol of prestigious status (Fair 2013, 20). During the Omani domination of the region, Omani aristocrats held the highest position in the social hierarchy, and women of the aristocracy wore the embroidered face mask, *saif malik*, which was locally known as a '*barakoa*', while slave women were allowed to use neither head or face covering nor possess any sorts of shoes (Fair 2013, 20). Thus, the face mask was considered to be elite fashion in the community, and to possess the ethnic connotation of being 'Arab'. Francis Barrow Pearce states that:

> "Arab ladies of the higher ranks of society keep very closely to the house, and never go out during the daytime. Her Highness the Sultana sets and excellent example in this respect, by frequently driving out, closely *veiled*, during the afternoon, but other Arab ladies, though generally anxious, as in other climes, to copy the doings of royalty, do not appear to have summoned up courage to adopt this beneficial practice" (emphasis added) (1920, 224-25) (Fig. 4.36).

The face mask was also worn in Comoro Islands and other parts of East Africa where it embodied the same social norm. For example, the queen of the Comorian island of Mohéli was photographed wearing a *baraoka* when receiving the French delegation in 1863 (Fig. 4.37).

(Fig. 4.36) Left: An Arab woman wearing a *barakoa* in Zanzibar. Photo taken by Gomes (Pearce 1920, 225). Photo reproduced from Pearce (ibid.).
(Fig. 4.37) Right: The queen of the Comorian island of Mohéli, along with an old nurse and a confidante, during the official visit of the French delegation in 1863 (Charnay 1863).[44] Photo reproduced from Charnay (ibid.).

In the East African context, the word 'Arab' was used to identify a person's father as being ethnic Arab, and this was a reflection of the fact that the social position and ethnicity of a child depended on the paternal line (Fair 1998, 71). For example, Princess Salme's mother was a slave concubine of Sultan Seyyid Said; however, once slave concubines became wives of the Sultan and entered the harem circles, they could adopt customs of *Arab* aristocrats such as the dress (ibid.). While slave concubines were allowed to wear the mask, there was a clear difference between the mask of concubines and the mask of Arab aristocrats. As the mask was made of silk material often embroidered with gold and

[44] http://expositions.bnf.fr/socgeo/grand/013.htm.

silver threads, the quality and amount of decorations further indicated the socio-economic status of women who were financially capable of obtaining it and socially permitted to wear it (ibid., 70). This can be observed through the face masks of Princess Salme (Figs. 4.34, 4.35) and of the Arab woman (Fig. 4.36) which were more richly decorated than the one worn by a concubine of Said bin Sultan (Fig. 4.38).

(Fig. 4.38) One of Said bin Sultan's concubines wearing a simple and less luxurious *barakoa* (Fair 1998, 69). Photo reproduced from Fair (ibid.).

The face mask as a symbol of Arab ethnicity and a visual distinction of a privileged position in society gradually lost its significance when slavery was abolished in East Africa in 1897, immediately after the abolition of slavery in Zanzibar. Fair observes that "[f]ormer slaves [also] asserted their status as free individuals by adopting previously forbidden forms of dress" (Fair 2013, 21), and the face mask was one cloth that they immediately adopted. By doing so, women or their families intended to upgrade their social hierarchy and integrate into society. One of the female respondents of Fair's survey in Zanzibar in 1995 said:

"During the days of slavery one was not allowed to wear certain clothes, these

> were the clothes of the Arabs. But, after slavery was done away with and the British grabbed political power, the Swahili and others started to wear these clothes. Now you felt like you had become one of the *mobibi* [wealthy Arab mistresses, ladies]. In the earlier days you couldn't wear such clothes, only the wealthy Arabs wore them. You could never dress like a mistress. Now, however, you could dress like a lady. … No one could stop you" (Fair 2001, 77).

The photograph (Fig. 4.39) capturing two women wearing *barakoas* in 1900 visually indicates this. A woman on the right wears a typical Arab aristocrat dress including a long scarf, long-sleeved shirt, trousers called *marinda*, and a lavishly decorated *barakoa* (Fair 2013, 20). In addition, she also wears some jewelries on her neck and wrist as well as wooden sandals. On the contrary, the other woman on the left does not cover her head with any kinds of veils, and her body is wrapped only by a single fabric and one side of her shoulders is even revealed. More importantly, she wears neither trousers nor shoes, and wears just a non-decorated *barakoa*. This illustration indicates the significance of the act of masking and, more specifically, its association with social value.

Later in the early 1900s, a face mask, *barakoa*, was replaced by *buibui*, which was made of black fabric and covered the head to toe. This cloth became particularly popular among former slave women as it covered the face and body, and served a better religious purpose of 'covering' women's beauty than a *barakoa* (which only hides half the face). Thus, the *buibui* was adopted as a means of "their families' growing respectability, adherence to Islam, sense of belonging within the island community and wealth" (Fair 1998, 82; Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 147-48).

(Fig. 4.39) Two Zanzibari women wearing different quality of *barakoas*, which indicates their socio-economic status. Retrieved from a website of '*Oman and Zanzibar Virtual Museum'*.[45]

The adoption of the face mask by former slave women was also seen in the eastern Arabian Peninsula. Similar to the social norms that were established in East Africa before the abolition of slavery, masking was forbidden for slave women in Oman and other Gulf Arab states. As Chatty notes, "[w]omen of formerly slave stock now also wear a full face *burqu*. Female slaves were not permitted to wear the mask in Oman prior to their liberation in the 1950s, only free women could do so" (1997, 139). Although in 1974, the adoption of the face mask amongst ex-slave women was relatively uncommon in some places, such as the Sohar of Oman (many of them also migrated to other Gulf states after

[45] http://omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d239_Omani_Masks.html.

the abolishment), it is likely that they adopted the masks of new communities (Wikan [1982] 1991, 96). Though a lack of quantitative data makes it difficult to state how common it was for freed slave women in the Gulf to adopt the face mask, the existing accounts appear to suggest that the former slave women's act of adopting face masks indicated their willingness to upgrade and transform their social status in Gulf society as well.

In short, the face mask, *saif malik* or *barakoa*, was not a sign of oppression in society, but was instead a cloth that women proudly wore to prove their privileged social status and wealth (Brisch 2010, 11). These social interpretations of the face mask in the context of East Africa and Oman and the wider Gulf places the assumptions of early European officials and travelers into clearer perspective, as the latter viewed masking as a sign of oppression. Fair also further clarifies that the adoption of different kinds of veils was "an indication of their [former slave women] growing empowerment" (Fair 2013, 24).

Conclusion

As Figure 4.40, which was created on the basis of findings discussed in this chapter, shows the distribution of different types of face masks, indicating historical, socio-economic relationships of the coastal areas in the Persian Gulf and the Western Indian Ocean. A comparison with a map of Iranian migration webs between the littoral areas of the Persian Gulf, which was created by Lindsey Stephenson (Fig. 4.41), further affirms these diverse maritime connections.

By combining my own field data with the exiting literature on the history and use of face masks in the region, it is possible to ascertain that the hypotheses I presented at the

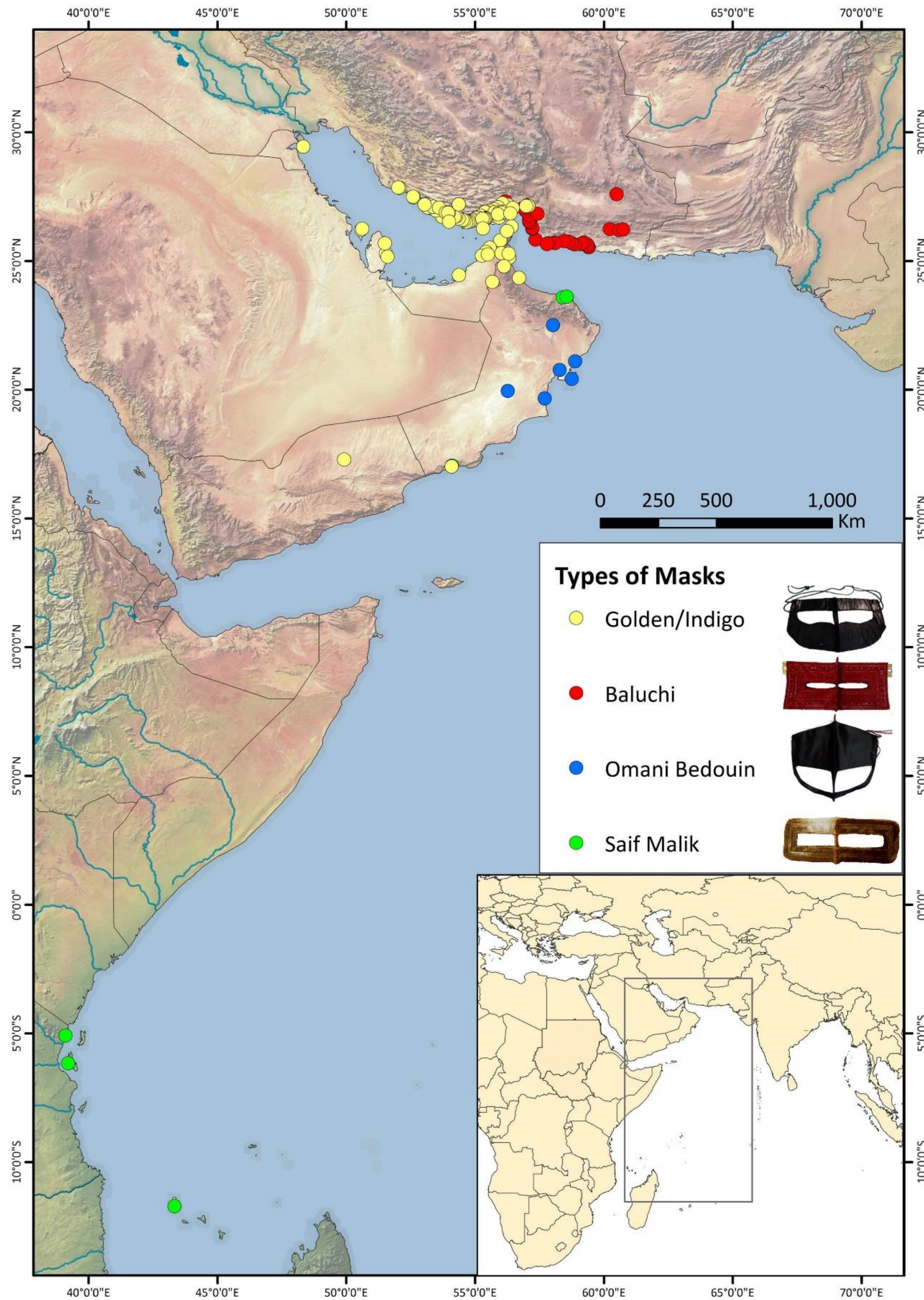
beginning of this chapter, which related to the origin and diffusion process of face masks, seem to highlight some relevant points and provide broader perspective of this regional material culture. These include the oral histories that suggest that the face mask first emerged at the time of the Portuguese occupation of the coastal areas of southern Iran during the early sixteenth century as a means of providing protection from harassing Portuguese soldiers; it also applies to the insight that it was introduced to eastern Arabian Peninsula and East Africa through migrations, trade, and intermarriages and settlements of people from the coastal cities and towns.

Face masks that we see today are the results of these historical exchanges and interaction of people, goods, and values. At the same time, face masks continue to indicate changes in the values, perceptions, and fashion of women in the region. Despite the early records of European travellers that assume the face mask was a sign of oppression, backwardness, and unprivileged status, it had functions of marking ethnic identity, privileged social status, and economic wealth.

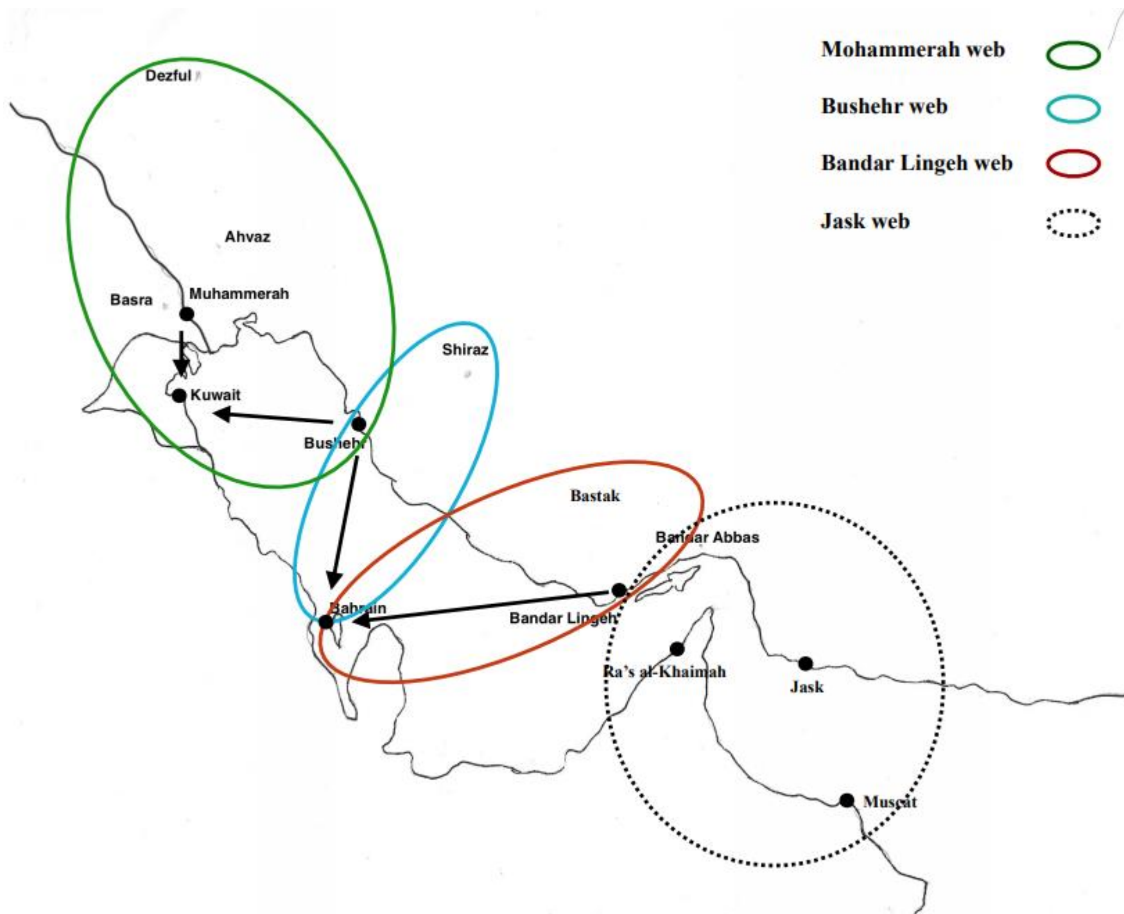
Yet if the origin and diffusion of the masks is to be assured, it will be necessary to undertake further study of diverse materials and resources. These include official documents and art materials such as paintings and drawings produced by the Portuguese and British on the Persian Gulf region. Chinese travel logs might also be an important source of information, as porcelain sherds of great antiquity seemed to be found in the Tiab village which is located 100 kilometres south of Bandar Abbas (Yassavoli 1993, 130).

While this chapter aims to illustrate the overall picture of the face-mask tradition in the Persian Gulf and the Western Indian Ocean by examining the distributions of two types of face masks—the golden/indigo face mask and the colourful rectangular face mask—

the next chapter will investigate the face mask and its relations to socio-cultural identities by analysing the cases of Iran's Qeshm Island and the UAE.



(Fig. 4.40) Map of places showing the widespread distribution of different types of face masks which I categorised into four types. Map created by Nadia Khalaf based on my research data.



(Fig. 4.41) Migration webs between the littoral areas of the Persian Gulf (Stephenson 2018, 59).

Chapter 5: Fashioning the Mask: Material, Craft, and Memory

"The clothes were not superficial, they actually were what made us what we think we are" (Miller 2010, 13).

Introduction

On one afternoon on a rare cloudy day in the UAE, we were heading to a local natural-history museum in Ras al-Khaimah that I had wanted to visit for two years. My Emirati friend, Khaled, and his two younger brothers, Hamdan and Ahmed, decided to come with me as they had nothing to do for their Spring holiday. I had passed by this small private museum two years before, but it had been closed at that time. I barely remembered its name. Although I knew it was in a residential neighbourhood, I had totally forgotten its location. When I told them this, they were not surprised and said we would ask around when we got to Ras al-Khaimah. I sat in the back seat of the car next to the youngest one of the three, Ahmed, who squeezed his chubby body as much as possible to the door on his side and tried to make as much distance from me as he could.

The scenery on the way from Dubai to Ras al-Khaimah gradually changed from countless buildings along the main road to the empty desert. I followed these transitions of landscapes while quietly listening to their 'brotherly' conversations with their heavy Emirati accent. Khaled's younger brothers did not know how to treat me because I was a woman from outside their family. When a break in the conversation occurred, I asked them if they knew any women making the *burquʿ* or who wore it. Hamdan, a sixteen-year-old boy, started talking about his best friend from school, Abdulrahman, whose Iranian mother used to be a local face-mask seamstress in Dubai. Having a seamstress as

his mother, it was Abdulrahman's job to ask his male classmates if their mothers would like to purchase *burquʿ*s from his mother as she wanted more customers. His classmates used to make fun of him and tease him for the fact that his mother was making face masks for a living. It became a bitter memory for Abdulrahman, which he only shared with his best friend, Hamdan. Hamdan was neither sympathetic nor tried to defend Abdulrahman but rather conveyed this 'funny' story to make us laugh. When I asked him if the younger generations of his age did not feel proud of someone engaging in the production of traditional handicrafts, which holds an important role in preserving and representing their national identity, he gave me a confused look. I did not understand what to make of his expression until we went to the museum and interviewed the owner.

Finding the museum was not as easy as they had expected at the beginning. It was only after going around the area several times and then contacting the owner on the phone that we found it. The museum had outdoor and indoor parts: tools that were traditionally used for pearling, shipping, and constructing houses were displayed in the open area outside, while historical documents, photographs, and clothes were inside.

The owner of the museum greeted us in front of the museum and invited us to sit on cushioned wooden benches placed in the open air while he served tea and coffee. Most of the conversations were held between the owner and me although Khaled and his brothers were sitting next to me without paying much attention to our conversations about the history and tradition of their country. The owner said his late mother used to wear the *burquʿ* and explained how women used to make them and how each one represents age and regional differences in the UAE. When I asked him if he knew any local seamstresses, he said: "No, I don't."

Shortly after, my male companions finished their drinks, and they seemed to lose patience

and went to see the exhibited objects outside. When the owner and I were alone in the open space, he told me that his mother had been a local seamstress selling handmade *burquʿ*s. When I showed excitement and asked him more questions, he became happy and shared his memories of his mother crafting face masks. His behaviour and reaction made me realise what it means to have a mother working as a local seamstress. The owner, who was in his fifties, was ashamed to acknowledge his mother's engagement in *burquʿ*-making in front of other Emirati men despite their younger age, as it indicated that his family's socio-economic status was poor and required the financial assistance of its female members.

There are still some Emirati women engaged in face-mask making as a hobby, and their techniques and knowledge are sometimes briefly featured in Emirati cultural TV programmes.[46] Although the exact number is unknown, they probably number less than thirty. Before the federation was established in 1971, seamstresses who economically benefitted from selling masks were considered to come from poor family backgrounds (El Mutwalli 2015, 88).[47] Similarly, on Qeshm Island, many Qeshmi women who became local face-mask seamstresses said their financial difficulties were the main reason for their economic activities, and that income from selling face masks still makes a great contribution to the family income. In both the UAE and Qeshm Island, economic conditions or the increasing unpopularity of the face mask (see Chapter 7) have caused many women to leave their jobs as face mask seamstresses. Consequently, their

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[46] For example, the National, the Emirati news agency, reported face mask masking in Abu Dhabi—see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdNg5YRaZks

[47] In the early twentieth century (1900-1929) when economic resources were limited, women were also expected to engage in various economic activities, and there was consequently no disgrace in these women working (al-Sayegh 2001, 23).

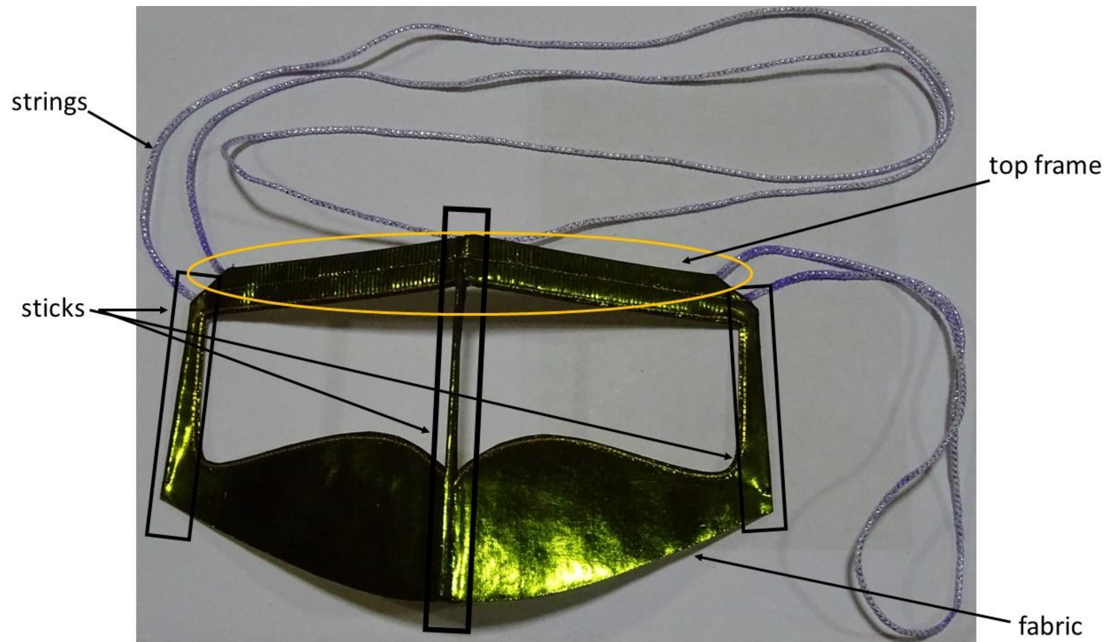
traditional crafting techniques and knowledge have begun to be forgotten. This chapter therefore aims to provide ethnographic documentation and analysis of the material and production aspects of this long-lasting tradition, and the developments within the craft over the years.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part identifies the individual materials and items that comprise a face mask. Because these materials and items have changed over a period of time, I analyse them in the context of changing social and fashion trends that emerged throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The second illustrates production of the face mask as well as unique crafting techniques and methods. It further discusses the change in manufacturer, crafting method, and price, which are integral parts of this living tradition. The third explores the living memories associated with mask-making. Each seamstress has her specific time, place, and surroundings when engaged in her making, and the individual stories can tell the seamstress's originality and provide insight into the professional characteristics embedded in her creations. Moreover, face-mask making constitutes a significant shared memory in families, as children sometimes observe and help with their mother's work. Such memories are important sources of oral history, vividly depicting living situations and family relationships that are becoming less common in modern society.

This chapter therefore provides in-depth knowledge about the material characteristics and making processes of this fast-vanishing craft. It lays the groundwork for further analysis of the symbolic meanings and roles of the face mask, which are discussed in the following chapter.

5.1 Sourcing and Selecting the Materials

The face mask generally consists of three components: fabric, wooden or plastic sticks, and strings (wealthy families also occasionally attach gold or silver ornamentations). In this part of the thesis, I identify the materials that have been used to craft and adorn the face mask. Figure 5.1 shows the main components of the mask.



(Fig. 5.1) Illustration of the face mask showing the main components. (Image: Manami Goto)

5.1.1 Fabrics

The fabric component is the most important element of the face mask, which not only characterises this unique artefact but also reflects diverse regional connections that stretch across the Indian Ocean. Analysing the fabric and its use brings out the intimate relationships between women, society, and this particular material.

The fabric is given different names depending on geographical location and sometimes individual woman. In the UAE, it is locally known as "*shellah*" (silk string) (Alnaqbī 2012, 32), *shīt khām* (cotton textile) (El Mutwalli 2015, 272), *ḍuu' al-jāfila* (surprised

bird), or *al-nīl* (the indigo),[48] while on Qeshm Island women refer to it as '*shīle*' (silk string). Alnaqbī (2012, 32) and Al Shomely (2016, 60) further distinguish the fabric based on its quality and explain that lavish and expensive ones are called '*sherbet* (light fabric)' or '*hussein*' while the lower quality for a daily use is called '*sahsootī*' or '*hachachey* (polisher).' [49] The fabric used to make the golden/indigo face mask is produced specifically to craft a face mask. Since the end of the nineteenth century, this fabric has traditionally been produced and exported from Mumbai, India to the Gulf region (Al Shomely 2016, 61). Before this, indigo-dyed fabrics from Oman may have been used (Richardson and Dorr 2003, 157, 344-45).

5.1.1.1 Production over the History

There are two family-owned trading companies that produce this type of fabric in Mumbai: Nimex[50] and K.H.B Exports. Karima Al Shomely (2016, 61) visited these companies and interviewed their owners in August 2014, which provided further details of the production process. According to her, both companies use white cambric cotton cloth made in India; by using this primary material, the factories produced different types of fabrics in accordance with the demands of the market. First, they dye a one-yard-by-

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[48] There are other names for this fabric, such as '*kharjāt nīl*' (indigo beads) (Al Azzi 1990) and '*maʿalum*' (landmark) (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 136). Different names have also been provided in accordance with the colour and quality of the fabrics. For example, one seamstress from Kalba of Sharjah refers to either red or green fabric as '*zaergh waergh*,' (blue paper) while another seamstress from Ras al-Khaimah refers to the red fabric as '*sherbetī*'; meanwhile the green fabric with better quality was known as '*Cambric*,' and another green one with lower quality is referred to as '*qshashat*' (hay) (Al Shomely 2016, 60).
[49] The original meaning of the word '*sahsootī*' is not known.
[50] In my personal correspondence on May 8th in 2017, Nasser Parvez Khatri (177), the owner of Nimex trading corporation, stated that the face mask fabric is manufactured by two factories, specifically Ibrahim Bawa Al Sabbagh and Abdulkader Al Sabbagh.

two-yard sheet[51] (one sheet measures almost 2 m × 1 m) of white cotton cloth in a specific dye recipe using industrialised indigo dye for about twelve dips; they then dye it green and then finishing with an indigo dye again (Al Shomely 2016, 62, 67).[52]

After dyeing the cloth for a total of fourteen times and drying it under the sun, the cloth is beaten until its surface takes on a lustre, and then a metallic colour is finally applied to the surface (Al Shomely 2016, 62-63). For the beating process, the factory of K.H.B Exports, for example, used to use a wooden hand-held hammer, 20 cm in circumference and 40 cm in length, which weighs more than 15 kg (ibid., 63) (Fig. 5.2). In order to reach the expected degree of sheen, the fabric required constant hammering for almost a whole day (ibid.) (Fig. 5.3), and the entire process to produce the fabric took approximately eight days (ibid., 211).

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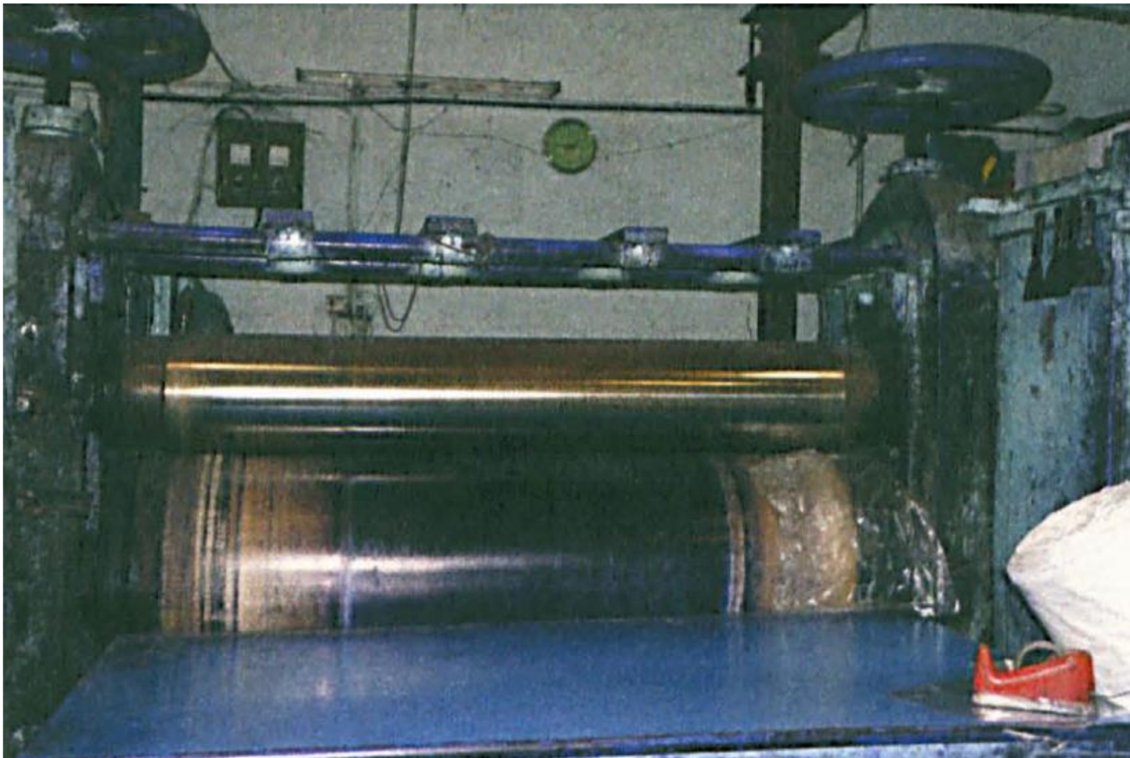
[51] One yard is equivalent to 0.9144 metres.
[52] Another factory, K.H.B Exports, first dyes the cloth in black, then ten times with indigo. After this process, they press the dyed cloth six times by using a pressing machine (Al Shomely 2016, 217).

(Fig. 5.2) A wooden hammer used to hit a fabric to make its surface shiny (Al Shomely 2016, 63). Photo reproduced from Al Shomely (ibid.).

(Fig. 5.3) An employee of the fabric factory engaged in the hammering process (Al Shomely 2016, 64). Photo reproduced from Al Shomely (ibid.).

However, such heavy manual work was replaced in 1954 by a machined press that has two big metal cylinders that enable the cloth to be straightened and polished (ibid., 64) (Fig. 5.4). With the help of the machine, they are able to produce 400 sheets in one day (ibid., 67). The dyeing recipes are kept secret within each family or are even known only to one person in the company, and this secrecy is particularly important as it is the decisive element in the quality of the fabric (ibid., 217).



(Fig. 5.4) A press machine which replaced the wooden hammer, making operations more efficient (Al Shomely 2016, 65). Photo reproduced from Al Shomely (ibid.).

The finished fabric is carefully folded into a small rectangle to minimise its oxidation, and it is wrapped in a very thin tissue paper to protect the surface from being scratched (ibid., 68) (Fig. 5.5). The wrapped fabric is sometimes placed further inside a cardboard box for extra protection (Fig. 5.6). The production usually takes place between October and May and stops during the rainy season as the fabric cannot be dried under the sun and the humidity quickly oxidises the fabrics, resulting in a loss of sheen (ibid., 67).

(Fig. 5.5) Left: A tissue-like wrapping paper to protect the fabric. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.6) Right: A cardboard box packing the wrapped fabric. (Image: Manami Goto)

5.1.1.2 Colour Variation

Although the fabric is made from a cambric cotton cloth dyed in indigo, each company has applied different metallic colours to the surface of the fabric, and this varies in accordance with customers' preferences and prevalent fashion trends in the Gulf at the time (Al Shomely 2016, 211-12, 218). Until 1960, both Nimex and K.H.B Exports only produced the fabric with a mahogany red colour (ibid., 66) (Fig. 5.7); however, when they produced a golden-green colour, it became very popular. Parvez Al Khatri, the owner of Nimex, observed: "Emirati women preferred the green because…green made them look younger" (ibid., 211) (Fig. 5.8).

Since then, after beginning with a golden-green colour, both companies have

experimented with various different colours while exploring potential demand in the market (Manami Goto, field notes). For example, the Abdulaziz Mohammed Taher Trading shop in Dubai stocks many different coloured face-mask fabrics, Mr. Abdulaziz (140), the owner, said:

> “The factories have produced different colours and brands and we have always worked together closely to analyse the demands. I inform them of the reactions and feedback from the customers, so they can modify their products according to the demands and trends. For instance, once a company produced a black face-mask fabric, but customers didn’t like the colour so even after twenty years there’s still a mountain of dead stock at the corner of my shop.”

After Nimex and K.H.B Exports learned that women dislike the black fabric, it has never been produced again (Fig. 5.9). This ‘demand-based branding’ was confirmed by one of the brothers who owns K.H.B Exports. He said:

> “When we want to try out a new version, we send samples to customers for their feedback. If they are satisfied, we give the fabric a name and design packaging for it. Similarly, if there is no demand for certain a brand [*sic*], we just stop producing them [*sic*].” (Al Shomely 2016, 218)

(Fig. 5.7) Left: A mahogany red fabric. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.8) Right: A golden-green fabric. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.9) A black fabric, which was sold in Dubai but that was unpopular with women (Manami Goto, field notes). (Image: Manami Goto)

5.1.1.3 Perceptions of the Fabric Quality and Associated Economic Status

While the companies manufacture the fabric and conduct market research by using their own methods, customers assess the quality of the fabric on the basis of specific criteria. Women, including my respondents, often claim that they can distinguish the quality of the fabric "based on the amount of indigo that transferred from the fabric to their hands: the less that came off, the higher the quality" (Al Shomely 2016, 70). However, Al Shomely's experimental tests of this theory, in which she soaked pieces of eight different branded fabrics in water and analysed the amount of indigo released from them by observing the density of the colour both in water and on paper, suggest that these perceptions are not a reliable way to judge the quality of the fabric (ibid., 70-73). In addition, she also sent samples of two different indigo-dyed fabrics to the American University of Sharjah so that the components of the indigo dyes used to produce the fabrics could be analysed. Upon the basis of these results, she points out that the components, while commonly used in the cosmetic and medical industry, can be toxic (ibid., 124-25). In fact, the indigo dye is treated as hazardous by manufacturers of the fabric, and the dye is accordingly prepared and used strictly for a limited time (ibid., 67).

Despite the belief in the correlation between the quality and the amount of transferred indigo dye, the quality of the fabric depends on the kinds of cotton and the types of dye used, and this is reflected in its price (ibid., 69). It is usually the case that the mahogany red coloured fabric, followed by the yellow and green, is the most expensive. According to Almusallim (1999, 33), it was previously the case that these different colours indicated the socio-economic status of Emirati women: while mahogany red was popular amongst wealthy women, the green was used by all other women. These embedded hierarchical relations, however, were dissolved when green fabric became more popular in the

1970s—as a result of the improvement in quality it also became more expensive (Al Shomely 2016, 61). By this time, the fabric had become affordable to all women because of the increased wealth of Emirati nationals.

Local seamstresses have also often taken into account the thickness and the absorbent property of the fabric, as a thin fabric makes it easier to sew and high absorbency keeps the brilliant sheen longer (ibid., 70-73).

5.1.1.4 Change in Price over the History

Throughout the twentieth century, the average price of the fabrics has also increased due to various factors. Firstly, the raw materials, such as indigo dye and cotton, became more expensive. Although the former owner of Nimex attempted to use a natural indigo dye for a while, both companies now use a cheaper chemical indigo for dyeing the fabric, for the reason that this creates a more satisfactory colour (Al Shomely 2016, 211).[53] K.H.B Exports had sourced the indigo dye from Germany until its price rose, and they then began sourcing it more cheaply from within India. The price of cotton has also increased because of rising labour costs, the impact of climate change and inflation (ibid., 212).

The expectations of the customers, specifically women of the Gulf (ibid.), is another factor that has caused the price to rise. According to the owner of Nimex, the number of rejected pieces of the fabric has increased because customers will not accept even a small

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[53] Natural indigo was used to dye clothing until the discovery of a synthetic organic dye with a chemical composition, which is very similar to the natural one used in the mid-nineteenth century. This new product was introduced to the coastal area of Oman from India in around 1863, and it continues to be used for face masks of different styles in the region (Richardson and Dorr 2003, 156-57).

blemish in the colour (ibid., 212). Accordingly, only 80 out of 120 pieces (66%) of fabric are viable (ibid.). This has caused an increase in the fabric price because the work done to create the fabric is very labour-intensive and has high production costs (ibid.). The loss during production therefore establishes a need for a high profit margin.

The increase in the price of the fabric has also been driven by a reduction in the demand for masks. Between 1970 and 2005, the companies produced around 300 or 400 pieces of the fabric every day and exported them to both the Gulf states and Iran as the face mask was essential to women on both sides of the Persian Gulf (ibid., 217, 212). However, demand has gradually declined due to the decreasing popularity of the face mask, as Chapter 6 discusses in more detail. As a result, production has reduced to between 100 and 120 pieces per day that are only exported to Dubai (ibid., 211-12).

This was confirmed by the local seamstresses on Qeshm Island, who told me that because the fabric is no longer available on mainland Iran, people bring the fabrics from Dubai and sell them in local shops on the island. Yet, because shipping from Dubai also sometimes goes directly to Bandar Abbas, a few respondents (1, 25, 29) also buy them there. As demand for the fabric has decreased, Qeshmi women are occasionally required to make a prepaid order to a vendor who then asks someone to bring the fabrics over from Dubai. During my field research between 2016 and 2018, a one-by-two-yard sheet of the finished fabric was sold for one hundred thousand toman (equivalent to approximately twenty GBP) on Qeshm Island, and was also sold for between one hundred and one hundred twenty dirhams (approximately between twenty-one and twenty-five GBP) in

the UAE.[54]

5.1.1.5 Branding over the History

Despite the decrease in demand, manufacturing companies in Mumbai have continued to develop new marketing strategies for fabric packaging as a way of keeping the market alive. Although the owner of the shop in Dubai acknowledged to me that sometimes the same fabrics are sold in different packaging with different brand names, thirty-one different brand names were introduced between 1906 and 2014 (Al Shomely 2016, 74-75) (see Appendix 8 for the list of brand names of the golden/indigo fabric).

These brand names, Arabic or English transliterated, indicate that the Arabic speaking population are the target customers, and these names are often associated with "feminine images and ideas" of Gulf society such as *Al-Zahra* (the flower), *Bint Al-Khalīj* (Gulf Girl), and *Malika Al-Khalīj* (Gulf Queen) (ibid., 69). The fabric that was introduced as the brand name "Necklace" in 1999 was in fact specially produced for the royal family for Eid occasions, and only one trader, called Quwani, was allowed to make an order on behalf of the royal family (ibid., 218). My field data also suggests that despite a plentiful variety of available fabrics, local seamstresses usually have their favourite brands and tend to use the same brand fabric in order to retain the quality of their masks.

The fabric has never been adopted by local Indian communities. This was confirmed by the owner of K.H.B Exports who reported that at one time large quantities of the fabric were stolen from their customer's warehouse (ibid., 67). The thieves attempted to sell

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[54] In April 2016, one British Pound was equivariant to 4,880 toman or 48,800 Iranian rials.

these fabrics but neither fabric retailers nor factories dealt with them and they were eventually forced to return the stolen fabrics to the warehouse from where they had originally been stolen.

5.1.1.6 Alternative Usages of the Fabric and Dye

Apart from being a component of the face mask, this indigo-dyed fabric is considered to be an effective medication by women in the Gulf region. Many women have used indigo-dyed fabric or indigo dye dissolved in water from the fabric for medical treatment. In tending to wounds caused by burns or even the itching caused by chicken pox, they soak the fabric in water before then softening it and using it to cover the wound. For problems of the inner parts of the body such as coughing, indigo dye dissolved in water is used as an internal medicine. Lootah (1999, 71) also states that the dye was applied to children afflicted by rashes and other skin diseases. In the past, when a woman gave birth, people would burn the fabric and place it on the navel string in order to cut it, in a ritual known as "*al-ʿāṭba*" (misery) (Alnaqbī 2009, 38).

The dye from the fabric has also been utilised as a cosmetic as it makes the skin whiter and brighter. Some women believe that it contains "the light of Joseph," and claimed the indigo stains "add[ed] to the light of the face" (Kanafani 1983, 65). In the past, a bride would apply indigo dye on the face to embellish her skin before the wedding (Fig. 5.10), a practice further discussed in Chapter 6. My interviews reveal that some Qeshmi women (15, 16, 20, 45, 46) mistakenly believe that the fabric is made of the bark of an Indian tree, and that the fabric is a natural material. The conviction that the dye has healing and medicinal benefits may have originally derived from this belief.

(Fig. 5.10) Al Shomely's short visual demonstration shows. She imitates a bride by applying indigo dye extracted from the face mask fabric to her face. This is done for purposes of beautification (Alhinai 2018).

The fabric has also occasionally been utilised as a means of protection from misfortune or trouble. For example, Emirati people believed that the indigo dye warded off the evil eye (*Alḥasad*) or *jin* (Balfour-Paul 1997, 160; Alnaqbī 2009, 38). They would cut fabric left over from making the face mask into either a bracelet shape or small pieces; soak them in water and then put them on the baby's wrists and ankles as well as over the eyebrows, the front and back of the chest, and the sole of the feet (Balfour-Paul 1997, 160; Richardson and Dorr 2003, 157; Alnaqbī 2009, 38). Additionally, some people, who were concerned that a white baby cloth would attract the evil gaze due to its bright colour, dyed it in indigo to avoid risk (Alnaqbī 2009, 39). These rituals are less practised nowadays, although the related cultural beliefs still resonate strongly amongst elders.

5.1.1.7 Lifecycle and Preservation of the Mask

The face mask has a limited period of usage and is unrecyclable. The time to discard the

mask is usually judged on the basis of the fabric's colour: at first it loses the sheen of the surface, and then the colour gradually turns darker (see Fig. 5.11). When it becomes dark brown or black, women often abandon it and make or order a new one. The usable period also depends on the way in which the mask is used and the surrounding climate: for example, if a mask is worn every day, within two weeks the sheen of the surface oxidises, and it turns brown. During summer, the oxidisation process tends to accelerate because the wearer's perspiration ruins the fabric, and the usable period is further shortened. Although the mask is not recyclable, it is possible to retain the sheen and extend the usable period: some women have traditionally applied perfume or cow fat and rubbed the surface of the mask with a seashell (Alnaqbī 2009, 39). Although this is short-term damage control, it saves women from the economic burden of constantly purchasing masks.

Since the late 2000s, a new black viscose or velvet fabric has been adopted for the face mask on Qeshm Island (Fig. 5.12). While the traditional indigo-dyed fabric is not recyclable and is becoming more expensive, the new fabric is suitable for manual work as it is not tarnished by sweat or impaired by heat. Women, especially those who engage in farming, prefer to wear a mask made of this fabric, but for special occasions they still wear the golden/indigo face mask.

(Fig. 5.11) Oxidised masks at different stages: the upper left mask has been used for approximately three weeks; the lower mask has been used for a month; the upper right mask has been used for more than two months and needs to be discarded (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo taken in Qeshm City in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.12) A mask made of black viscose or velvet, which became popular amongst farmers (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo taken in Borka Khalaf village in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

5.1.2 Wooden/Plastic Pieces

Another fundamental part of the face mask is the wooden or plastic pieces that supports the structure of the masks. A wooden/plastic piece (*saif*) is inserted in the middle of the mask in order to lift the nose part to support breathing and also to retain rigidity—this is called *al-ghaḍab* or *al-qadhab* (support) (El Mutwalli 2015, 274).[55] Traditionally, date-palm stalks (which have been found inside courtyards of houses both in the UAE and on Qeshm Island) have been used (Figs. 5.13, 5.14). In 1956, when the first hospital was opened in the UAE, medical wooden spatulas were used instead of date-palm stalks and ice-lolly sticks were later utilised (Al Shomely 2016, 77). These sticks were also introduced to Qeshm Island and are still used by the local seamstresses (Manami Goto, field notes). When Indian tailors began to take over the face-mask making business in the UAE in the late twentieth century, kebab skewers were also used for the *saif* part (ibid., 77-78). Today, as Bangladeshi tailors (123, 124) are the main face-mask manufacturers, they prefer to use bamboo straws imported from Bangladesh (Manami Goto, field notes) (Fig. 5.15). These changes do not simply reflect the introduction of different materials to the region but also illustrate fashion and a social tolerance towards the exposure of women's faces, as the material used has become thinner, revealing more of the nose.

[55] According to Morris and Shelton (1997 198, 330), in Oman, different materials are used for the strengthening, including "acacia and *Cadaba sp.* (*khemer-mir*) wood, a split section of an animal rib or a slice of horn from a gazelle or ibex" (after Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 136).

(Fig. 5.13) Date palm stalks used for masks, taken in Salakh village in December 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.14) A seamstress adjusting the size of the stalk to insert in the nose part of the mask. Photo taken at Qeshm City in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.15) Bamboo straws brought from Bangladesh. Photo taken in a face-mask tailor shop at Umm al-Quwain in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

Wooden pieces called *al-masāṭr* (plural)/ *masṭara* (singular) (ruler) or *al-ʿawād* (plural)/*ʿūd* (singular) (stick) (El Mutwalli 2015, 274) are inserted in each upper corner of the mask (Fig. 5.1). These pieces stretch the fabric and make it easy to attach the strings (*shabukh*) and stabilise the position of the mask on the face (Manami Goto, field notes). In the UAE, date-palm stalks were used for these parts; however, in 1975 they were replaced by matchsticks, which reduced the need to sharpen the stalks prior to installation (Al Shomely 2016, 77).

On Qeshm Island, date-palm stalks are still commonly used for the *saif*. Zahra (57) from Salakh village states: “We cut the stalks, clean and smooth them by whittling, and then adjust their length. We put a lot of effort into this process” (Manami Goto, field notes). By utilising free raw materials, they aim to maximise the profit from their artefacts.

5.1.3 Strings

In order to secure a face mask in a particular position on the face, the wearer ties strings at the back of the head to fasten the mask. These strings are normally braided threads made of wool, cotton, or even silver, that are made on the "*Kājūjāh*"[56] (Kanafani 1983, 64) and are attached to both sides of the mask (Figs. 5.16, 5.17). Red string is most commonly used and continues to be favoured by older generations. Generally, the string on the right side is longer than the left, and it is considered to be the best for varied tying styles and for right-handed people. The lengths can vary in accordance with the individual wearer's preference: the approximate length of the right-side string is between 30 cm and 75 cm and the left-side string is between 15 cm and 22 cm (Manami Goto, field notes—see Fig. 5.1). Women usually buy strings from local shops and markets or make them by themselves at home.

[56] *Kājūjāh* is "a support made by welding the tips of two funnels" (El Mutwalli 2015, 203). A small cylindrical pillow is placed on top of it to support different braid threads that are used to make strings (Fig. 5.17).

(Fig. 5.16) Different types of strings used to fasten the mask. Photo taken in a face-mask tailor shop in Umm al-Quwain, the UAE, in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.17) *Kājūjāh*, which silver strings are usually made on. Photo taken in Al Dhaid, the UAE, in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

5.1.4 Decoration

Although adornments are not an integral component of the face mask, they are prepared and worn for special occasions or by wealthy women to distinguish themselves (Manami Goto, field notes). Wealthy women usually purchase masks from seamstresses and gold or silver adornments separately from gold and silversmiths, and then attach the adornments to the masks themselves. Unlike face masks, these gold or silver adornments are repeatedly reused. When a face mask is oxidised and has lost its lustre on the surface, the adornments are removed and reattached to a new face mask.

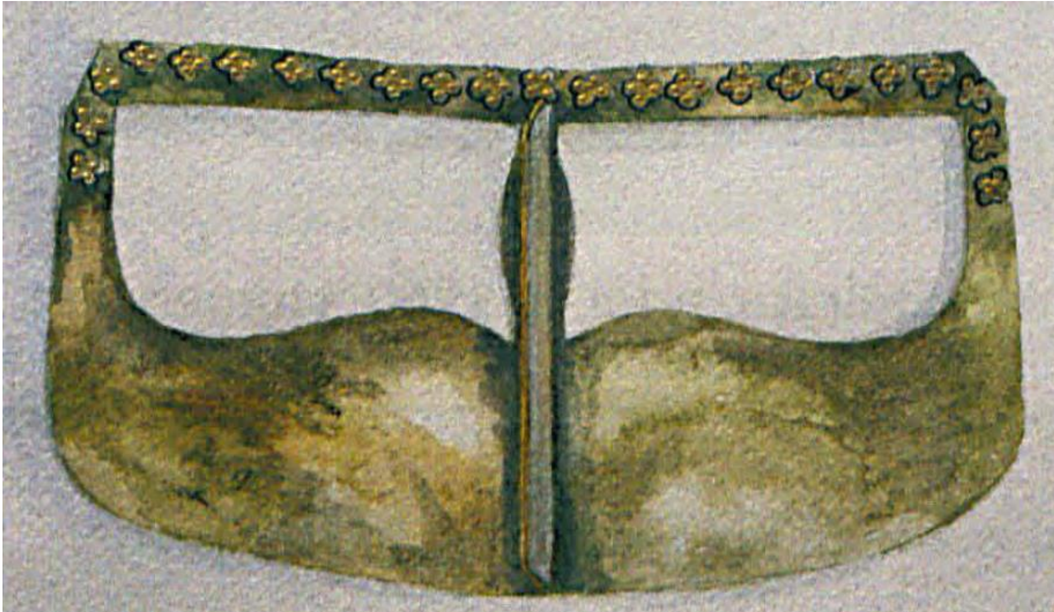
Up until the 1970s, women of the ruling families as well as those of wealthy merchant

families in the UAE, decorated their masks with gold or silver adornments (El Mutwalli 2015, 276; Manami Goto, field notes). One of the most popular decorating styles was to attach gold coin-like discs (called *hurūf* or *al-ṣafāyah*) to the top frame of the face mask. This type of mask is known as '*burquʿ riyāsī*' (principle or chief) (ibid.) (Fig. 5.18).[57] The number of attached gold discs varies: Kanafani (1983, 66) illustrates twelve gold coins whereas one that Sheikha Hamda bint Mohammed Al Nahyan wore on her wedding had a total of fourteen (Ghubash and Lootah 2015, 147). The typical Bedouin face mask decoration, in which the forehead section is adorned with silver, is the model for this decorative design (El Mutwalli 2015, 276). Adopted decorating styles therefore reflect popular fashion of the time, which is heavily influenced by neighbouring traditions and practices.

[57] The terms for the gold ornamentations seem to differ as in El Mutwalli's book she refers to the small discs as *hurūf* and to the coin-like discs as *mishakhīs* (2015, 284)

(Fig. 5.18) *Burquʿ riyāsī*'. Photo retrieved from an Instagram post (@Sultanibookuae, September 30, 2018).

Another style is called '*burquʿ bū nujūm*', in which the top or side frames of the mask are decorated with gold studs (*mishākhiṣ*), gold stars (*nujūm*), or sometimes crescent-shaped gold ornaments (El Mutwalli 2015, 276; Al Shomely 2016, 98-99; Manami Goto, field notes). The sewing technique used to attach these ornaments is called '*yanjimūna*' (putting stars) (El Mutwalli 2015, 276). The number of the gold ornaments differs in accordance with the size of the mask: the longer the top frame is, the more ornaments are attached, but one ornament is always placed on the middle of the top frame, which is also on the extension of the nose part (*al-saif* or *saif*) (ibid., 99). Some women place gold coins dangling from gold stars to make their face masks more fashionable and embellishing (ibid., 75) (Fig. 5.19).



(Fig. 5.19) *Burquʿ bū nijūm*. Image drawn by Al Shomely (2016, 99).

In the past, there was another type of gold ornament called '*al-naql*' or '*al-majilla*', which was however less common—it was primarily used to decorate the top of the head (Ghubash and Lootah, 2015, 34-35). Sheikha Ghaya bint Mohammad Al Qasimi[58] adorned her mask with this style. This gold ornament measured approximately 1.5 cm in width and 15 cm in length and was pinned to both edges of the face mask (ibid.) (Fig. 5.20).

[58] She is a stepsister of the current ruler of Sharjah.

(Fig. 5.20) '*Al-naql*' or '*al-majilla*'. Photo reproduced from Ghubash and Lootah (2015, 34-35).

While Emirati women have customarily adorned the top frame of the mask (Al Shomely 2016, 98-100), Qeshmi women tend to attach gold or silver ornaments to the strings, especially when getting married or attending a wedding (Manami Goto, field notes). These adornments also represent the wealth of the wearers, and they are still commonly seen on the island. Each gold or silver ornament consists of a combination of four plates, and they are often moulded into the shapes of chains or coins (Manami Goto, field notes) (Fig. 5.21). Each plate measures approximately one cm × one cm, and the most popular designs for the ornaments are coins, birds, leaves, and keys, although the researcher is not aware of any symbolic meanings attached to these designs (Khaṭībīzādeh 2010, 31-32). These different modified gold or silver adornments are selected based on personal

preference and are generally bought in Dubai (Manami Goto, field notes).

(Fig. 5.21) Different designs of gold adornments worn by Qeshmi women. (Image: Manami Goto)

In Dubai, these adornments were designed and sold at gold retailors; however, now there is only one remaining shop ('Modern Jewellery') that still sells these ornaments in the Dubai Gold Souk (Manami Goto, field notes) (Fig. 5.22). According to the senior salesmen of the shop (112, 113, 114), most of the customers who buy gold ornaments for face masks are Balochi people from Iran (Manami Goto, field notes).[59] In the past, women came to the shop by themselves to select their favourite designs; but as cell phones and social media became available and developed, they usually send photos of their desired designs to their husbands who come to the shop to complete the purchase. The demand in gold ornaments has not changed much as women tend to prefer the traditional designs except when they have particular designs in mind. When I visited the shop in 2018, the price of these gold ornaments varied between four-thousand and five-thousand dirhams

[59] Although Balochi women often wear a different face mask (the Balochi mask), they decorate their masks with the same gold adornments for special occasions.

depending on the weight: if the gold is around twenty-two or twenty-three grams, the price set is approximately five-thousands. On rare occasions, some women request a specially designed ornamentation for their masks. For example, one Emirati respondent (139) ordered gold adornments modelling the design of her favourite bracelet. Both Emirati and Qeshmi women craft or buy masks in their hometowns while buying the adornments separately and then personally attach them to the masks.

(Fig. 5.22) Different designs of gold ornaments specially made for decorating face masks. Photo taken at Modern Jewellery in Dubai Gold Souk in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

In recent years, however, due to the increasing price of gold and the high risk of theft, many Qeshmi women instead use imitation-gold ornamentations, which can be easily found in local markets (Manami Goto, field notes). These are exact replicas. While Emirati women have diversified ways to embellish themselves and demonstrate their wealth, adorning a personal mask with pure gold is still considered to be a status symbol and a source of pride amongst the masked generation on Qeshm Island.

5.2 Production of the Mask

5.2.1 Crafting Process and Methods

Making a face mask is a deeply traditional craft that requires considerable skill to master. Until the 1960s, most of the women both in the UAE (Dyck 1995, 34) and on Qeshm Island used to make their own masks; however, as some women became known for their crafting skill, masks were increasingly purchased from particular seamstresses, especially by upper-class women (Manami Goto, field notes). The hand-sewing process of the face mask is generally the same throughout the region except with some designs applied by an individual seamstress to suit the wearer. The process follows these steps: deciding the approximate size of a mask, cutting the fabric into pieces based on the size of an individual mask; making eye-slits and sewing edges; inserting wooden or plastic pieces into the nose part and upper corners of the mask; and finally attaching strings to the sides of the mask (Figs. 5.23, 5.24).

Firstly, seamstresses calculate how many face masks can be made from one piece of fabric (approximately 2 m × 1 m), as this depends on the size of the face mask. For example, in the UAE, because masks of the inland areas (such as Liwa) have tended to be quite large, approximately fifteen to twenty masks can be made from one piece of fabric, whereas around twenty-five or thirty *medium*-sized masks and around forty *narrow*-framed masks can be made from one piece (El Mutwalli 2015, 273; Al Shomely 2016, 212; Manami Goto, field notes). Conversely, on Qeshm Island, although the size and shape of the mask varies depending on the village, between twenty to thirty masks can be produced from one piece of fabric (Manami Goto, field notes).

Secondly, after the fabric is cut into the required number of equally-sized rectangular pieces, a frame of the previously-worn face mask is outlined, and the outer-edge is cut to shape. If there is no specific shape to follow, the rectangular piece of fabric is folded in half and a straight line is sewn approximately two cm from the centre where the wooden/plastic *saif* will later be inserted.

Following this, an eye slit, called *kharajat nīl* or *al-ghardha* (*ghargha al-ʿain*) (eye slit) (El Mutwalli 2015, 274), is made by using medium-sized scissors. The size of the eye-slit differs depending on the age of the wearer (Manami Goto, field notes). When a slit is made for the eye-area, the folded fabric is opened out and reversed to rub a solid soap on the inner edge of the eye slits. Many seamstresses prefer a specific red soap called 'Lifebuoy' as it is easy to apply and quickly softens the fabric to make it easier for the needle to go through the fabric (Manami Goto, field notes). Once the edges of both sides of the eye slits are softened with soap, the edges are rolled inside and sewn up. After each sewing session, the stitching is rubbed with a seashell or glass ball, called a *maṣqala* (glass ball), to straighten it out (Alnaqbī 2009, 35) (see Figs. 5.25, 5.26). Many respondents call this process "ironing" as it not only reduces the wrinkles in the fabric but also gives more gloss to its surface.

If the mask does not follow a certain model or previously-made mask, the seamstress will cut the lower part covering the cheeks (known as *al-khudūd* (cheek)) (El Mutwalli 2015, 274; Manami Goto, field notes). Once the eye parts are completed, the next stage is to design the top frame, known as the *khaṭ al-ḥājib* (eyebrow line), which covers the eyebrows and part of the forehead (El Mutwalli 2015, 274). To be more fashionable or contemporary, women pleat the top frame and sew it with a running stitch. In 1988, a special machine with two notched cylinders was introduced to the UAE—by inserting a

piece of fabric in the part where the cylinders engage, the fabric became pleated, albeit superficially, on the surface (Al Shomely 2016, 90). One respondent (130) in Al Ain bought a machine for 2500 AED (approximately 520 GBP)[60] a few years ago (Manami Goto, field notes). A number of machines were later brought to Qeshm Island and some women began using them, although the majority of women still make the pleats by hand (ibid.).

After designing the top frame, both top outer corners of the frame are diagonally-folded inwards; after match sticks or stalks of a tree are inserted into the folded part, the edges are sewn together to fix the sticks or stalks. Once the top frame of the mask is completed, the top of the nose part is sewn together, and then a wooden/plastic stick is inserted. The length of the wood/plastic stick is adjusted and cut accordingly, and then the edge of the nose part is sewn down to secure it. Finally, strings are sewn in each upper corner of the mask on the back (Fig. 5.28). Both ends of a piece of string (different in length) are sewn on each corner: a longer loop on the right-hand side and a shorter loop on the left-hand side.

In the past, women also used to sew a piece of fabric to the back of the top frame of the mask in order to absorb perspiration (Manami Goto, field notes) (Fig. 5.26). However, they purposely left the lower part of the fabric uncovered and allowed it to leave an indigo-dye stain on their face, as it was believed that this moistened and whitened the skin. Nevertheless, as cosmetics became more widely available, and the indigo stains fell out of favour, tapes were stuck on the back of the mask, in order to prevent the indigo dye

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[60] All currency values referenced in this thesis are accurate as of March 2018.

from staining the face (ibid.) (Figs. 5.28, 5.29).

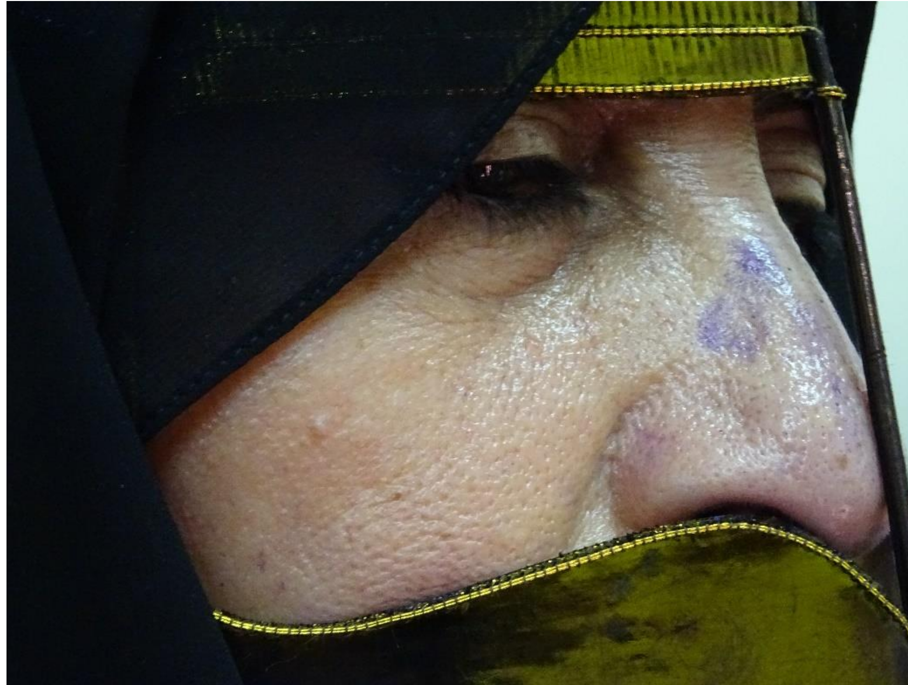
(Fig. 5.23) Uncut fabric and rectangular pieces of fabric based on a size of an individual mask (left photo); in the photo on the right, an eye-slit is made in the fabric (right photo). Photos taken in Al Dhaid in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.24) In the photo on the left, soap is applied on the edges of the eye slits; in the photo on the right, the edges of the eye slits are then carefully sewn using a needle and black thread. Photos taken in Al Dhaid in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.25) Left: A seashell or *maṣqala*. A shell of cypraea grayana is commonly used to straighten the fabric of a face mask. Photo taken at Sharjah Heritage Museum in March 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 5.26) Right: A glass ball used as an alternative to a seashell and a face mask. An extra fabric is attached to the top frame of the mask to absorb sweat. Photo taken at Sharjah Heritage Museum in March 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.27) The photo on the left provides a front view of a finished mask; the photo on the right provides a reverse view of the same mask, which was made by hand on Qeshm Island. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.28) The photo on the left provides a frontal view of a finished mask; the photo on the right provides a reverse view of the same mask, which was made by a sewing machine in the UAE. (Image: Manami Goto)



(Fig. 5.29) An indigo stain on the nose of a facemask wearer. Photo taken in Fujairah, the UAE, in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

5.2.2 Locations and Tools

This manufacturing process often takes place in a cool location, such as near the door, by a window, or under an air-conditioning unit, and it stops when there is rain (Manami Goto, field notes). Women also ensure that they dry their hands before touching the fabric as water and humidity can reduce the sheen of the material and easily pick up the indigo dye (Fig. 5.30). In the UAE, many Bangladeshi face-mask tailors live in Al Ain, an inner desert area, as the climate is much drier compared to other coastal cities in the country, and this makes it ideally suited to crafting these masks (ibid).

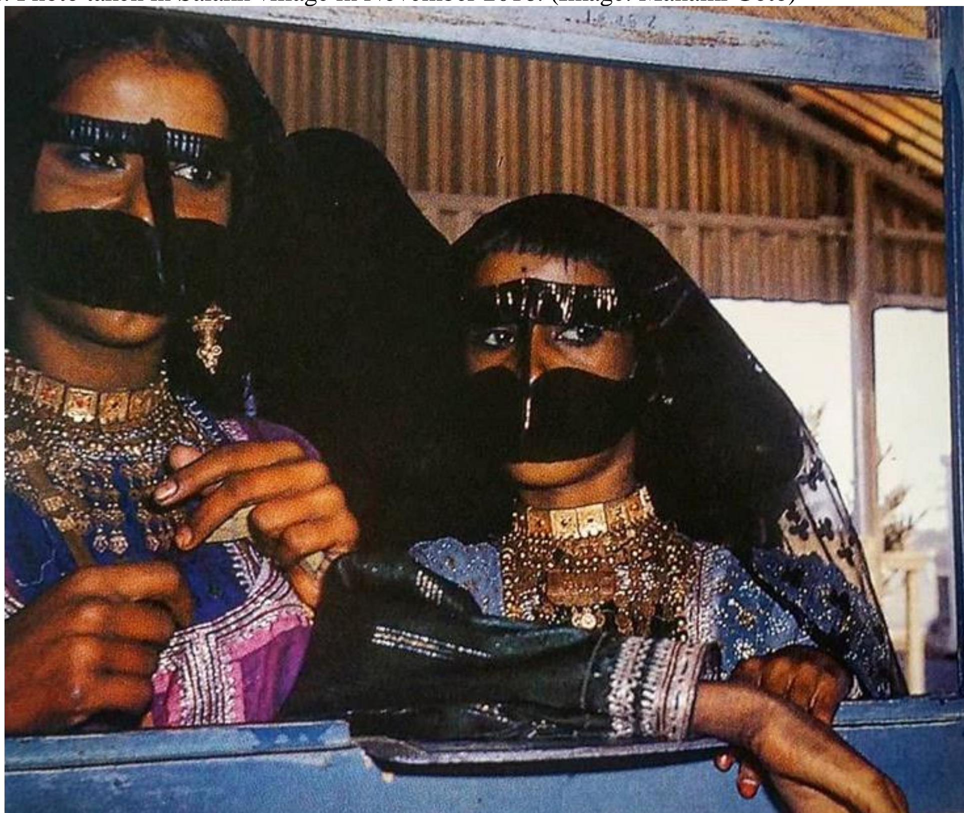
(Fig. 5.30) Indigo-stained hands of a local seamstress. Photo taken in Fujairah, the UAE, in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

Seamstresses also have specific scissors and needles in different sizes to craft each face mask, and they are often stored in an upcycled metal-sweet tin along with other tools required for the crafting (ibid.) (Fig. 5.31). Some of the women also allocate certain clothes for the making of face masks, as the indigo dye from the fabric can frequently leave stains on their clothes and will not generally wash out. The difficulty of handling the facemask fabric has also been acknowledged by Dyck (1995, 34), with reference to the blue-painted wall of the hospital in Al Ain (Fig. 5.32):

> "Everything they touched turned a purple-blue, too. Consequently, it was decided to paint the doors of the hospital a deep blue, so that the *neal* [indigo dye] wouldn't show. The women would have this blue colour all over their clothes as well."

Figure 5.32 provides more insight in this regard. When a face mask is completed, it is therefore usually wrapped in tissue paper or thin paper. In the UAE, it is placed in a small plastic bag and kept in a sweet tin (Manami Goto, field notes—see Figs 5.33, 5.34).

(Fig. 5.31) Various making tools used by a seamstress—soap, tape, an ice-lolly stick, black thread, and scissors. Photo taken in Salakh village in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)



(Fig. 5.32) Two Emirati women photographed with the blue-painted windows at the hospital in Al Ain: this photo was taken in 1964 (Dyck 1995, 34).

(Fig. 5.33) A finished mask wrapped in a tissue-like paper to prevent its dye from staining. Photo taken in Al Dhaid, the UAE, in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 5.34) Completed masks and other masking tools kept in a metal sweet tin. Photo taken at Salakh village in December 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

5.2.3 Changes in Manufacturer, Production Methods, and Price

The crafting skills related to mask-making were often learnt by observing other women producing the mask and then asking questions. Many respondents said they went personally to their family or neighbours to acquire the skill, and this clarified that becoming a seamstress was not always done through the family business (Manami Goto, field notes). Some women even paid a commission to well-known seamstresses to learn more advanced techniques of mask-making. These included more complex stitching or techniques of the *saif* making and insertion.

During the training period, girls used alternative materials as the indigo-dyed fabric is too expensive to be wasted. For example, women in Khor Fakkan used to practise on leaves of the sea-almond tree (Terminalia catappa) and were trained to tear them into the shape of the mask in order to develop a sense of its construction before using scissors (Al Shomely 2016, 85) (Fig. 5.35). In the mid-twentieth century, when cement was widely distributed to build houses in the UAE, some women began using brown-coloured cement paper-sacks for practice (ibid.). Additionally, with the opening of the girls' schools and the launch of newspapers, notebooks and newspapers also became common in training (ibid., 85-86).

(Fig. 5.35) A leaf of the sea almond tree torn in the shape of a mask. It was used for the purpose of practice (Al Shomely 2016, 85). Photo reproduced from Al Shomely (ibid.).

With the introduction of the hand-operated sewing machine in the UAE in 1960, the hand-sewing process has gradually been replaced by machine (Al Shomely 2016, 89). In fact, some of my Emirati respondents (106, 127, 130, 132) recalled that women started sewing masks with the machines in 1986. Additionally, Dr. Reem El Mutwalli (166) said, during a personal interview with me, that in the 1980s Indian housemaids who lived with Arab families in the UAE began mask-making to earn extra money. Since the early 1990s, Filipino men also joined the market and their delicate work was appreciated by local women who were no longer financially required to work as face-mask seamstresses and who gradually left this form of employment (Reem El Mutwalli, pers. comm). At the same time, Bangladeshis became interested in the market and have industrialised the craft by using sewing machines (Manami Goto, field notes) (Fig. 5.36). Today they are the main producers of the mask in the region, distributing masks to Qatar, Oman, and even some parts of southern Iran (ibid.). Interestingly, Qeshmi women tend to value factory-made face masks imported from Dubai more than hand-made masks that are locally

produced. They said that factory-made masks are more defined and look beautiful, and it is therefore more prestigious to wear them, for the reason that no-one makes masks with a machine on the island (ibid.). Such trends have been noticed elsewhere—for example, Maria T. O'Shea (1996) references it in relation to Kurdish costumes.

(Fig. 5.36) A Bangladeshi tailor using a sewing machine to produce masks in his shop in Umm al-Quwain in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

The price of the face mask differs depending on an individual seamstress, and it has changed over time due to the rise in the cost of raw materials (see Chapter 5.1). When deciding the price, seamstresses normally consider the detail of the design, along with a number of other factors, including whether it requires specific crafting techniques; the cost of raw materials: the choice of a fabric; the type of wooden or plastic pieces; and the time required to complete the mask (Manami Goto, field notes). Customers can therefore request and amend these options and negotiate the price of their ordered masks with the seamstresses.

In the UAE, prior to the 1950s, one mask was sold for one or two dirhams; however, by the 1970s the price rose to approximately ten dirhams (ibid.). Hessa (130), who was a well-known seamstress in Al Ain, used to produce a mask using a sewing machine in approximately fifteen minutes, and since 1986 she had sold two or three masks for a hundred dirhams (ibid.). When women attempted to further reduce the price, she used to tell them that “If you think my work is better than others, you pay the price.” She proudly recalled that many members of royal families were her regular customers.

According to Hessa, one of the leading reasons for the decline of the local seamstresses was because Indian tailors migrated to the UAE and began to sell masks at a much lower price than the average set by local women.[61] For example, Indians sold twenty masks for a hundred dirhams, which was ten times cheaper than Hessa’s masks. Thus, many local seamstresses, including Hessa, lost their customers and could not keep their business afloat.

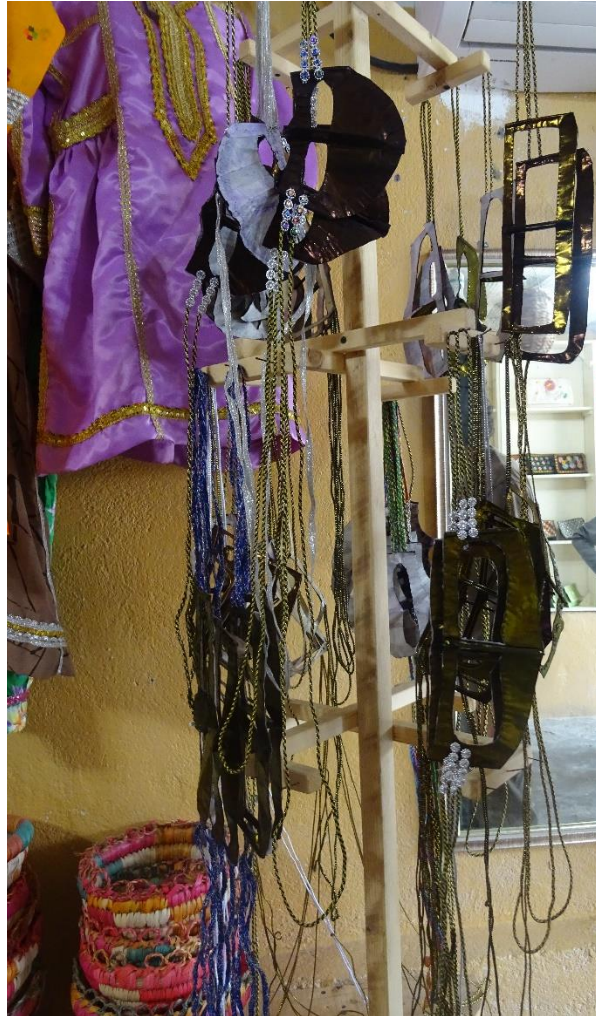
On Qeshm Island, local women are still the main producers of the face mask, although the price of the mask has also risen (ibid.). Lafia (1), a seamstress of Qeshm City, usually makes one mask by hand in two to three hours and sells it for between fifteen and seventeen thousand toman (3 to 4.5 GBP). If a mask has a simple design and takes only one hour-and-a-half to make, she charges between ten and twelve thousand toman (2 or 2.5 GBP). She said that these prices are quite reasonable as she is an old woman who needs money for her livelihood; however, in villages, the price of a mask can be between twenty-five and thirty toman (5.1 or 6.25 GBP). She also said that the price has risen

[61] Regarding Indian migrant labours in the Gulf Arab states including the UAE, see Prakash (2008).

because the cost of the fabric brought from Dubai had increased.

During my fieldwork on the island in 2016, a narrow-framed face mask with strings was sold for fifteen toman in Salakh village, whereas in Giahdan village which is famous for mask-making, the average price of one mask was between twenty-five and thirty toman. In Borka Khalaf village, where ready-made masks are often sold to tourists at local handicraft shops, a standard mask was sold for eighteen toman while a mask with imitation plastic-adornments attached to the strings was sold for thirty (Fig. 5.37). These high prices are sometimes encouraged by local NGOs or international organisations as part of community-based sustainable development, which supports local women's economic independence through the promotion of local handicrafts. Thus, considering the fact that these masks are produced by non-experienced local women and damaged through being on show for some time, the selling price is quite expensive.

At the same time, on hearing of the market, some local seamstresses from different villages bring their masks and sell them to these markets and shops in the tourist places in order to gain more money. One of the shops in Borka Khalaf village also displayed a factory-made mask imported from Dubai that was priced at twenty toman. The face mask is therefore becoming a local souvenir for tourists, having been marketed to preserve the local handicraft. In addition, it is also an important financial resource for the women of the community.



(Fig. 5.37) Ready-made masks sold to tourists in Borka Khalaf village. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

The working hours and attitudes of seamstresses vary and are very flexible as their products are sold in a very fragile demand economy (ibid.). In general, seamstresses craft one to three face masks per day, but popular women receive more than five orders a day, especially before events such as Eid celebrations and weddings. They therefore ask customers to place an order a few weeks in advance. These social and cultural events are the best opportunities for the seamstresses to attract new customers; the most effective way to advertise the excellence of their artefacts is via word-of-mouth at these large social occasions.

So far, I have illustrated the production process along with the specific methods and techniques used to produce this unique artefact, and have achieved this by combining the literature and my own field notes. This demonstrates historical changes in the materials and production of the face mask and also identifies the similarities and differences between Qeshm Island and the UAE, which can in turn be traced back to their socio-economic differences.

Next, I present the individual stories of seamstresses and their family members, which I collected through personal interviews. These stories reveal how face-mask making has become an important part of living memories among families and has even provided opportunities for daily communication by helping to build an intimate relationship between a mother and her children in their childhood.

5.3 Living Memories of the Making

Personal stories related to mask-making are not only an integral part of the material culture but also constitute an intangible heritage that is often neglected during discussions relating to the face mask. Since the number of local seamstresses is declining and mask-making has been industrialised by foreigners, it is important to investigate the considerable and active role that this craft has played in helping to form the particular experience of an individual or society. I therefore shed light on three individual stories that illustrate how mask-making has bonded families and informed nostalgic and living memories.

As noted earlier, many seamstresses started selling masks in order to support family finances. Some women took up the job at their husbands' request, while others did it on

their own initiative. Fateme (67) from Qeshm Island is an example of the latter. On Qeshm Island, men are both religiously and socially expected to provide everything for their families, and failing to fulfil such a duty is deemed to detract from their status as head of the household and their overall dignity. However, Fateme got married to her fisherman husband from the same village, and this put her in precarious circumstances. When he went fishing, he would not return for a few days, and she was the only one to take care of the house and look after their three children. She recalled, "It was very difficult to solely depend on my husband's income and manage everything in the house." Fateme sought every possible way to financially help the family, but at the same time she did not disgrace her husband by working in public. After a great deal of careful thought, she decided to secretly sell masks while her husband was away. In this way, she could improve living standards for her family a little without offending her husband. In addition, she took steps to minimise the risk that her business would be noticed by neighbours. She said:

> "I asked my best friend to sell my products instead of me. I made *burquʿ*s at midnight after my children had fallen asleep, and my friend would knock on a small window in my room in the morning to see whether I have any *burquʿ*s ready to hand over. Whenever she sold my *burquʿ*s, she brought the takings to me. But I did this only when my husband was away."

Although she made a discrete financial contribution to the household, after a while she realised that her husband had noticed her activity due to her indigo-stained hands. However, as her contribution was crucial, he pretended ignorance. There was a tacit agreement between the two, and this strengthened their marriage. This situation lasted for about five years, but when Fateme became well-known for her high-quality masks, she began to openly receive customers at her house.

In 2016, when I was listening to this story together with Khadija (68), Fateme's twenty-two-year-old daughter, she told me that she had a dim remembrance of quietly watching her mother making masks under a small light. Although Fateme was no longer engaged in mask-making, except when she received a special request from her old customers or visitors, mask-making was a way of survival and the only economic activity socially permitted for women at that time.

Seamstresses often involve their children in the process of mask-making, although this was not the case for Fateme. For example, Khaula (137), a thirty-four-year-old from the UAE, shared her vivid memories of how her mother, a local face-mask seamstress, sought to bring her and her siblings into the mask-making activity:

> "I always remember my mother's left hand covered in indigo dye and small cuts from the needles. At one point, she got tired and stopped making *burquʿ*s for others, but later she even stopped making *burquʿ*s for herself and started purchasing them from Indians. In my childhood when I was between seven and ten years old, I and my siblings used to collect ice-cream sticks [ice-lolly sticks]. Whenever we saw a stick on the street, we cleaned it and gave it to my mother. To encourage us, my mom awarded a dirham to whomever collected five sticks, so we were all competing. The best place to find sticks was near a grocery store, because when kids finished eating their ice creams, they usually threw away the sticks. Another place was a school bus stop! I regularly went there and sat and waited for someone to throw sticks. I didn't tell anybody about these secret locations or what I was doing. Because if my friends found out about this, everyone would start collecting sticks, and it would be difficult for me to earn my pocket money! But my cousins were collecting sticks although their mothers were

not making *burquʿ*s. Because we were very close, they knew my mother needed sticks to make *burquʿ*s. We were always going around to look for sticks after school."

For Khaula and her siblings, the collection of ice-lolly sticks provided a source of pocket money and also an opportunity to support their mother's important economic activity, which gave them a sense of solidarity and unity as a family. This later even became one of their nostalgic childhood memories. She added that these activities, however, are not familiar to the generation of Khaula's children, who are always kept indoors for their safety and live in relative affluence. Despite the generation gap between them of twenty-five years, which has been further reinforced by drastic economic and social changes in the country, mask-making and its related activities are often recalled nostalgically by Emiratis and are seen as embodying the 'good old days'.

While mothers' engagement with mask-making plays an important part in evoking children's memories, their involvement also impacts and motivates their mothers. As many seamstresses conduct mask-making along with child bearing, it has also become a meaningful recollection often associated with their children's growth. Salama (88), a fifty-three-year-old former face-mask seamstress, has countless memories of mask-making as her children were always around her when she sewed masks. She used to be a well-known seamstress in her neighbourhood and was engaged in mask-making every day because she had a large clientele and was popular. She had a specific setting in order for her to concentrate on the production in the best possible way. She said:

"When I made *burquʿ*s, I always used to sit at the corner of the living room, just under the air-conditioning unit because I should not sweat when engaging in the craft. Also I kept the radio on and would always call my friends and chat with them while

> making *burquʿ*s."

Because paying occasional visits to friends and relatives to ask after their health and well-being was one of the essential customs of the society, the spread of fixed-line telephones enabled the burden of such visits to be reduced without losing contact. A telephone meant that she could catch up with her friends and relatives and at the same time allocate more time for her mask-making activities.

It has been more than ten years since Salama stopped making masks although she continued to proudly wear the face mask. She said she enjoyed making masks. The only reason she left the activity was because of the death of her youngest son who was killed in an accident. She said:

> "I put all the crafting items away in the interior of the wardrobe and stopped making *burquʿ*s. Because my son was always around me when I was making *burquʿ*s. So, making *burquʿ*s always reminds me of him and I can't bear it."

Although she was willing to share her knowledge about the traditional craft with me, it was difficult for her to demonstrate the entire process of the production. Salama's personal feelings and memories attached to mask-making were far beyond anything I could have imagined. Her individual story tells us that although many seamstresses are involved in the craft because of its economic advantages, it has also become part of a deeply complex and considered personal life.

These personal stories illustrate embedded memories that relate to mask-making. They reveal the impact of the craft and its influence on various relationships in the community, especially within families. As a matter of fact, these stories humanise the object, ensuring that it is not rendered—as is so often the case—as simple designed material but rather as

an intimate object with an individual story to tell, which has an important role in regional material culture.

Conclusion

Locally manufactured and hand-made bespoke face masks reflect changes and developments within society on both Qeshm Island and in the UAE. Through a close observation of the individual materials and techniques employed in crafting a mask, I have attempted to examine: 1) the major changes that took place in the raw materials, such as variations in colour, source, and price; 2) the traditional manufacturing process of the mask and the historical shift in production methods, both of which should be understood in the wider context of socio-economic change/s in society; and 3) the individual experiences associated with the manufacturing, which is a fundamental part of the living memories of the people in the region. The compelling materialistic aspects of the face mask define the uniqueness of this fast-vanishing craft and emphasise the need to preserve related skills and knowledge.

Additionally, each individually hand-sewn mask represents the makers' originality and artistic capability. These masks provide a record of the close intimate relationship the mask maker had to her craft, family, friends, and her clientele, with each of these relationships adding a considerable and previously unacknowledged value to this distinctive artefact. The face mask, therefore, to borrow a term from Miller (2010, 26), becomes a "physical embodiment" of a particular time of people's lives and memories, which others can literally touch and wear. This revises and challenges the general assumption that the face mask is simply an object that covers the woman's face; on the contrary, it has an enormous personal and social significance. For example, the childhood

memories of Abdulrahman and the owner of the museum in Ras al-Khaimah, engaged at the beginning of this chapter, illustrate how the face mask physically embodies and imposes emotional effects, both on those who make it and also those who witness the process through which it is made.

However, the significance of the mask does not end with its production. Even after leaving the hand of a manufacturer, it continues to engage and embed the personal experiences of the wearer and performs various roles at both the personal and social level by responding to changes in the surrounding social and economic environment. The next chapter investigates the socially constructed symbolic meanings and various functional usages of the face mask, and illustrates a multitude of different expectations and experiences that are signified though the use of the mask.

Chapter 6: Embodied Identities: Face Mask as a 'Biographical Object'

"Things often 'say' and communicate precisely that which cannot be communicated in words. A silent discourse of the object may permit the cultural unsaid to be said, or marked out" (Tilley 2001, 259).

Introduction

After going through a labyrinth surrounded by blocks of similar-looking concrete houses in the old residential area of Qeshm City, a local man directed me to a house on a second floor where Lafia, a local seamstress, took orders for face masks. I climbed rusty stairs and saw her sitting and sewing a mask beside a fully opened door. The door was the entrance to her living room, and there was an open kitchen at the end of the room. Two girls and a boy were doing their homework on the living-room carpet, and the TV, which was next to the entrance, was on. When I called Lafia's name, she raised her eyes over her glasses and gave me a surreptitious peek while she continued to sew an upper frame of a face mask. I introduced myself and asked her permission to observe her work and record it. After telling me emphatically not to show the recorded videos to anyone because "people won't accept it," she finally agreed on the condition I did not share the recordings with anyone else.

I sat in front of her with my shoed feet outside in the hall. She seemed familiar with such interactions, and I soon realised the open door of her house was a sign of her private shop 'being open' and 'ready to take customers' orders'. One unmasked lady came up the stairs and asked Lafia if her order was ready to collect, Lafia asked her daughter to bring a small plastic bag from another room. Lafia and her client seemed to be on nodding terms with

each other, and no money was exchanged. Lafia later told me that she strictly enforces a pre-paid system as she does not have any savings.

Although she was making a particular style of face mask for a customer from Ramcha village at that time, she also showed me several other styles of face mask, which she explained differed from one village to another. She also presented two of the same style masks but of different sizes and said, “The big one is for an elder woman, and the small one is for a young one.” When I asked her if she can sew all the kinds of masks, she said:

> “Not all [of them], but if a customer brings a sample of the face mask, I can try to make one.” She continued: “There are some other people who make this [the Qeshm City style] but not these ones [the Ramcha village style]. In Qeshm City, I am the only one who knows how to make this [Ramcha village] style.”

During the two-hour interview, her hands continued to be busy with sewing, picking out some needed tools from a round metal sweets tin, scrubbing the fabric with soap, and attaching cotton strings to both sides of the mask. I heard my friend who had dropped me off calling my name from downstairs, and I realised that it had grown dim outside without my realising. I ran down the stairs and walked back to his car. In my head, I could still hear Lafia’s unique speech, hiccupping every two sentences. When I turned my head to remember the location of her house, I saw the light of the living room shining through the fully opened door revealing Lafia’s sitting shadow.

While the previous chapter identified materials, tools, and the techniques used to make the face mask together with the attached memories and rituals, this chapter focuses on significant roles and meanings that the face mask possesses and represents in local contexts. As Lafia explained, the distinctive styles and cuts of the face mask indicate

which village the wearer belongs to and her approximate age. Traditionally, in the field of material culture, the dominant academic discourse has been to consider an object as a sign or symbol which represents humans—Miller refers to this as a semiotic approach (2010, 12). Objects communicate nonverbally like a language, and our job as a scholar is to 'read' or 'decode' the symbolic meanings objects convey (Lévi-Strauss 1983; Lurie 1992, 3-36; Barthes 2006).[62] In this discourse, one purpose was to study subject-object relations that were based on the assumption of the human/subject being active and the object being passive (Tilley 2001, 260; Miller 2010, 48).

This assumption has been challenged as the role of objects is increasingly seen as more diverse and complex because many of them have "a practical use-value as well as a sign value" (Miller 2010, 48): for example, pots in an Indian village vary in terms of shape and range and are used for different purposes and occasions, and this demonstrates that beyond their practical use-value as a container, they have a socio-cultural significance that is evidenced in their different forms (Miller 2010, 47-48).

Moreover, some scholars even argue that an object possesses its own agency (Gell 1998; Miller 2010; Tokoro and Kawai [2011] 2013). This concept of agency does not imply that objects act with minds or intentions but instead confirms that they produce "*effects* on persons" (Tilley 2001, 260), such as a doll for a small girl who considers it a member of her family like a social being, or a car for the owner who attributes personality and even tries to hear its 'voice' when it malfunctions. These objects function as agents in particular

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[62] Baudrillard (1983) argues that in the postmodern stage dress does not simply signify 'meanings' or the personal reality, but instead constructs appearance which may possibly replace reality (also see, Baudrillard 1995; Tseëlon 1995; Cliffe 2017, 8).

social situations (Gell 1998, 19).

The face mask also communicates, symbolises, and reflects the wearer's social values (along with status, religiosity, and modesty), but at the same time initiates social effects: for example, to disguise identity or facial problems, protect from the sun, and beautify the wearer. It also—as I shall discuss in greater depth in Chapter 8—preserves cultural heritage and may become a source of income. Such varied meanings are locally and temporally specific and have often been undervalued despite the global obsession with the veil, which is generally understood as "an indicator of religiosity and suppression" (Karimi 2003, 220) whose single perceived function is to hide women in public.

This chapter therefore challenges the general and simplistic idea that "the imposed veil is only a part of an extensive cultural and patriarchal system of domination of women and men through the restriction in women's roles and mobility in society, and the prohibition of social contact between the sexes" (Grace 2004, 5).

In this chapter, I also intend to discuss the symbolic meanings and functions of the face mask in the context of Qeshm Island and the UAE, while categorising each into six broad dimensions: social, religious, physical, cultural, political, and economic. Generational changes and a comparison between two different societies reveal the material transformation of the face mask, along with differences and similarities in functions and perceptions that relate to the same material object.

6.1 Celebrating Womanhood and Freedom of Movement

One of the most important functions of the face mask has been to distinguish marriageable women from those already married. In the past, women were traditionally expected to

adopt the face mask from puberty, indicating a transition of the person from a girl to a woman.[63] However, it was also common for girls to marry before getting their first menstruation, although this depended on her physical maturity (that is, when her body appearance signals adolescence) and family's preference. In this case, they would adopt their first face mask on marrying.

On Qeshm Island, the custom of adopting a face mask either on the wedding day or on the day that the bride visits her mother-in-law for the first time is still practised in some villages, of which Burka Khalaf village is one: one respondent (20) said:

> "We start wearing it [the face mask] after we get married, precisely seven days after the wedding day because we stay in a room without seeing anyone else during those seven days. When we are taken to our mothers-in-law after that period, we wear the face mask. The custom is still like that."

Fateme (2), who was born in Karavan village and moved to Qeshm City, also recalled her experience when she got married at the age of 15. She said:

> "I didn't wear the *burquʿ* on my wedding day. It was after the wedding. Whenever women go to a party or gathering after the wedding, they would wear *burquʿ*. Because for seven days they shouldn't go outside their houses. If they want to go out of houses, that should be after seven days! So that people like non-*maḥram*[64]

[63] Abu-Lughod ([1986] 1999) discusses the use of objects, specifically the red belt and the black veil, to mark womanhood in relation to sexuality and fertility.

[64] Wikan lists the male family members who are allowed to see her face without the face mask (besides her husband). These are: "her son, father, brother, father-in-law, father's brother, mother's brother, husband's brother, husband's son from a previous marriage (all of whom are debarred from marrying her by the Moslem extensions of incest taboos), as well as *younger* cousins on both her father's and mother's side" ([1982] 1991, 94).

don't see women's faces."[65]

Not all Qeshmi women adopted the face mask of their own volition; such traditional customs were sometimes forced upon them, and this is discussed at some length in the following chapter. It is worth noting that the face mask is also worn for an 'intended public'—that is, to express marriage eligibility, for men who are looking for brides, and their families or relatives who are involved in the selection process of the brides.

In societies such as Qeshm Island where gender segregation is strictly applied, the wearing of a face mask is intended to inform the community if the wearer is eligible for marriage in the absence of direct interaction between the sexes. For Qeshmi women, a marriage is still considered to be a great achievement in life. Being unmarried in their 20s is seen as problematic and sometimes brings shame to their families. Lafia (1) explained, 'In my village, if a girl is 20 or 25 years old, people say "she is old [and] she can't get married. After 25 years old, nobody marries her. They say she is too old"'

Marriage therefore marks a celebration, and a newly married woman is allowed to wear a more revealing type of face mask that will enable her to show her beauty in public. Zahra (57) from Salakh village explained the difference between an unmarried woman's face mask and a married woman's face mask in the past. She said:

> "In the past, a [unmarried] girl wore a bigger *burquʿ*, and after marriage, she would wear this [more revealing style]. Because after a wedding, wearing this [a revealing style] makes a girl look beautiful. But before marriage, a girl shouldn't

[65] The custom of wearing the first face mask after a seven-days honeymoon was also observed in Sohar, Oman (Wikan [1982] 1991, 88).

be beautified and exposed to people [outside her extended family].”

Zīnat (62) from the same village provided a similar narrative but added that a divorcee or widow also wore a bigger face mask. She said:

> “Eighty years ago, when a girl passed the age of nine and became ten years old, she wore a *burquʿ* with small eye holes which covered the entire face. On a wedding day, they put on a beautiful *burquʿ* which was made with narrower frames. Women kept beautiful *burquʿ*s to wear them after marrying their husband. But if one got divorced, or her husband passed away, then she needed to wear a bigger *burquʿ*.”

Thus, regardless of a woman’s age, the wearing of a bigger face mask indicated her ‘marriageable’ status. The size of the mask is not the only feature that distinguishes a married and unmarried woman, as the colour of the fabric used for the face mask is also an important form of sign language.[66] On Qeshm Island, the dyed cambric cotton fabric has been used for all face masks irrespective of its owner’s status. However, women took advantage of its material characteristics to signal their married status: for example, local women believed that unmarried women should not be exposed to the curious gaze of non-*maḥram*, and thus the shiny colour of the face mask was not suitable and needed to be modified. Zahra (57), a local seamstress, explained the way women used to darken the colour of the fabric:

> “The fabric was originally a green colour which attracted people’s gaze

[66] There are also differences in *chador* between married and unmarried: an unmarried woman wears a black *chador*; once she gets married, she wears a colourful *chador* that is often printed with floral patterns.

[considered undesirable]. So, they [women] applied coconut oil to the *burquʿ* [fabric] until the colour became reddish [considered dull and less desirable]. And some of them rubbed a lot of coconut oil into [the fabric] until its colour became black."

By darkening the colour of the fabric, women aimed to maintain the expected social morality of unmarried women. These customs were also practised in a similar way in the UAE. In general, women adopted the face mask from puberty onwards; however, it was also common for them to get married before their first period. Thus, some girls could don the face mask prior to puberty if a marriage took place earlier. Tarifah, a 70-year-old woman from Ras al-Khaimah, wore the face mask daily from the age of 15 after getting married. She said: "Girls from this area had to start wearing the *burquʿ* from the time they got engaged and it had to be the large red *burquʿ*. On their wedding day, it was swapped for a small green *burquʿ*" (Al Shomely 2016, 214).

Though variations of colour and quality of the face mask fabric have already been discussed in Chapter 5.1.1, it is interesting to note here that while women on Qeshm Island used oil to darken a green coloured cambric cotton, which is said to be the cheapest amongst the face-mask fabrics; women in the UAE instead purchased a red dyed cotton and used it for an unmarried woman's mask, although it was the most expensive one. This does not simply indicate the availability of the fabrics and differences in the socio-economic status of people in two different areas, but also shows how women selected and modified the available materials by using household supplies as appropriate. By doing so, women in both places intended to fulfil the socio-cultural norm that unmarried women should not be seen by non-*maḥram* (marriageable men) and should not attract the public gaze.

Such expectations are strongly associated with the concept of modesty defined by the local communities. In fact, the most common explanation given by both female and male respondents to the reason for wearing the face mask was to preserve the 'modesty' of women. Concealing 'sexual parts' of the female body—the face, in particular cheeks, upper lip, and eyebrows—does not only preserve public decency (Foley 2010, 171) but also provides women with freedom of movement in a gender-mixed sphere. Yet some argue that "the deliberate concealment of certain parts of the body originated not as a way of discouraging sexual interest, but as a clever device for arousing it" (Lurie [1981] 1992, 213); in other words, concealment gives erotic connotations to the parts and therefore draws more attention.

Karimi further points out that Islamic patriarchal cultures often perceive a woman's body to be a sexual entity and veiling to be a form of segregation, which extends beyond what the *madhāhib*'s (legal schools) interpretations of *Qurān* and *sunna* (religiously established custom and tradition) establish with regard to women's body and veiling (2003, 188). This complex issue of the female body and representation and control will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

Wearing the face mask acts as a physical and metaphorical partition between the woman and her external world, securing her personal space. The veil for the Tuareg men of the Sahara shares the same function as it is "a form of distance between their selves and their social others" (Keenan 2004, 89) that "provides neither isolation nor anonymity, but bestows faceless and the idiom of privacy upon the wearer, and allows him to stand somewhat aloof from the perils of social interaction, while remaining a part of it" (Murphy 1964, 1257). In the UAE, women both living in coastal and desert areas have engaged in outside work such as agricultural and livestock activities and selling products

in local markets, especially prior to the modernisation of the country, when the face mask gave them a sort of security (ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz 2011, 148; Al Shomely 2016, 112). Kanafani previously described how essential the face mask was for women during this time. She states: "In the desert and mountains women work collecting wood or breeding goats, where they are more exposed to male presence. In this case, the mask allows freedom of movement" (1983, 67) (Fig. 6.1).

In 1931 when the Dubai legislative council decided to ban female fishmongers, male fishermen sought revocation of the new law by implying that their female colleagues sell at far higher prices than male counterparts and have better knowledge about the system of the market (al-Sayegh 2001, 26; Foley 2010, 172) (Fig. 6.2). Many women had their economic and social roles outside their home, which were essential to their livelihood, and the face mask acted as a safeguard for them when playing these roles. In 2018, female fishmongers who left their jobs in the 1970s and 80s came back to the Dubai fish market while wearing their face masks. In doing so, they enjoyed the support of the Dubai Fishermen Co-operative Association (Al-Khanjari and Rabaya 2018) and became visual representations of the Emirati cultural heritage (Fig. 6.3).

(Fig. 6.1) A 1971 photograph depicts an Emirati woman on her way to the *falaj*, a communication centre. She is carrying containers of water on her head and arm (Dyck 1995, 60-61). Photo reproduced from Dyck (ibid.).

(Fig. 6.2) A 1962 photograph depicts female fishmongers dealing with customers at a local fish market near the old *sūq* (market) in Dubai (Kawashima 2010, 52). Photo reproduced from Kawashima (ibid.).

(Fig. 6.3) One of the returning female fishmongers at Dubai's fish market in 2018 (Al-Khanjari and Rabaya 2018).

Moreover, before people could afford their own bathroom and internal plumbing, women usually got together and went for public bathing and washing clothes to the oasis or sea. According to Al Shomely, one oral historian from the city of Fujairah in the UAE remembered a tree locally known as the '*burqu*ʿ [face mask] tree' which was located near the sea where women engaged in such activities (2016, 115). In order for face masks not to be wet, women hung them on the branches of the tree, and the reflection of the sunlight from the surface of the face mask signalled to passing people that "women are swimming," which prevented men from coming closer (ibid.) (Fig. 6.4).

In addition to maintaining a women's personal privacy, it should also be remembered that revealing a sexually mature woman's face in public can be "a threat to her family's honor" (Wikan [1982] 1991, 93), since only men who are allowed to see a woman's face are their husband and non-marriable males. It also indicates that the woman is failing to fulfil ideal feminine behaviours such as being docile, shy, and self-effacing, and may sometimes even be referred to as "a prostitute" (ibid., 102) as a result. One Qeshmi woman (23)

spoke about the general public reaction towards an unmasked woman. She said: "In villages, if your face is out, people talk about it…. They would say the person doesn't have personality (*shakhasiyāt nadare*)! How dare she reveals her face!" While Brooks ([1995] 1996, 32) and many other feminists observe that the female body carries the heavy burden of male honour, Bullock (2002, 214) denies a link between male honour and veiling, as social control is applied to women's behaviour in general and not specifically to veiling. Although it is therefore difficult to categorically state that the face mask is a symbol of male honour, veiling functions as a sign that a woman is respectable, and she expects to be recognised and treated as such (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 10). It can be suggested that the protection of family honour rather than male honour is a relevant reason for the wearer to adopt the face mask and for male and female relatives to promote or sometimes force them to wear it.

Such embedded feelings of embarrassment when removing the face mask were even observed inside a house. When I was interviewing women (including 132, 133) in a guest room, and some male family members or relatives wanted to greet me, they first knocked on the door, and the women asked who they were. Once they knew they were not their husband or sons, they would immediately put masks back on before letting them enter. At that moment, I too was searching for my abaya or jacket to cover my body and a scarf to cover my hair before male members of the families came into the room. It was not a required or expected action, and some women even told me, "It's fine. You don't need to cover yourself like that. They know you are here and a foreign guest. They have been to Europe and other countries, so they understand." In fact, I did it not only to respect the social values and cultures of the communities, but I personally felt comfortable covering my body because it gave me more confidence to talk to the men as the dress code created

a respective space and distance between us.

However, the cultural rules imposed to control female sexuality and body were not applied to me in the same manner as local women. Conversely, the expectations and perceptions of the sexual metaphors contained within our (mine and local women's) bodies were different. As Cliffe states: "once meanings are added, culturally specific ideas come into play, and it becomes impossible to make impartial evaluations about body modifications" (2017, 5). In the situation I was in, the viewpoints of observers or the public was of greater concern to everybody in the room than how I felt about the social context I was then part of. I was considered more as a symbol of a particular culture than an individual. I was in a parallel situation to a woman wearing a face mask: covering up empowered me to engage in social activities without breaking the cultural taboos and also created a comfortable distance for everyone in the room.

Until recently, in both Qeshm Island and the UAE, an average household consisted of two or three generations living in one big house; however, as the nuclearisation of the family has advanced, more families have started living separately but nearby. Extended family members still pay regular visits to each other and gather at their grandparents' houses on Fridays and on special occasions. At these inner-family gatherings, elder women are often the most active participants and the centre of attention. A daughter (104) of a masked woman told me how the face mask allows women to interact with male members of the family without being shy and unmannerly. She said: "Women can't reveal their faces in front of non-*maḥram*. But during meals, they [women] like to sit with their sons-in-law, the ones who have married into their families. But it is difficult for women to have direct interactions [because there are considered to be outside the direct kinship]. In such situations, women have meals in their masks."

At the same time, at family gatherings and weddings, I have witnessed men approach masked women and kiss their heads or foreheads, and sometimes even their foot to show their respect as part of a greeting. As such interactions indicate, the mask does not prevent physical interactions between male and female family members, but rather enables them to take place without the parties feeling awkward.

The role of the face mask in relation to freedom of movement becomes more noticeable when women are prohibited from concealing their faces. On Qeshm Island, the Islamic custom of mourning is still authentically performed. When a woman becomes a widow, she needs to stay at home for the mourning period, which is religiously defined as four months and ten days. During this period, she cannot use a face mask to conceal her face and usually wears a black dress. Her movement is restricted both ritually and physically. One woman (23) explained:

> “The woman [widow] doesn’t keep the *burquʿ* on because she must sit at home in order not to be seen by people, non-*maḥram*. Only women can see her for the four months and ten days. If she becomes sick, she must go to see the doctor at night, so nobody sees her. This ritual is based on *Qurān* and *hadīth*.”

Without a mask, the women’s movement suddenly becomes very limited, and it interferes with their daily activities.

The face mask being a symbol of womanhood is strongly related to the notion of modesty as the face of a woman who passes puberty should not be seen by marriable men (non-*maḥram*). Nonetheless, covering the face with the mask enables women to be out in public and interact with males without losing her sense of decency and reputation as well as the (culturally constructed) family honour. The preceding symbolic meanings and functions,

which are cultural rather than religious phenomena, are shared and practised on Qeshm Island and in the UAE in a similar manner. However, Qeshmis and Emiratis have a different understanding when it comes to the association between the face mask and Islamic interpretations.

6.2 Expressing Piety

In my interview conversations, the Islamic term 'non-*maḥram* (marriageable man)' was constantly mentioned by respondents of both areas—Qeshm Island and the UAE—to clarify the situation when a woman is required to conceal her face. Yet there are different perspectives of the relationship between the masking custom and Islam. While many Emiratis see wearing the face mask as a tradition and cultural custom and therefore emphasise its non-religious aspect, masked women of Qeshm Island contend that it is a religious practice. For them, "it is a *ḥijāb* [form of covering]," because the eyebrows are an extended part of the hair which needs to be covered in front of marriageable men, so they ensure their mask covers their eyebrows. However, the ascription of religious meaning to the concealing of the face is debated (see Chapter 1.5.1.1), and local perspectives vary depending on the person. A Qeshmi woman (15) described the general perceptions of masking custom. She said: "Old people said it [the face mask] is a type of *ḥijāb*. Now people say it is not a *ḥijāb*. But because old people used to say so, I wore it. But these days some [women] don't wear it anymore."

Another woman (1) from the island, who wore the face mask but did not view it as a *ḥijāb*, said:

> "People say it [the face mask] is a *ḥijāb*. But it is not a *ḥijāb*! When I wear it…

> see? Is this acting like a *ḥijāb*? It doesn't act like a *ḥijāb* [meaning concealing the face completely]. But people say you must wear it. My mother, my parents said not wearing the *burquʿ* is "*ʿaīb* [shame]!"

Yet, because of the religious connotation embedded within the masking custom, some people started using the term '*niqāb*' interchangeably, despite the fact that the face mask was traditionally known as '*burquʿ*'. Conversely, Emirati women and men firmly disagreed that the face mask is part of Islamic practice. This view was also observed amongst the Emirati respondents of Al Shomely (2016, 111). One of her female respondents gave an example of why she thought wearing the face mask was non-Islamic practice, when she said, "women had to remove their burqas when they circle around the Kaaba in Mecca as evidence of the burqa's non-religious function" (ibid., 112). This knowledge is probably based on the *hadīth* collected by Al-Bukhari ("women must unveil their faces even at the time of pilgrimage to Mecca, 'a woman in *ihrām* shouldn't wear a Niqāb (face veil), nor should she wear gloves'") (Karimi 2003, 212). It can be suggested that although the entire pilgrimage is a holy journey, the general understanding is that the face mask should be only be removed when a woman on pilgrimage enters a state of *iḥrām* (a highest sacred state of being). This is evidenced by ʿUthmān's claims that women also went to *Ḥajji* (pilgrim) wearing the face mask (1998, 408). However, many of my Emirati respondents shared the opinion that the face mask's primary function was not religious because it does not conceal the entire face, and its colour and shape attract people's gaze; whereas if it was intended for a religious purpose, it would anonymise the wearer and disinterest people.

Despite these contemporary Emirati arguments, it should be noted that some Emirati women, during the late 1970s, did relate the masking custom to *sunna*. For example, one

Emirati woman said to Kanafani: "We are mothers; it would be taboo (*ḥarām*) to take it off" (1983, 70). Kanafani further observes: 'Some [women] even state that the face is considered as a blemish (*ʿūrah*) which, like the ankle and the elbow, should be covered: "The mask protects and conceals our sanctity: we feel naked if the mask is off"' (ibid.).

During Kanafani's fieldwork, she encountered a religious Sheikh who denied wearing the face mask was a religious obligation (ibid.). It seems that people's perceptions of the religious connotations of the custom had been caused when an 'official' interpretation of this kind initially spread through the modern education system during the 1970s. This in turn resulted in the introduction of a new type of face coverings such as the *niqāb*—a black veil that covers the entire face except eye parts—which was imported from neighbouring countries (see Chapter 8.1.1). This change is currently taking place on Qeshm Island as well as other places in southern Iran, and it is often promoted by men who have worked in or visited the Gulf Arab countries and become convinced by this view. They either come to believe that the *niqāb* fulfils religious modesty in a better way (and ask their wives to adopt the *niqāb* instead of the traditional *burquʿ*), or come to believe that there is no need to conceal the face, and therefore ask their wives to discard the face mask.

However, the legacy of the importance of concealing the eyebrows is still alive as a universally established rule for anyone who wears this type of the face mask regardless of geographical locations and personal backgrounds, including the UAE. Although when I sought the rationale behind it from the Emirati respondents, the answer was often: "I don't know. But that's the proper way!" The traditional use and meanings of the object continuously change and are occasionally replaced or forgotten in the evolving process; however, there is, at the same time, evidence of the surviving agency of the object, which

is accommodated and modified in accordance with the needs of the users and time and space.

Modern education and various religious interpretations that became available through modern technology such as TV and social media have changed views towards the concealment of the face and the face mask. The face mask does not openly signify the religiosity of the wearer, but women do take religious obligation and preference into account, especially when they leave the house. Furthermore, like Iran's Qeshm Island and the UAE, where the local population is Muslim and the implemented laws and rules are based on *Sharīʿa* (Islamic canonical law), their cultures are intimately tied to religion and vice-versa. Although the intentions behind the wearing of the face mask are only known by the wearers, an Islamic interpretation for the concealment of the entire face is often used by the states and general public to support the discontinuation of the use of the face mask. This is a theme that I further discuss in Chapter 8.

6.3 Concealing or Beautifying

According to many respondents, the mask is also used to protect the face from strong sunlight and the heat of the Persian Gulf, where summer temperatures can exceed 50 °C. A woman from Qeshm Island (11) said: "My grandmothers used the *burquʿ* made of the fabric *shīle* [the golden/indigo fabric], but it was much bigger so that they could hide their face from the sun." Indeed, whenever I saw unmasked faces of elderly women, their smooth and firm skin made me believe that the face mask does serve as a sunshade. Similar views are commonly expressed by other anthropologists, including Holton, who states:

> “[S]he took off her mask and sat without it. Her face was startling. From behind the long, old-fashioned mask the full person revealed itself. She sat without her burqu, without her veil, an old woman of perhaps seventy or seventy-five, but her face–[*sic*] what an amazing face, a face of unimaginable fascination. Every feature was still perfect. The skin, protected over the years by the long mask, moistened by its own sweat, was almost unwrinkled” ([1991] 1993, 252).

When I asked another masked Qeshmi woman (35) what she does to maintain such great facial condition, she grabbed her mask and proudly said, “Oh, that’s because of this!”

The indigo-dyed fabric of the face mask does not only serve as a sunshade, as its material characteristic is known to moisturise and whiten the skin (Chapter 5.1.1), which is important because pale skin is associated with social status. Fateme from Minab (160), who wore the golden/indigo face mask, explained the relationship between white skin and social significance by noting that, in the past, women from wealthy families did not need to go outside as their house maids would go to the market or shops to purchase necessary daily items, and many of them did not even have a face mask. On the contrary, women from poor families were engaged in tasks on the coastal areas and they therefore, as a result of their work, had darker skins. Women’s skin colour was thus an important piece of information that indicated their socio-economic status—to this extent, pale skin was “a marker of cultural superiority” (Grace 2004, 22), and this was often an asset for men and their families when selecting potential brides. Such notions were also shared amongst Qeshmis.

Although these notions have gradually decreased as women have become increasingly free to leave their homes, it is still generally the case that people’s, and particularly men’s, preference is for white skin and that the generally accepted image of beauty is still pale

skinned. These perceptions were shared with me by some Qeshmi men, and one Qeshmi woman (33) also explained this norm in her community. She said:

> 'Wearing the *burqu*ʿ makes my skin whiter, so everyone wears it. One of my friends has coloured eyes and her skin is pale, and that is what everyone envies her for. When she takes the mask off, everyone is like "Ohhhhh!! …Because our original skin is not white as we get tanned by going to the sea, it is rare to have pale skin."

I also engaged in conversations with women, in which I was asked if I knew of any whitening creams and was also asked how I maintain my 'white' skin. Many Qeshmi women acknowledged that Japan is one of the most famous producers of cosmetic products whose people are very keen on beauty, and my female hosts often checked what kind of products I used and where I got them from. Whitening creams produced in China that had no label were imported from Dubai and were often apparent in the most visible areas of the beauty shops.[67]

Although similar connotations associated with pale skin can be found in many other cultures across the globe, these social values are also changeable, as the preference for bleaching or darkening one's skin depends on the "current standard of beauty" (Lurie [1981] 1992, 234) that applies in a particular place: for example, the overall tan, which was long considered to be an indicator of 'lower-class status', became a symbol of prestige in northern Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century when cheap labour required long hours of indoor work, as only wealthy people could afford to

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[67] In Qeshm City, there is a China mall that sells products imported from China, including kitchen stuff, clothing, and home tools.

travel to the south in winter (ibid.).

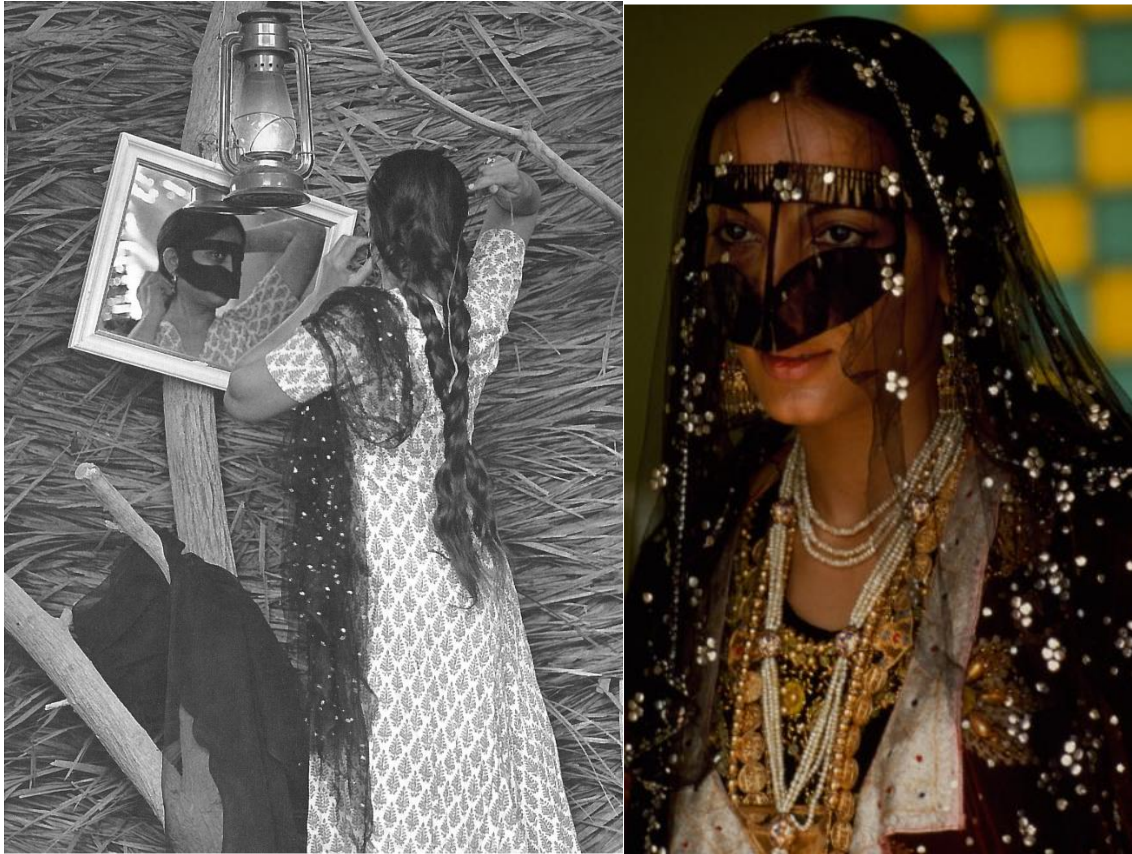
In the UAE, pale skin is also considered to be the traditional standard of beauty; however, this has changed due to the rapid improvement of living standards because of oil wealth and the application of strict religious rules in public spaces, which discourages women from engaging in outside activities (al-Sayegh 2001, 18). However, since the number of migrants into the country increased, another important reason for the change might be a shift away from brown skin being an indication of lower class to being a symbol of prestige that attests to 'Arabness'. As Chapter 3.2 demonstrates, this facial feature helps to distinguish indigenous Emiratis from naturalised counterparts from Iran, who tend to have fair skin (Glioti 2018). Moreover, a feminist view of natural beauty has recently become widespread amongst young women, especially those who studied and lived abroad (Manami Goto, field notes). In occurring alongside the changing role of women in society, the face mask's function as a protection against harsh environment has gradually become insignificant, and the aspect of beautification has instead become more noticeable.

The aforementioned functions of the face mask tend to focus on its 'concealing' aspect. However, the mask is distinguished from other types of veils by the fact that it beautifies the wearer, achieving this by adjusting for an individual facial feature and enhancing some attractive parts. For this reason, the face mask is regarded as "a *zinah* or an adornment" (Wikan [1982] 1991, 98-101; Kanafani 1983, 64-72; Balfour-Paul 1997, 141; Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 15; El Mutwalli 2011, 289; Al Shomely 2016, 117-18). Since there is no template for the face mask, women have either sewn or ordered one according to their preference. One Qeshmi seamstress (29) said:

> 'It [the *burquʿ*] gradually became more stylish and decorative. Women arrange

> their own designs by cutting the material differently, attaching gold adornments, or shortening some parts to be more revealing. They [women] often see themselves in the mirror and think, "This way is prettier, so let's make this part narrower" or "I want to emphasise this part, so I will make this part wider."'

When an Emirati seamstress (88) was asked about her choice of a kebab skewer for the nose part, which was selected over an ice-lolly stick, she answered with a smile: "I want people to see my prominent shapely nose! A thin skewer exhibits my nose more than an ice-lolly stick!" Wikan writes how the face mask transformed an ordinary-looking woman into someone appealing and acknowledges that "its curved lines and the non-fixity of size of its various parts make it even more suitable for manipulation than are cosmetics in Western culture" ([1982] 1991, 98). An Emirati proverb also reflects this theme by asserting that "women without burqas are not pretty, especially if they have large teeth and button noses" (*Shīnāt alwujūha zīnāt alburāquʿa*) (Al Shomely 2016, 117). By adjusting the eye slits, frames, and used materials, women maximise their own beauty, including by sharpening chubby cheeks and softening slant-eyes (Figs. 6.4, 6.5).



(Fig. 6.4) Left: A woman trying to tie a face mask around her head in a dressing room next to a *Bārāstī* hut located between Fujairah and Ajman. Photo taken in 1966 and reproduced from Bhatia (1995, 19).
(Fig. 6.5) Right: A young woman in an Abu Dhabi harem in 1970. Her heavy jewellery and adorn dress indicate her high status. This photograph was taken by Eve Arnold and reproduced from Magnum Photos (2014).[68]

The face mask's 'ability' to enhance facial parts for beautification is particularly appreciated by elderly women because it provides an anti-aging solution—the face mask can therefore disguise less attractive facial problems, such as wrinkles, blotches, a lack of teeth, and even block bad breath (El Mutwalli 2015, 288) (Figs. 6.6, 6.7). The older a wearer gets, the bigger the face mask becomes. By doing so, women attempt to emphasise particular features of the face to beautify themselves: for example, emphasising eyes circled with black eyeliner while hiding unattractive parts of the face. In the Arabian

[68] https://pro.magnumphotos.com/image/LON153696.html.

Peninsula, the eyes are regarded as a reflection of “exotic and erotic value” (Kanafani 1983, 69). One Qeshmi respondent (38) also explained why she still practises the masking custom even though it has become unpopular. She said:

> “Since I already adopted the *burquʿ* before, I prefer to continue wearing it. Now I lost teeth, my face became old, and I have wrinkles, so this [*burquʿ*] works well for that [hiding the unattractive parts]!”

(Fig. 6.6) Left: A woman from Iran’s Bandar Kong without a face mask. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 6.7) Right: The same woman from Bandar Kong with a face mask, which hides absent teeth and wrinkles to enhance her beauty. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

Some women refuse to simply accept a traditional norm which holds that elderly women should wear a bigger face mask by adapting a narrower-framed mask that barely conceals the face. As Figure 6.8 shows, this type of the mask is known as the *burquʿ bushanab* (which literally means ‘moustache-style face mask’) in the UAE. One Emirati woman (88) explained her choice to wear the contemporary face mask when she said: “Wearing

this mask [*burquʿ bushanab*] makes me feel younger. And it is my public statement that I am not old yet!" Despite the fact that the women who wear this particular style of the mask receive substantial criticism, they resist being silent and seek to comply with public expectations that they will be 'traditional Emirati women' who represent the nation. This important but quite complex subject is further discussed in Chapter 8.2.2.

(Fig. 6.8) An Emirati woman wearing the *burquʿ bushanab*. Photo taken in February 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

Concealing and beautifying, which are often recognised as having an opposite meaning, are compatible in the case of the face mask. While giving full control to the wearer's intentions, it also acts to protect the skin and conceal blemishes and imperfections; in addition, it also acts to enhance individual facial features that the wearer aims to emphasise or reveal. A face mask that is carefully sewn for each individual wearer allows women to project their ideal images of themselves. Moreover, revealing the eyes while

concealing the mouth or teeth reflects an aesthetic emphasising certain parts of the face. These attributes are still applicable to the generations who no longer wear the face mask, as women often cover their mouth when they speak or laugh in order to not show their teeth (El Mutwalli 2015, 288).[69] Wearing the face mask therefore renders two different messages: "'keep away' and 'look at me': at my (honoured) position within my family, and the position (honour and wealth) of my family with respect to the outside world" (Al Shomely 2016, 112). It also possesses both "mysterious appeal and a powerful allure" (Richardson and Dorr 2003, 344).

6.4 Embedding Individuality

The face mask, in addition to signifying womanhood and beautifying while protecting skin and social decency, represents individuality. The previous section already explained that each face mask is made-to-order in accordance with the wearer, with the consequence that its shape and size differ from one instance to another. However, a substantial amount of personal information about the wearer is signified and embodied in the face mask, including her origin, age group, socio-economic status, occasion, and ethnicity. These attributes can be identified through particular styles, colours, adornments, qualities of the fabric used, and the ways in which women tie their masks. The face mask, therefore, acts as a biographical object of the wearer that is closely related to their individual identity.

[69] Women of the Bataharah in Oman tattoo some emblems to show their tribal affiliations and beauty; in order to reveal their chin tattoos, some women situate the edge of their face masks above the upper lip (Richardson and Dorr 2003, 387).

6.4.1 Origin

The people of Qeshm Island and the UAE recognise that the distinct styles and cuts of the face mask indicate a certain village or area, and can therefore identify the wearer's native place. In 2017, there were three cities and fifty-seven villages on Qeshm Island, and most of these had their own styles to distinguish themselves from their neighbours. Figure 6.9 shows a number of examples of these different designs of the masks on Qeshm Island. One Qeshmi woman (1) said:

> "Every city and village have its own style and model. Some wear big ones, some wear ones with wide or narrow eye slits. Look at this *burquʿ*. This is the one from Laft village, and Khamir village has a different one. And Khohonde village is again different."

One example is provided by the case of Bandar-e-Doulab and Chahu. Even though the distance between the two villages is less than 5 kilometres, the local women insisted there was a clear dissimilarity between their masks. At the same time, when one village split into two, the majority of both communities retained the face mask of the original village as a visual representation of the village's original identity. A woman (25) from Borka Khalaf village, for example, explained the reason why the village face mask design is the same as that of Ramcha village, which is 12 kilometres away: she was told that during the veil ban of the 1930s (see Chapter 8.1.1), some of the residents of Ramcha village migrated to the inner area of the island in order to maintain the outlawed masking custom and therefore escape official inspection, while retaining the original face mask design (Figs. 6.10, 6.11). From these examples, we can see how the common style of the face mask implies the migration history of the people as well as a unified identity. Nevertheless, none of my respondents could explain when and how differences of the face mask

allocated to villages began, with these distinctive designs representing each village continuing to be the same until today.

(Fig. 6.9) Different styles of the face mask: each one is associated with an individual village on Qeshm Island (Manami Goto: field notes). (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 6.10) A face mask from Ramcha village. It is known to be the most detailed-style mask among the island's face masks, and it requires special sewing skills (Manami Goto: field notes). (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 6.11) A woman wearing a face mask from Borka Khalaf village, which is said to carry a trace of the Ramcha village style. The unique cutting and smooth curve accentuate the wearer’s eyes. (Image: Manami Goto)

Generally, women adopt the face mask from their village of origin, expressing their sense of belonging and solidarity. When women get married to men from different villages, they are likely to keep their face masks from their place of birth as it represents their origins. However, some women choose to adapt to the face mask from their husband’s village in order to show an accommodating attitude towards their new family, which helps them integrate into their new community. In recent years, as movement of people inside and outside the island has become more common, women’s choice of masks is not restricted to their village of origin, and they have begun to freely select well-matched or favourite masks, often from the existing styles on Qeshm Island. Once they pick their preferred styles, they ask their regular seamstresses to make minor adjustments based on their individual facial features.

There are also women who have no choice but to adopt other styles of the face mask that are different from that of their villages. When I asked a woman (53) from Ramcha village why she was wearing the Qeshm City style face mask, she said, “I wear the Qeshmi [City] type because my eyes are weak. I can’t see if I wear the Ramcha one.” As the small eye-holes of the Ramacha village style limit the eyesight of the wearer, the informant chose to wear the Qeshmi City style because it has wider eye slits and does not restrict her view.

Those particular designs of the face mask worn on the island also play a role in differentiating the native population from outsiders. Since 1990 Qeshm Island has been registered as a tax-free zone (Karner 2016, 19), and accordingly it has imported goods without taxation and been exempted from Iranian visas, with the result that many foreigners come to the island through Dubai for tourism. Iranians also come from the mainland for shopping (see Chapter 3.1). The shopping malls and streets of Qeshm City are often overflowing, especially on weekends, and women with different types of the face mask, such as the Balochi, Bandar Abbas, or upper Hormozgan style can be observed. Wearing the Qeshmi face mask sometimes benefits the wearer as local people recognise the various styles of the Qeshmi face mask: for example, these women are not overcharged at local shops, and it may be easier for them to find seats in shared taxies as the drivers can quickly identify potential passengers who wear the face mask of the destination. Therefore, the symbolic meaning of the face mask that implies the origin of the wearer can sometimes affect the daily activities and interactions of Qeshmi people.

Al Shomely observes that in the case of the UAE, approximately thirty different designs have been identified since the 1950s (2016, 102). Many of her Emirati respondents pointed out that the regional differences were less distinct in the past; however, due to the discovery of oil and the establishment of both internal and external official borders in the

country, some face masks began to be named after urban residential neighbourhoods (ibid.). A face mask on which the bottom part is cut in a curve is, for example, traditionally worn by women from Dubai. This face mask used to be called ‘*bo-lafah*’, which means ‘curved’ (Ibid., 99); however, today this face mask is called ‘*burquʿ Zaʿabīl*’ which is named after *Zaʿabīl,* a well-known district of Dubai (Fig. 6.12).

Moreover, both the shape of a mask and also the way that a mask sits on the face can differentiate the origin of the wearer. Women from Kalba, Dibba, and Khor Fakkan have a unique way of positioning a mask on the face. The name of the mask is ‘*mankūs burquʿ* (facing downward)’, which is derived from the fixing position used—these women are known as ‘*nākisa al-burquʿ*’ (Alnaqbī 2012, 37). In the typical way of positioning a mask, the upper frame of the mask is fixed to touch the eyebrows and the strings are fastened parallel to them. However, as Figure 6.14 demonstrates, the *mankūs burquʿ* is positioned by maintaining balance between the nose and the stick, which is inserted in the middle part of the mask (Alnaqbī 2012, 37; Al Shomely 2016, 101). Accordingly, the upper part of the mask leans forwards and does not touch the eyebrow line. Some women further classify various designs of masks based on areas such as Ajman (*ʿajmāni*), Sharjah (*sharjahwi* or *shārjī*), Al Ain (*ainawī*), and Abu Dhabi, which was known as ‘*burqu al-yāsī*’ during the early 1970s (Alnaqbī 2012, 36; El Mutwalli, 2015, 281; Al Shomely 2016, 102) (Fig. 6.13).

(Fig. 6.12) Left: A woman wearing *burquʿ Zaʿabīl* which has a distinct curve on the edges. Photo taken in Dubai in March 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 6.13) Right: A woman with a face mask that is distinct because it covers the entire face. Although there is no specific name for this style of a face mask, it was commonly worn by women in the mountainous regions of the UAE including Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo taken in Fujairah in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 6.14) The diagram on the left shows a frontal view of the *mankūs burquʿ*, and the diagram on the right demonstrates how a woman, *nākisa al-burquʿ*, positions the mask (Al Shomely 2016, 101). Photo reproduced from Al Shomely (ibid.).

Tribes such as *al-awamer* or *al-shiḥūḥ* also depict their characteristics on their face masks (Kanafani 1983, 65; ʿUthmān 1998, 404-5; Alʿawaḍī and Quraishī 2011, 59). In the late 1970s, only young Bedouin women from the *al-shiḥūḥ* tribe who lived in the mountain

regions of Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah wore face masks that did not conceal the lower lip while women in the rest of the UAE completely covered the mouth with the face mask (Kanafani 1983, 65). Besides, the traditional women of *al-shiḥūḥ* have always preferred to use long red strings that fasten the mask, which reach below the waist (Fig. 6.15). The face mask's function of signifying the origin of the wearer tended to simply celebrate her identity and did not intend to represent a political affiliation; however, in recent years in the UAE, both the state and the emirates have tried to politicise the shapes and associated meanings of the face mask to establish distinct national or local identities (see Chapter 8.2.1).

(Fig. 6.15) A woman from the *al-shiḥūḥ* tribe wearing a mask with long strings that reaches around her waist and buttocks. Photo taken in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

6.4.2 Age

As discussed earlier, the size of the face mask differs depending on the age of the wearer. Women both from Qeshm Island and the UAE claimed that in general the face mask used to be larger, and the eye slits were narrower, hiding most parts of the face—in the case of the UAE, this change occurred when independence was achieved (ʿUthmān 1998, 389; Manami Goto, field notes) (Figs. 6.17, 6.18). Yet, a traditional custom insisting that the size of the mask becomes bigger in accordance with the age still applies, and women can therefore calculate the approximate age of a wearer by looking at her mask. There is a broad agreement amongst both Qeshmi and Emirati women that the size of a face mask represents each generational unit: the twenties, thirties, and forties (Manami Goto, field notes) (Fig. 6.16). This was, for example, illustrated by one of my respondents (115). She said:

> "This *burquʿ* is for fifty-year olds. But the one I am wearing is for forty-year olds, so the moustache part [the lower frame of the mask] is narrower and more revealing [of the part around eyes and cheeks]. This one [for fifty-year olds: it] is too early for me to wear it!"

The general idea of a particular size of mask designed for each age group has been learnt even by younger generations who do not wear the face mask anymore, and they sometimes comment on the age appropriateness of their mothers' face masks. During my fieldwork both on Qeshm Island and in the UAE, I did not come across specific names for these face masks that are suited to each age group, and my respondents often described differences as "large *burquʿ*" or "narrow-framed *burquʿ*." However, according to some local researchers, there are certain names for these different-sized masks.

(Fig. 6.16) Three face masks from Paiposht village on Qeshm Island which indicate the different age generations of the wearers: the upper one is for a woman in her 40s; the middle one for a woman in her 30s; and the lower one for a woman in her 20s (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo taken in December 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 6.17) *Shaikha bint ʿalī bin saʿīd bin ghalīṭa al-Mahairī* was a Qūranic teacher for young girls in Dubai in 1953. Although the photograph was taken during a school graduation ceremony, this face mask is probably the standard size for a young Emirati woman from this time (Codrai 1992, 155). Photo reproduced from Codrai (ibid.).

(Fig. 6.18) The woman on the right is in her 50s, while the woman on the left, who is her mother, is in her 60s. Although the woman on the right wears a face mask that consists of a narrower frame, which is more revealing than the 'appropriate' face mask for her age, it is generally the case that the colour and size of masks indicate generational differences. Photo taken in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

In the UAE, there are three main standard models of face mask that apply to each age group. One of them is '*burquʿ muqaṭṭaf* (torn)', which is usually worn by newly married and young women (Alnaqbī 2012, 36). It has very wide eye-slits that reveal the cheeks and the lower lip in order to show the wearer's beauty. When a woman is in her 30s, she starts to change her mask to '*burquʿ miyānī*' (middle in Persian), which is a medium size mask (ibid). This mask conceals more parts of the face than the '*burquʿ muqṭaf*' by narrowing the eye-slits and widening the bottom part of the mask. Finally, older women, widows, and a few unmarried or brides-to-be wear a large face mask: the former conceals signs of aging and the latter is intended to show modesty and/or express grief and sadness

(ʿUthmān 1998, 408). This face mask, which is known as '*bumajailha*' or '*burquʿ dhayiiq* (narrow)', has very narrow eye slits, and is substantial in size, completely covering the lower half of the forehead and jaws (ibid.; Al Shomely 2016, 95) (Fig. 6.19). This model of a face mask is now nearly extinct, because unmarried women no longer practise the masking custom, and older women are less concerned about their faces being completely covered.

In addition, Lootah observes that there is not much cultural expectation that elderly women will conceal their faces in public, for the reason that they are no longer considered to be "a subject of sensuality or pleasure" (1999, 72). Moreover, women who want to anonymise themselves have adapted the *niqāb*, a long black veil, instead of the face mask. While styles and designs indicate the wearer's origin, different sizes instead signify the wearer's approximate age group.

(Fig 6.19) The face mask that is known as '*bumajailha*' or '*burquʿ dhayiiq*'. Photo taken in Ajman in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

6.4.3 Occasion

Women change their face masks in accordance with occasions, fashion, and circumstances. Most of my respondents observed that it is common etiquette, when attending a wedding, henna night, and special gathering (e.g. Eid), to wear a newly tailored face mask that shines brightly (Figs. 6.20, 6.21). This indicates the wearer's sense of respect and good wishes to the hosts as well as the guests. Most women therefore always keep two masks at home, with one being for occasional use and the other being for daily use. Once the brightness or golden colour of the face mask fades away, they use it daily and purchase a new mask. When a daily use mask gets darker and loses its rigidity, women discard it.

Some women, however, store darkened face masks and wear them for funerals alongside dark clothes (Fig. 6.22). One woman (106) from Ras al-Khaimah observed that these dress codes and taboos have recently become less accepted and maintained. She had seen some women attending funerals with their shiny golden face mask—the following of this dress code indicates the wearer's cultural awareness and also conveys the image of the 'traditional' woman.

(Fig. 6.20) A wedding celebration in *Zaʿabīl* (Dubai) in 1954 (Codrai 1992, 189). Although the colours of the face masks are not clear in the image, women most likely wore new masks with wider eye slits specifically ordered for the occasion (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo reproduced from Codrai (ibid.).

(Fig. 6.21) Left: A woman from Shib Deraz village on Qeshm Island showing her newly made face mask that had been prepared for an upcoming event. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 6.22) A woman from Daraku village on Qeshm Island wearing a face mask that had lost the gloss of the fabric. This often reflects the financial situation of the wearer: many women would discard a mask if it

gets as dark as the one seen above. The colour of this mask is dark enough to wear for a funeral (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo taken in December 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

6.4.4 Socio-Economic Status

The act of concealing the face visibly distinguished free women from slaves who mostly came through Zanzibar (see Chapter 4.2). Since such an act was forbidden for slave women, it seems that many ex-slave women adopted the face mask in order to elevate their social status and gain respect in public after slavery in the Gulf region was abolished in the 1950s (Wikan [1982] 1991, 96-97; Chatty 1997, 143; Rugh 2007, 7).

Amongst free women, the colours of the face mask fabric have served to indicate the wearer's socio-economic status. The shiny indigo-dyed fabric has been imported from Mumbai, India since the end of the nineteenth century after synthetic dyestuff was produced and introduced to India in the middle of the nineteenth century (Richardson and Dorr 2003, 156) (see Chapter 5.1.1). Its cost and quality differ in accordance with the colour, with red being the most expensive, followed by yellow and green. These varieties have been available since 1960, as before this year the fabric manufacturing companies only produced red-coloured indigo dyed fabrics in India (Al Shomely 2016, 66). The differences in the fabrics have already been discussed in Chapter 5.1.1, but the constant acquisition of face masks made of the red-coloured fabric requires a stable source of income and is also preferred by elder women (ʿUthmān 1998, 389).

The fabrics have been mainly imported to Dubai from India, and from there they are distributed to other parts of the Gulf including southern Iran, including Bandar Abbas, Qeshm Island, and Bandar Lengeh. It is therefore the case that more variations of the fabric are available in the UAE, whereas only limited brands and colours, usually yellow

or green, are sold on Qeshm Island. It has been suggested that the increased demand for the low-quality face mask fabrics was induced not only by the fact that the majority of lower class women could not afford the red-coloured fabric, but also by the perception that shiny yellow or green coloured fabrics could compensate for a lack of gold jewellery, which was a symbol of high socio-economic status (Al Azzi 1990, 25; Al Shomely 2016, 39).

Women's social status is generally more apparent during celebrations, as wealthy women decorate their masks with gold and silver. It is common to adorn a bridal face mask with gold, which the groom gifts in advance along with other wedding presents. On Qeshm Island, gold adornments are placed on the temple parts attached to each side of the strings (Fig. 6.23). These adornments usually consist of four designed gold plates that are often joined together, and a total of eight gold plates are situated on each side. Flowers or leaves are the most frequently used motifs within the four designs for the gold plates (see Chapter 5.1.4).

(Fig. 6.23) A face mask from Giahdan village with gold plates ornamentations, which was purchased in Dubai. Because the gold adornments are reusable, once the face mask loses its lustrous colour and rigidity,

a woman takes the gold plates and discards the mask, then makes or buys a new mask for special occasions (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo taken in December 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

Those gold adornments are imported from Dubai and sold at the town markets or directly to the women. However, due to increasing gold prices, many of the gold adornments have been replaced by imitation gold or crystal. Another reason for the popularity of imitation gold, which many Qeshmi women mentioned in my interviews, was the danger of theft. One respondent (20) said:

> "We now use imitation gold because when we went to weddings and cultural celebrations with real gold adornments attached, they were often lost or stolen… If you bring a *burquʿ* with gold ornaments, they would take them away from you either when you pray or from your bags."

According to some Qeshmi respondents, the fact that gold can easily be exchanged for money means that theft even takes place among close relatives, often being committed by children who do not attract much attention in the crowd.

In the UAE, it seems that only ruling family members and prominent merchant families were able to afford ornamentations for their face masks. These ornamented masks were often shared amongst family members and were sometimes rented out to poor families who were not financially capable of purchasing them for their weddings (Alsenjray 2009, 59; Al Shomely 2016, 98). Many women I interviewed had also not even heard of or seen actual ornamented face masks in the UAE, and told me that they used newly-made face masks without any decorations on occasions. They also said how difficult life was before the discovery of oil, and this highlighted a huge economic gap between a few very wealthy families and the majority who were destitute (Fig. 6.24).

(Fig. 6.24) Women dancing during a local wedding in Dubai in 1962 (Kawashima 2010, 70). In contrast to the women in Figure 6.25, the lack of face mask adornments and jewellery indicates their low socio-economic status (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo reproduced from Kawashima (ibid.).

Although these decorative masks are now only seen in museums or private collections, the sewing of gold coins or discs on the top or sides of the face mask, as described in Chapter 5.1.4, were popular ways of adorning masks in the UAE and the other Gulf Arab states. In the UAE, the last generation of Abu Dhabi's ruling family that used the gold ornamented face mask stopped wearing it in the 1970s (El Mutwalli 2015, 284) (Fig. 6.25).[70]

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[70] These women are Shaikha ʿĀsha bint Shakhbūt Āl Nahyān, Shaikha ʿĀisha and Shaikha Maitha banāt Muḥammad Āl Nahyān (the older sister of Shaikha Hamda bint Mohammad Āl Nahyān), and Shaikha Hamda bint Mohammad Āl Nahyān (El Mutwalli 2015, 284).

(Fig. 6.25) Women at a celebration that took place in Abu Dhabi in the 1970s (Rashid 1996, 129). They are probably from the ruling family as the gold adornments attached to their face masks and heavy jewellery indicate their high socio-economic status (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo reproduced from Rashid (ibid.).

Interestingly, the gold ornament style—gold plates attached to both sides of the strings—which has gained popularity on the Iranian side of the Gulf, including Qeshm Island, was not commonly seen in the UAE, even though it was known about and referred to as '*shubūk*' or '*shubūch*' by elderly Emirati women. This style was only recorded in the northern Emirates up until the late 1970s (Kanafani 1983, 66), and this might indicate cultural boundaries within the UAE, with the north-eastern part being more culturally connected to the Iranian side and the south-western part being influenced by the desert culture of the central Arabian Peninsula.

On Qeshm Island, gold decoration is still considered to symbolise the socio-economic status of the wearer and her family despite the increased use of imitation gold, although this is not relevant in contemporary Emirati society. One reason could be because most Emirati women no longer wear face masks. However, it is more important that improvements in living standards driven by the distribution of oil revenues distributed to

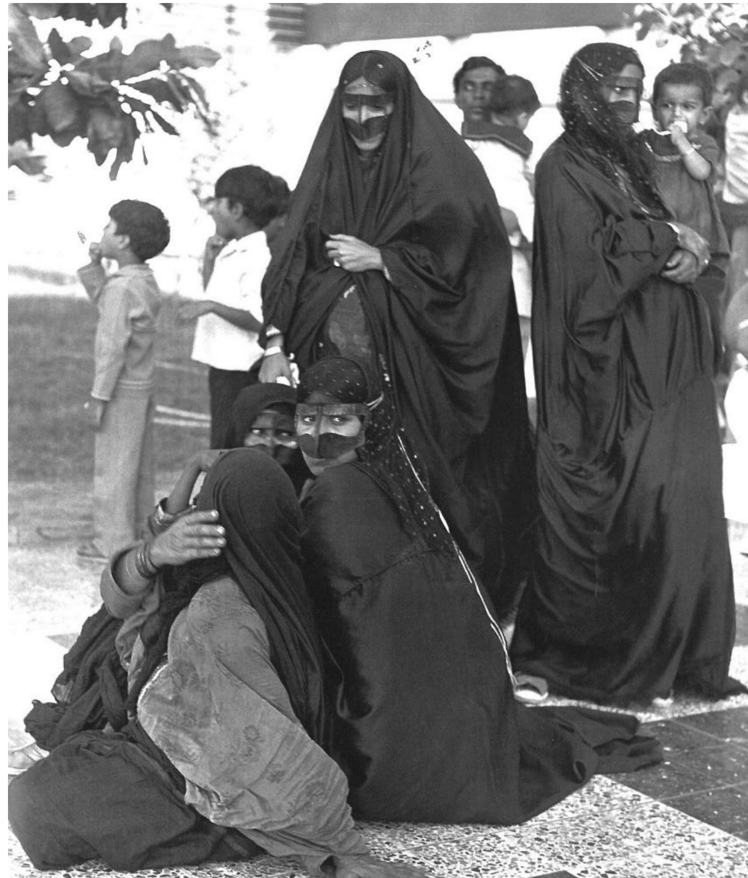
citizens has made it easier for Emiratis to purchase gold. For this reason, gold adornment lost much of its importance as a symbol of prestige.

To summarise, the long-standing cultural connotations attributed to adornments, designs, and colours have changed in accordance with the social situations that prevail at a particular time. Lurie observes that a shift of this kind has been caused by a corruption of the social hierarchy, observing that: "[A]s class barriers weakened and wealth could be more easily and rapidly converted into gentility, the system by which color and shape indicated social status began to break down" ([1981] 1992, 115). A similar phenomenon may soon occur on Qeshm Island as substantial amounts of foreign investment are flowing in, and the local economy has also been stimulated and supported (Ehsani and Azari 2017, 133-34).

6.4.5 Ethnicity

The face mask as a symbol of ethnicity is not widely discussed on Qeshm Island as very few non-native people wear it and live amongst Qeshmis. However, the Balochi face mask is very distinct from Qeshm Island's face mask (Chapter 1.4), and this means that when they come to the island to shop, it is easy to spot them. On the contrary, in the UAE some Emiratis believe that the way women tie the masks around the head differentiates Emiratis of Arab ethnic background from those that have a Persian or Balochi ethnic background (Al Shomely 2016, 109). According to their observations, Emirati women of Arab ethnic background tie the strings of the mask directly around the head and then wear the outer head veils, and this makes the strings invisible (ibid.). In contrast, Emirati women from Persian or Baluchi backgrounds tie the face mask over the head veils so that the strings are visible. These differences may be attributable to different attitudes towards

the covering of the hair. While historical photographs of Emirati women show translucent head veils that barely conceal the hair (Fig. 6.26), Qeshmi women always seem to wrap their head veils tightly so as not to reveal their hair.



(Fig. 6.26) Women sitting in front of the Maktoum Hospital in 1968, which was the first fully-equipped hospital to be established in the Dubai area (Bhatia 1995, 53). Prior to the 1970s, the woman's head veil functioned as a means of modesty rather than a physical object to hide behind (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo, taken by Ramesh Shukla, reproduced from Bhatia (ibid.).

However, since the 1980s with the rise of religious awareness and the application of fundamentalist interpretations of Islam to dress code, the importance of concealing the hair increased in the Gulf Arab states (Chapter 8.2.1). Additionally, many of my Emirati respondents who tie the strings over the head veil are of Arab origin, and they intentionally secure the face mask over the head veil to prevent the veil that is covering the hair from slipping off. The strings thus serve the function of a fixing agent. The

assumption that the way of fastening the face mask indicates the ethnic background of the wearer is therefore rather controversial as there is no general agreement on this subject.

Very few women also mentioned that Balochi women tend to cover a larger part of the face, and this recalls Wikan's observation ([1982] 1991, 98) that in Sohar in Oman the size of eye-slits establish ethnic differences, with Arab eye-slits being larger and Balochi being smaller (Stehlin-Alzadjali 2010, 70).

6.4.6 Summary of the Face Mask as a Biographical Object

Taken together, these findings provide insight into various meanings that the face mask communicates and reveal how intended meanings attributed to a design, size, and wearing method are understood differently on Qeshm Island and in the UAE. Through detail modification and styling, women actively exhibit their individuality and celebrate particular aspects of their identities such as origin, age, and socio-economic status: to all intents and purposes, the face mask therefore provides a biography of the wearer. Furthermore, while the economic gap within the community has constricted and alternative options have become available, the colour of the fabric and gold adornments have lost their symbolic meanings and the ability to serve as prestige signs of wealth and status.

Yet, an essential characteristic of the face mask is to enable the wearer to customise and personalise the article, and this allows her to express her sense of belonging as well as aesthetics. It is also important to remember that this is one of the few occasions that a woman has full control in a traditional patriarchal society although there are signs that social attitudes are beginning to gradually change. Hosmon's observation that "the Arab

woman's wardrobe is in direct proportion to her husband's social rank and his finance" (1914, 12) no longer fully reflects the reality of Emirati women's social situation.

6.5 Cultivating Imagined Communities

Once an essential element of women's public attire, the face mask is now often an item reserved for occasional use. Few families on Qeshm Island now urge their girls to adopt a face mask after marriage, and most women from younger generations on both sides of the Gulf no longer conceal their faces on a daily basis. Demand for the elaborate and personalised centrepiece of the women of the Gulf is in decline, yet many young women try to revive it by wearing it during henna nights and cultural events.

The attitude of young Qeshmis towards the face mask varies as some women see it as being out of fashion and remark that "it [the face mask] is ugly and unfashionable" or "an unnecessary tradition to pass down." Others, meanwhile, believe that it is somehow their duty to preserve its history and practice for the benefit of future generations even though the traditional use of the mask may disappear (Chapter 8.2.1). When Qeshmi women talked about preserving the masking custom as part of their identity, they referred to either their 'village' or 'island' identity when engaging with the dress and associated rituals. No one referred to 'Iranian' or 'Persian' identity when openly acknowledging their social belonging (Chapter 8.1.1). In fact, masking custom has been practised only in southern parts of Iran, and other cities, where the majority of the population is Persian or other ethnicities, do not present the face mask as part of their traditional attire. Thus, even in public museums, such as the Ethnological Museum and Abyaz Palace in Tehran, the face mask is introduced as part of regional dress. Additionally, the government does not favour masking custom, as they believe concealment of the face is not consistent with either the

national or religious identities of Iran.

However, some elderly Emirati women choose to keep the face mask over other face coverings because they aim to preserve the masking custom as part of their tradition and national identity. Younger Emirati women insist their reason for wearing the face mask is to sense their 'Emirati' identity and to acknowledge the importance of long-standing traditional custom. Because other types of face-covering were introduced to the UAE, mainly from Saudi Arabia (El Mutwalli 2015, 59-60), the attitudes of masked women tended to divide between adapting a new form of veiling (a full-black face veil) and continuing to wear the traditional face mask. The latter is often preceded by the belief that the full-cover black veil does not belong to their society, and they therefore do not have any emotional attachment to it. One Emirati woman (116) said:

> "Girls change their minds easily depending on fashion, and whenever they feel uncomfortable wearing the *burquʿ*, they go for the *niqāb*. The *niqāb* is from other Gulf countries and not from the Emirates. The elder women get used to wearing it, and they resist the change."

In the UAE, when young women discuss the face mask, they tend to associate it with the 'national' identity rather than the identity of their town, city, or emirate. However, this 'national' identity was constructed later in the 1970s, and it has been politically emphasised through media and cultural celebrations and events, as Chapter 8.2 further discusses. As the traditional function of the face mask becomes irrelevant in society and is replaced by other objects, it has been claimed that it is increasingly important to preserve the tradition of the face mask. In the contemporary period, the face mask functions as an object that provides people with a sense of belonging and represents particular identities that are greatly influenced by regional and local politics.

On Qeshm Island, indigenous cultures and lifestyles have been modernised and Persianised, and it is therefore crucial for the indigenous population to establish a local identity through distinctive traditions such as the face mask (Ehsani and Azari 2017, 134-35). This is not only vital to preserve their identity, but also attracts tourists, an important source of income that improves livelihoods and social welfare. In the UAE, the initiative led by the government and individual emirates to promote the face mask as a representation of the national or local identity has been vital in unifying the population and helping to distinguish them from neighbouring states. This attitude created an interesting phenomenon in which inventing an 'Emirati' face mask reflected their national tradition, motivating young people to uniquely modify or create a contemporary face mask. In the contemporary period, the face mask embodies new meanings and functions.

6.6 Providing an Economic Prospect

The revival and preservation of the face-mask tradition is closely interconnected with the economic interests of locals, especially those of younger generations. On Qeshm Island, women's empowerment through local handicrafts as a means of promoting identity preservation and economic independence is a focused agenda that is supported by local and international organisations as part of an institutionalisation of a Global Geopark and ecotourism (see Chapter 8.1.3). Women were traditionally expected to work only as housewives and to have limited access to social activities, and were solely in charge of the household while men were the financial provider for the family. However, their traditional economic activities, such as fishing, have been greatly affected by modern industrial mass production methods and external involvement in the market, and this has increased poverty amongst indigenous people on the island (Ehsani and Azari 2017, 144).

Many organisations, including an Iranian organisation, the Avaye Tabiate Paydar, and the Japan International Cooperating Agency (JICA), have sought to take advantage of the island's rich topology and unique cultural tradition, along with international recognition of both features. They have launched projects that provide trainings that effectively promote and enhance rural women's handicrafts and financial management, and this includes making dolls that wear traditional attire and exhibiting them in the Geopark museum (ibid.) (Fig. 6.27). This brought about a gradual change in society because male members of the community began to recognise the potential of women who had been considered to be subordinate, and allowed female family members to take part in economic activities (ibid., 143; Manami Goto, field notes). Nonetheless, it is important to note that foreign organisations and non-Qeshmi Iranians are greatly involved in bringing this social change to the local society; yet it is still too early to fully measure its impact on the gender relations in the community.

The women's earnings also supported the family's income and improved their overall standard of living. In addition, social media also enables local entrepreneurs to quickly follow the latest trends and reflect them in their products: for example, by designing household utilities, daily articles, and souvenirs that utilise face mask motifs, such as bags, pouches, wallets, and cushions; this is in addition to modifying the traditional face mask by taking up the vogue and adopting new colours, materials, and styles. This economic prospect has therefore motivated young generations, for whom the face mask is far removed from daily lives, to take part in its conservation. This, at the same time, enables them to reconnect with the traditional custom, a point that is further discussed in Chapter 8.1.3.

(Fig. 6.27) Dolls imitating local women by wearing the traditional dress, sold to visitors at local shops in Borka Khalaf village. The different face masks represent the identity of each village on the island (Manami Goto, field notes). (Image: Manami Goto)

In the UAE, a similar shift in the relationship between new generations and the face mask can be observed. The social restriction imposed on women is less strict than on Qeshm Island, and yet the public engagement of women is still impeded by family constraints to a certain extent, especially in the workplace. In order to accommodate social and family perceptions while finding their livelihood and role in society in a manner that will enable them to develop knowledge and skills, many Emirati women are attracted by the possibility of establishing their own business through social media. As entrepreneurship has become more popular, distinguishing oneself from other competitors through successful branding has become key to survival. Accordingly, many Emiratis tend to apply locality or 'Emiratiness' in their artefacts, and they often use the 'traditional' Emirati dress as a motif for the design (Manami Goto, field notes). These can be easily examined at events showcasing artefacts created by local entrepreneurs (Figs. 6.28, 6.29). This new business opportunity not only provides a platform for young Emiratis to associate with the disappearing tradition of the face mask, but also gives the face mask a new function as a means of economic innovation.

(Fig. 6.28) Hand-made bag with a motif of a masked woman, sold at the Mother of the Nation Festival in Abu Dhabi in March 2017. The designer of this bag, Ummī Thurayā (78), is a local entrepreneur who is originally from Oman but resides in the UAE. She often uses the traditional 'Emirati' dress in her artefact designs, and her products have become popular amongst Emiratis (Manami Goto, field notes). (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 6.29) A greeting card using the face mask motif. Some local entrepreneurs use the face mask motif for different products (Manami Goto, field notes). Photo taken in Ras al-Khaimah in March 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the associated symbolic meanings and functions of the face mask by drawing on the perspectives of local women from Qeshm Island and the UAE. This contradicts the argument that veiling is solely a religious or political requirement. The face mask has served to mark womanhood and wifely status, secure public access, protect the face from harsh environment, express piety, safeguard modesty/social status and convey individuality. From the onset of puberty, a woman carefully selects fabrics, colours, shapes, designs, and the adornments of her face mask, which are closely associated with specific 'codes' defined by individual societies and inherited across generations. Through this process, a woman attempts to construct herself and her socio-cultural identities; in other words, the face mask provides her with a space to achieve both self-identification and self-expression in a patriarchal social environment.

The face mask, as an object that physically conceals the face, is often understood as a way to anonymise or eliminate women from public sphere; however, at the same time, it eroticises and embellishes the wearer by accentuating particular parts of the face. Nevertheless, this multi-dimensional, distinct feature of the object has not received enough attention and nor has it been appreciated by people who are not familiar with the native cultures. Today, the face mask emerges as a symbol of local and national identity, being modified and designed in accordance with the latest fashion trend or social situation. Though the masking custom is itself vanishing, women today aim to preserve the face-mask tradition, both materialistically and ritually, while maintaining a sensible balance between social expectations, tradition, and a new way of life.

Masking as a cultural ritual, choosing a mask for fashion, creating artefacts with mask motifs for employment, or being masked to signify status and identity—each one

embodies very different meanings despite the fact that they all employ the same practice. Yet it needs to be clarified if rapid societal change, which has in turn impacted on women's status and lifestyle, has motivated women to wear or remove the mask: this also implies the question of precisely when this has occurred. In a society where male opinions are highly respected and regarded, there is also the issue of how women negotiate and bargain their agency in relation to masking. The next chapter therefore explores women's agency in relation to masking and unmasking, and examines struggle, power negotiation, and the active engagement of women who are often seen as victims of a patriarchal system.

Chapter 7: Expressed Agency: Negotiating Gender Roles through the Act of Masking and Unmasking

يا بنت عمي افسخي البطولة

كيف افسخ البطولة و اخوك واقف بطوله

"Cousin, remove your burqa [mask]. She replies 'how can you want me to remove my burqa when your brother is standing behind you?":

A popular Bahraini saying about a face mask (Al Shomely 2016, 113).[71]

Introduction

Soon after receiving the location of the house on Google Maps via WhatsApp, it took me only ten minutes to reach where Fatima, my friend's neighbour had invited me to interview her masked mother in Ajman. When I informed Fatima of my arrival, she quickly opened the entrance door and guided me to the guest room. Dozens of old photographs were hung around the room, and a replica of a traditional well and its surroundings were set up at the corner of the room along with randomly placed old coffee pots and vintage Coca-Cola bottles.[72] While I excitedly observed the room's decoration and objects, Fatima's mother, Salama, approached me and greeted me with "Hello." When I replied to her in Arabic, she turned her head to her three elder daughters and said,

[71] In this context, the husband and wife are cousins, thus the husband refers to his wife as 'cousin'.

[72] The collection of local antiques and the building of replicas of old objects have become popular hobbies among Emiratis.

"She speaks Arabic!"

I quickly realised the significance—Fatima and her other sisters who no longer lived in the house had gathered that evening in order to translate. Once they realised this was not required, they started recording the interview scenes for their Instagram and Snapchat posts. In the meantime, they sometimes participated in the interview conversations whenever their interests arose. When I asked questions that related to Salama's decision to continuously wear the face mask despite its unpopularity, her daughters became actively involved in the discussion. "We have asked her to take it off. It's an old tradition and there is no need to hide the face now," one said. Another added: "We told her to wear the *niqāb* if she wants to cover her face." The youngest daughter interjected and observed: "She is the only one who still wants to use the *burquʿ* in her generation in the family. Everyone left the *burquʿ* custom."

The lively conversation caught the attention of Salama's husband who was in an inner room and who then arrived in the guest room to join the conversation. My interview quickly transformed into a family conference regarding Salama's maintenance of the face mask. Once he became familiar with my research topic, he demanded, "Why are you doing research on the *burquʿ*? There are more important things to study!?" In explaining the aim of my research and sharing interesting findings with him, I asked about how he perceived his wife's insistence on wearing a mask. He looked at Salama's face and replied:

> "Well, I told her many times to stop wearing the *burquʿ*! In the past, it was used to conceal the face for modesty, but now the *burquʿ* does not serve any purposes. It is revealing the entire face!"

Salama pretended not to hear anything and kept playing a traditional game using seashells (*bakīs*/*pakīs*) in front of me without saying a word. I formed the impression that the subject had previously been extensively discussed. She looked at me from a position where her husband could not see her face and smirked, before exclaiming in his direction: "Enough (*khalāṣ*)! I want to wear it! So, it's enough!" The husband found himself in the embarrassing position of being scolded by his wife in front of a foreign guest and briskly left the house with a friendly farewell greeting to me.

This was not the only time I encountered arguments between a wife and husband or family members over the wearing of the face mask. Both in the UAE and on Qeshm Island, it is common for male members of the family to involve themselves in the selection of women's clothing, as women's appearance and behaviour are often considered to carry the burden of family honour and reputation.

The previous chapter explored symbolic meanings embedded in various elements of the face mask and its diverse functions. In contrast, this chapter focuses on agency around masking and unmasking and further examines the motivations that lie behind the wearers' actions. Thus, the focus shifts from the object to the wearer. Because the acts of masking and unmasking are often driven by other forces such as family members, friends, education, modernisation, (un)written laws, and interactions with the outside world, this chapter aims to illuminate and discuss changing attitudes towards masking and unmasking practices between the 1930s and the 2010s. It takes into account women's daily experiences—adapting, negotiating, resisting, struggling, and bargaining with cultural ideas about the nature of women's bodies. The state's control of women's bodies in relation to the masking practices and women's reactions will be explored in Chapter 8.

After outlining a theoretical perspective, this chapter describes and discusses two case

studies: the women of Qeshm Island and those of the UAE. Each case study is further divided into three parts: the first focuses on the generations who customarily adopted the face mask and continue to wear it; the second sheds light on the generations who once adopted the mask but later discarded it; and the third illustrates the generations who have never worn the face mask. This comparative historical approach portrays the development of gender politics and women's varied actions and reactions towards the practice over a period of time. Despite their complexity, the acts of masking and unmasking deserve special attention as they contribute to the history of women's agency, depicting the manifestation of the relationship between the state, religion, and society, and tracing women's pursuits to establish their position and status in society. As the family conversations at the beginning of this chapter illustrate, the face mask, which was once one of the most unique elements of the Gulf costume, has become seen as an unnecessary, old-fashioned item that many women have attempted to abandon in accordance with the continuing advance of modernity and changes in religious and gender politics.

The disappearance of time-honoured customs is often understood as a natural process in the advancement of modernity and the course of the country's development (Wikan [1982] 1991, 108). Consequently, scholars have invested little effort into analysing the role of personal experience and struggle in this process, which is often caught between accepting, resisting, and accommodating both internal and external influences. In order to understand these complex forms of agency that surround acts of (un)masking in Gulf society, I will begin by identifying the problems that relate to the current debate that attends to the agency of veiled women. I will then define 'agency' and its context.

Dominant readings perceive the act of veiling to be representative of women's subordination to men: women in a veil are, to this extent, depicted to be "*devoid of agency*"

(Bilge 2010, 9-10). This representation derives from a secular, liberal definition of agency as being "the free exercise of self-willed behaviour" (Mack 2005, 434; Sahu, Jeffery, and N 2016, 2). This definition suggests that an established agent is expected to always act upon his/her best interests and resist oppressive power relationships (Mack 2005, 436). However, this definition, in presupposing autonomy and dependency, is solely a reflection of masculine and elitist concepts of the nature of agency and, to this extent, ignores diverse forms of agency exercised amongst marginalised groups as well as different socio-cultural contexts (Benson 1990; Davies 1991, 44). For example, feminist scholars such as Mahmood (2001), Avishai (2008), and Korteweg (2008) argue that the definition fails to grasp the complexity of female agency and also posits that women who do not resist domination lack agency.

Meanwhile, Mack (2005, 440) and Saharso (2008, 6) argue that this lacks cultural sensitivity and accordingly warn against the dangers that adhere within such a Western-centric definition. Saharso observes:

> "[W]hen we criticize other cultures than our own there is a risk that we use double standards, that we use essentialist notions of culture and that we speak for, and thereby deny the autonomy and agency of, minority women" (2008, 6)

To put it differently, individual autonomy, which is essential to the Western understanding of agency, is not always applicable to other socio-cultural contexts.[73] These cultural differences become particularly problematic when veiled women are

[73] Japanese society often prioritises relationships over individual desire when making choices—accordingly, the expression and indication of personal desire and attributes are often considered to be immature (Markus and Kitayama 1991).

viewed as "*unconscious agents* of their own manipulation at the (male) hands", as in the presentation of Bilge (2010, 17), which denies the personal autonomy of veiled women. Badinter (1989), for example, does not acknowledge Muslim women as agents who can make 'free' choices, including about their appearance, "because the content of their cultural norms—namely, the Muslim values of female restraint, modesty and seclusion—are opposed to personal autonomy" (in Mookherjee 2005, 33). This same attitude can, however, be alternatively understood as the agency of determinism or voluntarism, meaning that women do not simply adhere to a status of subordination within their culture or gender constraints, but rather become willing subjects (Bilge 2010, 23). Therefore, as long as actions are undertaken by a freely consenting individual acting on her accord, her autonomy is arguably recognised as given (Christman 1991; Mahmood 2001, 207). This interpretation positively shifts our attentions to diverse modes of individual actions performed in order to achieve "a certain kind of state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1997, 24).

Although the above literature has attempted to theorise Muslim women's agency concerning the veiling practice by extending beyond the discourse of subordination/resistance dichotomy or determinism, this discussion still fails to embody women's own voices. This is attributable to the fact that it is often based on assumptions that view veiling only as a religious practice or the veiled woman as being passive and submissive in a patriarchal system. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, Muslim women's use of the face mask is neither limited to just a religious obligation nor as an expression of piety. Nevertheless, the outward behaviour of Muslim women's veiling practices (in this case, masking) does not necessarily reflect the complexity of the wearer's inward motives. This may be the only factor in her agency not taking a context-

specific approach.

However, the act of masking cannot be simply generalised or symbolised as a marker of submission to Islam or male family members, resistance to Western hegemony, or a cultural practice embodying her identity. It is significantly more complex and nuanced than these reductive understandings imply. I therefore locate ‘agency’ as an analytical term that “refers to the purposeful action of individuals”—this puts aside the discussion of autonomy and structure of agency (Duits and Liesbet 2007, 165) and enables a closer examination of individual accounts of the decision to mask and unmask. I also consider women’s strategies in dealing with social expectations. By making women actors and subjects rather than objects, and in recognising their active agencies, I aim to challenge the dichotomy in the debate around Muslim women’s agency over the act of (un)masking. The task of this chapter is not to evaluate or judge whether (un)masked women are oppressed or free. Instead, it seeks to consider the complex factors surrounding the agency of masking and unmasking.

7.1 The Case of Qeshm Island

Qeshm Island was ruled by the Arab tribe of Bani Muʿin until it came under Iran’s (formally Persian) administration in 1856 (Schofield and Blake 1988, 3; Al-Otabi 1989, 28). Despite this administrative change, the inhabitants have kept closer ties with the Gulf Arab countries than with the central government of Iran and other Persian communities on the mainland. Consequently, almost all aspects of island life—cultural, economic, religious and social—have been greatly influenced by Arabs on the opposite side of the Gulf.

Like the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula, the society of Qeshm Island has traditionally been built under a rubric of classical patriarchy, meaning that senior men extend authority over others, and this entails the control and subordination of women, which takes various forms and manifestations (Kandiyoti 1988, 278). Once a woman is married, both her own and her husband's family tend to be involved in retaining her honour (Meeker 1976, 409-10). Nonetheless as tribal and family unity has weakened, it is normally the husband who is most influential in decision-making, and this includes clothing choices.

Under these social constraints, expressing one's agency becomes increasingly complex, yet Qeshmi women have developed creative strategies and tactics and utilised clothing to reach public spaces, education, and employment. By doing this, they have challenged gender hierarchies and cultural norms to gain more control in a traditional patriarchal system, which Kandiyoti terms the "*patriarchal bargain*" (1988, 275). Although Qeshmi women have gradually left the masking custom and either adopted a new form of veiling or gone completely uncovered, they can still recall when the masking custom was imposed and some women fought to become unmasked. However, patriarchal bargains around the acts of (un)masking have not ceased, and some women continue to repeat different negotiating strategies, thereby imposing their agency on decisions connected to both masking and unmasking.

In the case of Qeshm Island, these generational changes can be broadly divided into three periods. The first, prior to 1980 when the masking custom was often enforced on girls, focuses on the girls' feelings and experiences when they first adopted a face mask and illustrates their use of mask as a means of personal expression. The second, 1980-2000, relates to the period when some women began unmasking despite social resistance and examines the motivations that underpinned the act, followed by the social reactions and

struggles that they encountered in the process. The third, from 2000 onwards, relates to a period when the face mask is no longer considered to be a social need and many young generations do not have any experience of wearing it. It investigates women's changing attitudes towards the masking custom and their relationship with the mask. This complex historical narrative exemplifies how intentions of agency in relation to acts of (un)masking vary and change depending on social circumstances.

7.1.1 Prior to 1980: Masking as Part of Custom

Due to the geographical characteristics of Qeshm Island, much of the central government's domestic politics and legal administration did not reshape the island's traditions until recently. The veil ban of 1936 caused the emigration of some inhabitants who opposed the decision to unveil women, and they relocated to the other side of the Gulf, a movement of people known locally as *Kashif al-hejāb*. However, many women on the island escaped inspection and continued to practise masking in their own spaces, such as their own homes and surrounding neighbourhoods.

As discussed in the previous chapter, girls were asked to adopt their first face mask as soon as they passed puberty. It was often the parents, especially the mother, who insisted that their daughters wear it. In the case of Safa (54), her parents forced her to conceal her face with a mask: 'My mother said, "You must wear it!" My mother and father didn't allow me to reveal my face. I had no choice but to adopt a face mask.' Despite varying social expectation of the ages at which girls adopt a face mask, the decision rests entirely with each individual family. The donning of the mask did not only signal the wearer's marriageable or married status, but also maintained her modesty as a mature woman who carries the honour of her family. Some families advised their daughters to adopt a mask

even before having their first menstruation if their physical appearance resembled an adult.

Although many of the respondents did not initiate their own masking by themselves, one of them (8) had indeed decided to adopt her mask by herself, without her parents' instructions to do so. She said: "When all my friends started wearing the *burquʿ,* I was the only one who was unmasked because I had not passed puberty yet at that time. But I decided to wear it by myself not to be left out in the [friends'] group!" Thus, the masking could be part of identity construction as well as the cultivation of peer-group relationships. Despite various motives leading girls to mask, all the informants, both men and women, acknowledged that masking was a custom that local women were expected to follow. This did not leave room for girls and women to choose.

While some Qeshmi women willingly accepted this custom without any objection, others went through difficult times before agreeing to wear the mask for the rest of their lives. Adopting a face mask upon marriage was part of a customary procedure to officially declare the status of being a married woman. Leila (51) married at the age of twenty-one and remembered her feeling when wearing a face mask for the first time after a wedding. She said: "I was so happy because wearing a face mask made me feel I had a husband!" On the contrary, Fateme (67) first experienced adopting a face mask when she got married, and for her it is still associated with unpleasant memories. Although she was aware of the custom of her village that she would be asked to wear a face mask after her wedding like everyone else, she cried and refused to wear one because she felt that "the mask limits [her] world and freedom." Now, after almost thirty years, she cannot imagine leaving the house without a mask.

Many masked women recalled that it took time to get used to wearing the face mask as they were always expected to keep their masks on except in front of their husband, non-

marriageable men, and other women. This imposes a physical burden as a substantial material object is placed on the face all the time, making the wearer uncomfortable when eating, breathing, and talking, and also leaving indigo stains on the face. At the same time, there are also psychological effects as a masked woman is no longer 'free', in the sense that her behaviour becomes constrained by the social norms and the expectations of a mature woman, such as preventing her from interacting with marriageable men, which limits her movement outside the home. Amene (8), a thirty-nine-year-old woman from Bandar-e Doulab, recalls her feelings when she transited from being a 'girl' to a 'woman':

> "You know, here [the village] we all played together when we were small. I was very active and fought with boys many times. But after I got my first period and adopted the *burquʿ*, I felt I became a grown-up woman, and my family did not allow me to meet my male cousins informally like before."

For girls, it is a big change as they usually play with their male cousins and have access to both male and female social spaces until puberty; thus, wearing a mask implies that such activities have become unacceptable.

While some women prefer to keep a mask on even in front of other women, most Qeshmi women tend to unmask inside the house. Therefore, the acts of masking and unmasking indicate a clear distinction between public and private space. Amongst women, the act of unmasking also signifies the relationships between the wearer and the others. At weddings or relatively big gatherings such as Eid celebrations, many women do not reveal their faces as they do not like to be seen 'naked' by other women who are not familiar to them. Once the wearer becomes acquainted with the other women, she would remove her face mask to show that she trusts them. These acts of (un)masking are often used to express the wearer's sympathetic attitude towards others, and for the other to infer the

wearer's intentions (Kanafani 1983, 70-71). Therefore, the act of unmasking can be considered friendly, and the decision not to unmask can be seen as rude and may sometimes cause a breakdown in trust. Beyond the symbolic meanings of the face mask, its use has also been a very important aspect of non-verbal communications between inhabitants.

7.1.2 Between 1980 and 2000: Tensions with Masking

The deep-rooted tradition of masking therefore continued to be practised with support from both men and women. However, a gradual change began to take place on the island when a few women decided to remove their face masks in the early 1980s. Amongst my respondents, there were a few women who shared their experiences of removing the mask for the first time and how they received negative criticism and even rejection from family and society. By shedding light on these individual experiences, this section analyses the active agency used by women and their efforts to change the masking custom.

The first story is about Zīnat Daryāī (62) who was the first women to lift the face mask in Salakh, a small and rural village. Since childhood, when she had grown up watching airplanes crossing above the island and listening to a radio brought from Dubai, Zīnat had sought to understand the strange phenomena she was observing, and this later motivated her to go to school, which was uncommon for girls at that time (Mukhtārī and Daryāī 2004, 18-19). Her father supported her aspiration to study and allowed her to go to school, where she was one of the three girls in the entire school. As time passed, she became interested in studying medicine, which she thought would help her to save lives in the village. She then began to work as a healthcare assistant in a local clinic.

Meanwhile, her parents proceeded with arranging her engagement to a local man, as this was a typical village custom for girls at this time. During the arrangement, her mother-in-law-to-be asked her parents to urge her to leave the job in the clinic because her working outside the home would create a bad reputation for the family. Although Zīnat disagreed, her efforts were in vain as her father thought the marriage was best for her to save her and the family's honour. He used various methods, including locking her in a bedroom, burning her medical equipment, and forcibly preventing her from going to the clinic (Hutton 2003, 70). She eventually gave up her work and married at the age of twelve. When she was preparing for her new married life, a woman who assumed the role of '*mashhadeke*' and was therefore in charge of meeting Zīnat's physical needs before marriage, brought a face mask and told Zīnat that she had become old and must adopt it. Although Zīnat cried and ripped it into pieces that she threw away, she eventually gave in and accepted the mask (Fig. 7.1).

(Fig. 7.1) Zīnat at the age of nineteen in Salakh village on Qeshm Island (Mukhtārī and Daryāī 2004). Photo reproduced from Mukhtārī and Daryāī (ibid.).

For a while, Zīnat committed herself to domestic housework like all other women. However, she could not completely abandon her aspiration to become a healthcare worker and, after giving birth to several children, she decided to go back to college in mainland Iran to study medicine. In the college in Bandar Abbas, the concealing of the face was forbidden, and she therefore removed her mask during her studies and would wear it whenever going back to her village. After returning to Salakh as a medical practitioner, she began to see the masking custom as a form of oppression against women and also felt that the mask was obstructing when she applied medical treatments. Accordingly, she

decided to remove the face mask in spite of the villagers' opposition, and this resulted in her being ostracised from the village for the next ten years. During my interview, she recalled her circumstances at the time. She said:

> 'It was very difficult. Everyone stopped greeting me and avoided eye contact with me. Whenever there were celebrations or gatherings, I was the only one who was not invited. When people gathered for celebrations, I usually sat on the beach alone, looking at the stars, and crying, asking "Why should I go through such struggles?"'

It was a gradual process for the villagers to reaccept her with her unmasked face, and they only did so—and even then, after a long period of time—because she was the only person who could provide medical aid in the village. The more she saved people's lives and assisted in child delivery, the more people began to appreciate her role and acknowledge her effort. Slowly other women followed suit and went public without a mask. Yet her efforts to challenge the patriarchal system and women's status in the village did not stop there.

On February 1999, she won a seat on a village council along with her husband, Aḥmad, during the first elections to take place since the 1979 Iranian revolution (Hutton 2003, 69). She gained the most votes in the election, followed by her husband, who came in third (Naficy 2012, 50).[74] A documentary featuring Zīnat's campaign for the election captured her in conversation with an elderly male villager who came to receive her

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[74] Zīnat's story became widely known after Ebrahim Mokhtari, the renowned Iranian director, produced two films based on her struggles with social norms and her campaign during the election: the first film, entitled "Zinat", premiered in 1994; while the second documentary, entitled "Zinat: One special day"' premiered in 2000.

medical treatment. He insisted that she should withdraw her candidacy, while observing that "[w]ives should be like domesticated animals." In affirming the difference between men and women, he therefore sought to discourage her from taking part in politics (Mukhtārī 2000).

Eight months after being elected, Zīnat received permission from the government to establish a junior high school for girls in the village. Younger generations of the village who have gone to her schools no longer wear the face mask. She also extended her house and turned it into a cultural hall and accommodation for tourists, where she employs local women. There, she organises an artistic theatrical ceremony that depicts a young girl in an iron mask, with this being intended as a metaphor of the social restrictions on women and her personal experiences and feelings when she was fighting for the right to unmask (Fig. 7.2). When I asked her about her perceptions of the face mask, she replied, "I hated *burquʿ* so much, but now I see it as part of our tradition and heritage."

(Fig. 7.2) Zīnat putting an iron mask on a girl's face during a cultural event at her house (Brennan 2016). Photo taken by Eric Lafforgue.

Zīnat's great achievement in overcoming the struggles she encountered in practising her agency over the act of unmasking and breaking cultural taboos in traditional patriarchal society proceeded through different stages, and she used different forms and stages of negotiation in the process. These included: accommodating family and social demands in her early years; adopting the unmasking rule at an educational institution in order to pursue her career; resisting social control of women's bodies by discarding the face mask; and finally preserving the masking tradition through theatre and local handicrafts. As the relationships between the face mask and women have changed in accordance with time and space, their use of agency and sense of purpose have also shifted.

After women like Zīnat began the trend, women in other villages on the island began to leave the custom of wearing the face mask. In the case of Bandar-e Doulab, another small village on the island, the first woman who removed her face mask enjoyed the support of her husband who had studied outside the island and was perceived as a young, open-minded person in the village. Though the villagers raised objections, her female relatives quickly joined her in abandoning the mask. Amene (8) from the same village, who adopted a face mask upon her marriage, took advantage of this development and decided to leave the house unmasked. She was encouraged by her friends and female relatives who began removing their masks in public and admitted that she would not have done so if other women had not taken that action before her. Her husband (9) also confessed that he did not oppose her decision because other women had already removed the mask, and the act of unmasking was no longer perceived to be scandalous. Therefore, he did not feel that the unmasking act would damage the family honour.

Education and also encountering people outside their villages or living spaces seemed to greatly impact their decisions to remove the mask. During the unmasking on the island

some Qeshmi women were influenced by their female relatives who lived on the opposite side of the Gulf and had already abandoned the face mask. Some respondents were in fact motivated to unmask when they visited Dubai and other places where the face mask was perceived as old, backward, antiquated, and not a religious obligation—wearers found that their masked faces attracted gazes, completely contradicting their initial purpose. Before the spread of modern education and mobile phones, the main sources of information and knowledge for Qeshmi women were either their male relatives or female neighbours of their villages. Thus, occasional visits of their relatives in the Gulf Arab states to the island or their rare visits to these states created opportunities for them to exchange information and gain new perspectives that extended beyond their established social horizons. Because Dubai and other Gulf Arab states were rapidly developing and becoming the centre of trade, fashion, and technology in the region, Qeshmi people oriented towards the social changes taking place there.

It is worth mentioning that unmasking did not become widespread until women themselves took action to change people's perceptions towards the masking practice. Although male opinions are still highly respected both in the domestic and public spheres, the increase in the number of unmasked women substantially changed the views of men who previously adhered to preconceived notions of masking. The story of Zīnat illustrates how a few women took the lead in defying the masking tradition and proved that women could take up diverse roles in society rather than just being housewives and bearing children. The advancement of women's education and the introduction of a new Islamic interpretation of face covering, meaning it became a non-obligatory act, both helped to justify unmasking. This change did not result from a political movement in which all the women fought for the right to unmask, but was instead induced by a social change that

was itself influenced by the early advancement of modernity and women's status. While each woman reacted differently to the unmasking trend, it in fact created more options for women to exercise their agency around (un)masking.

7.1.3 After 2000: Masking as 'Backward'

Despite the growth of the unmasking trend, tolerance has varied from one village to another, and the opinions of men, especially husbands, are still prioritised over those of women with regard to acts of (un)masking. However, men's attitudes towards masking have also diversified, as the number of unmasked women increased and the social pressure on the strict enforcement of the masking custom weakened. According to my female respondents, men's attitudes can be classified into four types: allowing wives to choose for themselves; discouraging wives from wearing the mask; continuing to prefer their wives to wear it; and encouraging wives to wear the *niqāb*, a black full-face veil, instead of the traditional face mask. The husband's attitude also impacted the negotiation strategies that women adopted regarding the act of (un)masking.

Harime (59), who is from Salakh village, married her thirty-year-old husband when she was fifteen. She has never worn a face mask as her husband did not ask her to. Yet, she recalled that some of her friends wore one at their husband's request. On the other hand, Zainab (23), from Borka Khalaf village, was eager to adopt a mask upon her marriage, and her husband was not involved in her decision. She recalled: "I decided to wear the *burquʿ* by myself because my mother and elder sisters all wore the *burquʿ*. And my husband didn't comment on my decision, so I continue to wear it." Even within the same village, women's perceptions towards masking differ. Another woman (24) from the same village stated that she does not like wearing a face mask, and that this is now

acceptable as revealing one's face is no longer problematised like in the past. She stated:

> "I don't have a *burquʿ* and I didn't like it and nor does my husband. I got married nine years ago but before then women had already stopped wearing the *burquʿ*. Previously all the people commented on women who didn't wear the *burquʿ*. But since ten to fifteen years ago, people's perceptions towards the *burquʿ* custom has slowly changed and revealing the face became less problematic."

When I asked unmasked women of younger generations in their early twenties or even younger about their husbands and male relatives' attitudes towards their face being uncovered, many of them stated that nowadays men generally prefer their women to be unmasked. Some even strongly demand that their wives never wear the traditional face mask except at cultural events. When I interviewed men who hold such opinions, their attitudes were often based on the view that the mask illustrates backwardness and a lack of education. In an inversion of the original social position, some even think that their young wives being masked might harm their family's reputation. The links between the masking custom and a lack of education were also repeatedly mentioned by unmarried/married, young, educated, and unmasked women.

Respondents remarked that the face mask was often seen as being "out of fashion," "ugly," and "unsophisticated"; they then invariably proceeded to explain that the reason that women used to mask was because they were not educated enough to realise that the masking was unnecessary for women. This unmasking discourse is firmly supported and implemented by current religious interpretations in the state of Iran as well as the Gulf Arab states, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Upon encountering these new perceptions towards the masking practice, I wondered if

older masked women were doing anything to stop the unmasking tendency. Although many women refuse to abandon the masking practice themselves, they often do not suggest that their daughters follow their example. When I asked a masked woman (29) if she asked her daughter to adopt a face mask like her own mother had done so, she responded:

> "No, my daughters are from a new generation that does not wear the face mask anymore. My eldest daughter doesn't wear the mask because her husband doesn't allow her to wear it. I gave my daughter to her husband. If her husband doesn't ask her to wear it, I don't force her to do so."

The unpopularity of the masking practice has been generated by both men and women: men tend to disapprove of a wife being masked while elder women are less eager to preserve the custom by asking their own daughters to mask. Such positions may concern and confuse some girls who are not yet married but may wish to adopt a face mask once they get married. Marwa (34), who is still single and proud of her mother being a local face mask seamstress, wishes to wear a face mask after marriage. She told me that, "I want to wear the *burquʿ* when I get married like my mother. But it depends on my future husband. If he doesn't approve of it, then I can't wear it." Although it is usually difficult to change a man's decision and preference, this may be one of the important criteria when she comes to select a marriage partner.

Even those men who prefer their women to be masked have been forced to adopt a new approach in order to convince unwilling wives and daughters. Prior to the 1980s, men often made masking an obligation for women when they obtained puberty or got married, and sometimes there were even physical punishments if they did not comply. However, nowadays men gently insist that their women practise the masking custom by saying "You

become more beautiful when putting the *burquʿ* on," or "It is better and more modest that your face is covered and unidentified in public."

Women also take different actions to unmask when their husband expresses a preference for masking. Fariba (20) sought to remove the face mask by claiming it had fallen out of fashion, and many of her friends and relatives had removed their face masks; but she cannot do so because her husband wants her to conceal her face. She therefore sought medical advice to convince her husband. She said:

> 'I went to see a doctor and told him that wearing the *burquʿ* irritated my eyes, so I wanted to remove it. But the doctor said it was better for the eyes to keep the *burquʿ* on. I told him, "If you said it was bad for the eyes, I could throw it away!" but he said it is good.'

Many other respondents in their forties also mentioned women, who wanted to discard the golden/indigo mask but were prevented from doing so by objections from their husbands or family members, tended to resort to medical advice in order to support their arguments for unmasking—this reflected the fact that a doctor's diagnosis was often perceived to be more "valid" or "convincing," particularly by men.

Occasionally, men's attitudes change as women get older. In the case of Bandar-e Laft village, the unmasking tendency has continued since the mid-2000s, and some women remove the face mask only after giving birth to three or four children. By giving birth to many children, a woman establishes the sense of mature 'womanhood' and 'motherhood' in the community and is, at the same time, seen as losing her 'sexuality'. Thus, people usually become more tolerant of her unmasking behaviour since her aging face does not pose a threat to communal values. Although all respondents still agreed that women have

to accept their husbands' opinions on the masking practice, elder women's decisions are more easily accepted by society and are less controlled by their men. In other words, as they age, they gain more autonomy over decisions concerning their physical appearance.

Although it is still a recent trend, the spread of conservative Islamic dress code among women, including the *niqāb*, a black full face covering, has also reached Qeshm Island. The *niqāb* is often introduced to a village community by men who have worked in or visited the Gulf Arab states, who became convinced, during their stay, that the *niqāb* better serves to preserve the modesty of women as it covers the entire face except for the eyes. Upon returning to the island, they recommend that women replace the traditional face mask with the *niqāb* purchased in those states. According to Marwa (34) from Kavarzin village, an eighteen-year-old newly married woman was not asked to adopt the traditional face mask, and her husband instead asked her to conceal her face with the *niqāb*. Although it was not initially her decision, she thought the *niqāb* would be more 'appropriate' as it would enable her to retain her modesty and avoid men's gaze in public. There is a noticeable tendency for the *niqāb* to be adopted by married women in their twenties or thirties. In fact, in Paiposht village, while women over forty conceal their faces with the traditional face mask, younger married women in their twenties and thirties wear the *niqāb*. Due to the popular tendency to abandon the traditional face mask on the island, the *niqāb* provides an alternative for women who still prefer to conceal their faces and anonymise themselves in public, and this enables them to continue to access public space.

Today, most Qeshmi female family members consist of three generations: masked grandmothers; unmasked or masked mothers; and unmasked daughters. In the case of Qeshm Island, the shared perceptions of whether the masking is appropriate or

inappropriate often depends on the wearer's age groups. The masked generations often have a clear opinion that masking belongs to elder generations, and they therefore disagree that the custom should be imposed on the younger generations. Meanwhile, some unmasked women hold a very negative opinion of the masking practice, but also strongly oppose their masked grandmothers abandoning the masking custom. For example, Mona (13), a twenty-one-year-old housewife, told me that she cannot imagine herself wearing a mask in her daily life. She called masking "the ugly, uneducated custom," and maintained that it should be abandoned as people are now more educated. When I asked her what she would do if her masked grandmother decided to leave the custom and go out in public unmasked, her face instantly expressed rejection and she said: "No way! I wouldn't allow her to do that!" She continued, "I would do everything to convince her to keep the mask on! She is different from my generation. She must stick to her tradition!" Such reactions are not uncommon, and even women themselves sometimes take an active role in enforcing certain ideas of what female bodies should represent and embody.

This historical approach that examines changes in perceptions and practices relating to the masking custom on Qeshm Island illustrates that different forms of women's agency are exercised in relation to acts of (un)masking. While it is undeniable that male family members are actively involved in these acts, it is also important to acknowledge that Qeshmi women do hold opinions and have utilised different methods and approaches in order to perform a patriarchal bargain and implement their own decisions. Personal experiences related in interview conversations with Qeshmi women indicate that each individual woman has a different perception of, and relationship with, the face mask. In addition, not all women support the unmasking trend. While some have struggled to remove their face masks, others have encountered difficulties in practising the masking

custom despite it being their own decision. The subsequent comparative analysis of the case of the UAE demonstrates different processes in the masking custom over the last fifty years and discusses the recent revival of the custom amongst younger generations.

7.2 The Case of the UAE

The traditional role and status of women in UAE society was very similar to that of Qeshm Island. In general, women were expected to engage mainly in domestic housework and the upbringing of children, and enjoyed little freedom outside the home, although this varied in accordance with the family's socio-economic class (al-Sayegh 2001). They were also under the umbrella of traditional patriarchy with men often making decisions about both domestic and public matters, and women being expected to either follow or negotiate with their male counterparts. Within this social framework, the masking practice, and decisions relating to (un)masking, were also under parental or male-kin authority; a situation that prevailed until the 1970s and 80s.

Since the establishment of the UAE as a nation-state in 1971, the practice of masking has, however, gradually declined. It is argued that women's education is one of the main reasons for this development (El Mutwalli 2015, 289-90). The government-led initiative of enrolling girls in schools resulted in them wearing uniforms, and this deferred the adoption of the face mask until marriage. During this period, the average age of marriage also rose from nine years to between thirteen and sixteen years (ibid.), and women's role in society began to change along with their lifestyles. In the 1980s, as more women pursued higher education and began to enter the workforce, the average age of first marriage rose to between nineteen and twenty-two (ibid., 291). By that time, women in major cities began abandoning the face mask, and this reflected the fact that this

generation had a different lifestyle and mindset from its predecessors.

By the early 1990s, the wearing of the face mask was no longer an imposed custom, and many women who had previously adopted the face mask began to remove it. However, Sheikh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding president, tried to maintain the custom by insisting the female members of his family should wear the mask and traditional costume when he was present (ibid., 291). Although the use of the face mask as part of daily practice has faded away, both the government and people have sought to preserve the face-mask tradition in various other ways, most notably by insisting that it is an object associated with their heritage and national identity (see Chapter 8.2).

Upon the basis of the preceding historical outline of social changes and women's roles in the UAE, I divide the following section into three periods in order to further analyse changes in women's decisions and attitudes towards masking and unmasking. The first part relates to the period prior to 1970, before the UAE achieved independence, when masking was culturally compulsory for women who had passed puberty or married. In this part, I mainly focus on women's personal feelings and experiences of adopting the face mask, in addition to their public and private masking practices. The second part engages with the period 1970-90 and illustrates how modernisation and Westernisation affected the masking custom. In the case of the UAE, a government initiative was significant in this regard, as it introduced and imposed a new style of clothing on nationals, and this provides a different narrative of the unmasking tendency from that evidenced on Qeshm Island. The third period, which engages with 1990 and onwards, mainly analyses the social pressure supporting unmasking and women's struggles against it. Because masking has come to be seen as a custom of the past, many masked women now feel pressurised to drop their masking practice. This part also explores a revival of the face

mask as part of the ‘preservation’ of the national identity and heritage amongst young generations, which has not yet been frequently seen on Qeshm Island.

7.2.1 Prior to 1970: Masking as a Signal of Dignity

Before 1970, masking was seen as an indication of women’s decency and propriety (Soffan 1980, 37-38), and women were asked to wear a face mask to preserve their modesty in society. Many of my Emirati respondents who are in their fifties and above emphasised that “My mother, grandmother, great grandmother and aunts, all women here wore the *burquʿ*,” and so did they. Others expressed it more directly by replying that they did so because it was “*ʿādāt* (traditions)” and masking was seen as an act of “*sitr* (modesty).” For older generations, masking was a socially embedded act for women who had passed puberty or got married and, regardless of their will or opinion, the masking of the face was a precondition for them when leaving their family homes. As in the case of Qeshm women, there were women who naturally adopted the face mask as part of custom or in accordance with a request from their parents; others, meanwhile, had a difficult time accepting the practice.

Salama (88), who married at the age of seventeen, which was relatively late for her generation, was excited to officially adopt the face mask because she saw it as “a sign of becoming an adult.” Even before her marriage, she and her female friends used to gather to make face masks from a newspaper and wear them for fun. Another example is Mūza (132), a woman over sixty from Ajman, who adopted her first face mask when she became engaged at the age of fifteen or sixteen (she could not recall which). She could not remember a time when her female relatives had worn the face mask, but accordingly she purchased a face mask from one of her neighbours and began to wear it. She recalled:

> "No one told me [to wear the *burquʿ*]. It has been a custom for all women including my mother, grandmother, and my mother's sisters, the aunts. Every woman followed the custom in the UAE [such as] in Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Al Ain."

When I asked her how she felt when she wore a mask for the first time, she said: "It was normal. I didn't have a *disliking* [emphasis added] feeling [towards the masking]. But moreover, I didn't even think about engagement! At that time, we didn't even know the face of a husband-to-be!"

For Mūza, the adoption of the face mask was just a small part of the rite of passage and part of her progression towards a future, unknown, married life, and she was much more concerned about her impending marriage to a stranger than the social expectation of masking. She recalled, "…fathers and mothers decided everything for girls. For example, my parents decided my husband without consulting me. As long as they agreed with each other, my opinion was never asked."

Luluwa (127), from Al Ain, who wore the face mask when she married before reaching puberty, recalled that the situation was similar for women before the 1970s. She said:

> "In my generation, the moment women had their first period, they wore the *burquʿ*. But for me, *alḥamdulilla* (thanks God), I wore the *burquʿ* before I even had a period because I got married very young. Two years after my marriage, I had the first period…. We were all scared [of marriage], of course. Now young ones talk on the phone and sit together before an engagement and can decide whether they like to proceed it further. But in the past, we didn't even know we were getting married! Everything was decided by fathers. A woman was so *maskīna* (poor).

> She didn't know what was going on around her. She was treated like a female goat, animal!"

In Luluwa's generation, many girls were married between the ages of nine and eleven. It is therefore reasonable to assume that these girls listened to their parents' suggestions before masking.

Aisha (117) from Fujairah, who does not know her exact age but is probably in her late seventies, refers to the example of women who did not immediately accept masking. She recalled:

> "My mother brought the first *burquʿ* when I got married at the age of probably around fifteen or sixteen. I refused to wear it at the beginning. I didn't even know how to wear it. But at that time, everyone had to wear the *burquʿ* and my mother taught me how."

Nada (118), another sixty-year-old woman from Fujairah, wore it one week prior to her wedding, when she was twelve or thirteen, because everyone kept asking her to cover her face with the mask, despite the fact that she was unwilling to do so. Dana (96) from Abu Dhabi also recalls the irritation she felt during her first few weeks of wearing the mask ("We had to accustom ourselves to wearing the *burquʿ*"). Although many women did not initiate the masking and it was often the decision of their mothers or fathers, they gradually became used to wearing it in their day-to-day lives. Moreover, all of my respondents who adopted the face mask prior to independence in 1971 still continue to wear it, and many of them expressed the view that they feel naked when they do not do so.

In most places, women wore the face mask outside their homes and took it off when they

were inside, as one of the main purposes of the mask is to hide women's faces from the male gaze. However, the previous situation in Sohar and among the Harasiis tribe in Oman differed from this norm because a woman, who gave the appearance of adulthood, but did not mask in public, was considered to be a prostitute, slave, or mentally ill (Chatty 1997). Emiratis, on the other hand, normally viewed an unmasked woman as being either physically immature or as being challenged in an undefined way, that the woman and/or her family were frequently invited to elaborate. Although masking was not obligatory in a domestic sphere unless a marriable man was present, women sometimes wore the mask more frequently than social convention demands. Wikan relates this close relationship between women and the face mask—"[w]omen do not only fulfill society's ends by adhering to its general rules in this matter [removing the mask] but adapt the *burquʿ* to fulfill their own personal needs and ends" ([1982] 1991, 95).

It was up to an individual woman when and where she wanted to remove her mask, and such personal choices seemed "to depend solely upon the way she feels at a given moment" (ibid.). As with masked women on Qeshm Island, although it was not being obligatory to mask in front of other women, Emirati women sometimes preferred to do this when they were surrounded by unfamiliar counterparts. They would also remove the mask in order to control and manage personal relationships with counterparts.

In addition, many Emirati women preferred to keep their masks on even in front of their family members, including sons, daughters, and sometimes even husbands. For example, Mohammed (138) originally from Ras al-Khaimah told me of his father's experience with his masked mother:

> "My father entered the military at the age of fifteen, and since then he had never seen his mother's face under the *burquʿ*. He became accustomed to it because she

> always wore the *burquʿ* even inside the house. May her soul rest in peace, she passed away ten years ago at the age of around sixty-four or five. When all the relatives gathered at the hospital to say their goodbyes to her, she refused to take off her *burquʿ* to put on an oxygen mask. Because she didn't want anyone to see her unmasked face. When the nurses forced to remove her *burquʿ,* she asked someone to shut the curtain and allowed only her two daughters to enter the space. When her breath got weaker and everyone felt her death was getting closer, other male members of the family entered the space. It was the moment when my father saw his mother's real face for the first time since the age of fifteen."

Mohammed himself never saw his grandmother's face without the face mask. Sara (146), a twenty-nine-year-old woman from Sharjah, had also never seen her grandmother's face. She said to me:

> "I have never seen my grandmother's face even once. She always keeps her *burquʿ* on, thus none of my family has seen her actual face under the *burquʿ*. When she needs to take off her *burquʿ* like during a prayer, she always makes sure to lock her door so that no one sees. My grandfather also said he has never seen her real face! For me, my grandmother's face is the face with the *burquʿ*."

Some respondents reported that during the 1950s and 60s quite a few Emirati women did not show their 'real' faces to their husbands and did not eat in front of them.

For those men who had rarely seen their wife's 'true' face, the act of unmasking was considered erotic especially during intercourse between a husband and a previously masked wife. Before intercourse, a husband would take off his wife's mask to reveal her face, and at this moment her face becomes "another erogenous zone which is covered at

all times and when disclosed produces pleasurable erotic emotions" (Kanafani 1983, 67). Prior to the 1970s, when underwear, bras, and panties were not commonly used by local women in the region, stripping the wife of her face mask and making her face 'naked' aroused a great physical and emotional impact on both parties. Newly married women tended to keep their masks on in front of their fathers due to embarrassment (Wikan [1982] 1991, 96), as the married couple were expected to experience their first intercourse on the wedding night.

The proposition that the female face is an erogenous zone is also reflected in the unique view of the face mask that adheres in some parts of the UAE, where it is treated as an intimate, sensual object of the wearer. Asma (149), from Al Ain, recalled that "[b]efore, we didn't allow men to see women's *burquʿs* [when not in use]. It was forbidden, for instance, for women to randomly leave her *burquʿ* on the bed or anywhere people might possibly see it. We had to hide it."

The properties of the mask meant that it could become easily oxidised or wrinkled, and accordingly women have always kept their masks in special metal boxes or between pages of telephone directories. If a personal face mask was seen alone, it was considered to be shameful and inappropriate. This special treatment extended to the mask in the pre-modern era may be understood to further underline the sexual connotation ascribed to it. After all, the same treatment is applied to items of intimate clothing that must be kept discrete. The preceding discussion has served to underline that, in the period prior to 1970, the adoption of the face mask was often enforced on women. This was because the revealing of the mature woman's face was considered to be inappropriate and their parents therefore made sure to impose the social rule. Masking was, however, not only an expected behaviour or long-lived tradition but was also strategically used to express the

wearer's nuanced feelings and emotions. Women were likely to treat the face mask as an extended part of their bodies or as intimate personal objects. The example of the UAE is particularly instructive as it highlights how the intensive relationship between women and the face mask began to change when the country gained independence and began to modernise its society.

7.2.2 Between 1970 and 1990: Masking as the Past

The period following independence produced rapid social, political, and economic changes in UAE society, and these in turn impacted popular attitudes towards the masking custom. Shihab (2001, 249) and Godwin (2006, 4) observe that the UAE contrasts with other developing countries that usually require a difficult and lengthy process of economic development—to this extent, the UAE successfully exploited sudden increases in the price of oil during the period 1973-82 in order to achieve rapid development over a very short period. The distribution of immense oil revenues to citizens across all sectors of society both stabilised internal socio-political tensions and also completely changed their way of life. Modern education, which was provided free to all Emirati citizens, was a key status marker and one of the factors reshaping the role of Emirati women (Shihab 2001, 255; Godwin 2006, 2; al-Sayegh 2001, 29). Although modern education for women had already begun in the 1950s, only 30 female students were enrolled in the academic year 1956/7 and this had only increased to 381 in 1958/9 (Soffan 1980, 113). However, by the academic year 1971/2 this number had soared to 32,862 (ibid.). Luluwa (127) from Al Ain observes that it was not easy to convince local people to send their children, and daughters in particular, to school as education had never been a requirement for women in their traditional lifestyles. She observed:

> "In the old days [before the independence], we did everything by ourselves. We didn't have education and didn't go to any school! We women gathered and sat outside with drinks and sewed clothes for ourselves, kids, and men. We didn't have any maids, so we intensively worked for cooking, looking after children, and taking care of animals. We were very healthy, and nobody complained about hand pain, back pain, or headaches like they do now! But when Sheikh Zayed came to power, we became modernised. People didn't allow their kids to go to school at the beginning, but Sheikh Zayed awarded money for kids, both boys and girls, who went to school. And the higher level of education they reached, the more money they received. So, parents started supporting education for kids."

Sheikh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nahyan believed education to be the fundamental basis of national development and the well-being of the country's citizens, and accordingly compulsory primary education and free education at all levels were promised by the UAE constitution (Godwin 2006, 2).[75] Modern education also necessitated the systematic institutionalisation of the school uniform, and the one for girls generally consisted of a head scarf, long-sleeved shirt, and full-length apron style dress (El Mutwalli 2015, 6).[76]

For young generations who attended school, both the age at which they adopted the face mask was deferred (as a result of marriage being delayed), and their exercise of agency around masking became socially more acceptable. For example, one respondent (107) mentioned her eldest daughter born in the late 1970s who refused to adopt a mask: 'When

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[75] Article 23 of the UAE constitution states that "Education shall be a fundamental factor for the progress of society. It shall be compulsory in its primary stage and free of charge at all stages, within the Union."

[76] The ministry of education schools provided students with a white, medium-weight cotton and a heavy blue cotton to make these school uniforms.

my daughter was small, I made her wear the *burquʿ*. She wore it only once and then she said, "I don't want to wear it." So, I didn't ask her anymore.' Because her eldest daughter did not mask herself, she did not ask her younger daughters to do so. When I interviewed a masked mother (96) and her unmasked daughter (97) together in Abu Dhabi, I asked her why she did not impose the custom on her daughter; she replied:

> "We can't force anyone to wear it. For example, if I tell you to wear it and you don't want to, can I force you to do that? But in my time, it was different. We had to wear it. Especially when my mother said I had to wear it, it means I had to. No other options."

In this period, only a few women who continued their education to the high school level wore the face mask in school after being married (El Mutwalli 2015, 290). It is worth mentioning that elder women understood and respected generational changes in society, even those that related to the masking custom, and therefore tolerated younger generations moving away from the custom.

Social tolerance towards unmasking was generated by several other factors, which resulted in changes in women's dress in general during this period. One factor was a change in the lifestyles and roles of women. Before the influx of wealth after independence, women were engaged in both domestic and public duties in the extremely hot weather; although they were modestly covered, their attire tended to be very light, thin, and sometimes transparent, often revealing their bodies beneath (ibid., 74). Oil wealth improved living standards and enabled women to escape from traditional labour by hiring servants and handymen, and this allowed a focus on fashion and style, with the consequence that many luxury brands from the West became popular.

A second factor was the immense increase in the country's foreign population, and this caused women to cover themselves more conservatively in order to protect themselves. The veil was one of the adopted items that was first used by the ruling families as a status symbol in order to distinguish themselves from lower-class women; however soon other Emirati women followed suit (ibid., 75). In 1974, a rumour spread that the *burquʿ*, the traditional face mask, might soon disappear and the *ghishwa*, a black face veil directly attached to the black overgarment, would replace it. This rumour even reached Sohar in Oman, and this made the masked women of Sohar furious (Wikan [1982] 1991, 107). Shortly after, some of the modern Sohari women began wearing the *ghishwa* on the top of their face masks for formal visits to fully conceal their faces, with the intention of copying what they thought was the latest fashion in Dubai.

A third factor was new interpretations of Islamic doctrine introduced by neighbouring Arab and Islamic societies, which supported the spread of the face veil on religious grounds (El Mutwalli 2015, 76). These changes in women's clothing that came about as a result of the modernisation of the country accelerated the unmasking tendency that was noticeable in larger cities such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Yet, the masking custom was still commonly practised in public spaces in rural areas of the northern Emirates.

As increasing numbers of foreigners and tourists continued to enter the country, new forms of dress that symbolised the economic wealth and status of Emirati nationals became more prominent. As a consequence, the face mask began to be seen as an ill-informed tradition of the past and became unpopular amongst generations born in the 1970s and 80s. Although these attitudes became increasingly common, the period after 1990 resulted in women evidencing increased agency in relation to the act of (un)masking.

7.2.3 After 1990: Revival of Masking

In the 1990s, more women pursued higher education and employment in both the private and public sectors. While much of the younger generations' outdoor attire mainly consists of a new slender and sleeved, ankle-length black cloak (*ʿabā*), and a black head veil (*sheila*), a few adopted a more malleable cloth version of the face mask, the *baghara* (singular) or *ibgharāt* (plural) (El Mutwalli 2015, 106). Older women continued to wear the traditional face mask in the belief that it was a substantial part of their daily attire (Fig. 7.3). Three major changes need to be highlighted in relation to masking practice during this period: social pressure on masked women towards unmasking; social imposition of the *niqāb*; and a revival of the face mask among young generations. In examining these changes, this section illustrates the complex social situations that surround the masking practice and the relation of women's active agencies towards the practice.

(Fig 7.3) A woman wearing the face mask in her house in Ras al-Khaimah in 1992 (provided by one of the respondents).

As the family conversations at the beginning of this chapter demonstrate, negative social views towards the masking practice have greatly affected family members of masked women, who perceive it to be an outdated practice that is not appropriately adjusted to modern Emirati society. Some children, as well as husbands, even think that having a masked mother or wife is a social embarrassment, which indicates a lack of proper education and sense of modernisation. Sumaiya (99) from Abu Dhabi, who has practised masking over forty-five years, observes that "my husband and children have asked me to remove this [the mask], but this is part of me."

Another masked woman from Dubai mentioned that her children, and her sons in particular, have asked her to unmask because the practice is anachronistic. But women continue to reiterate their 'free' agency. Luluwa (127) from Al Ain stated:

> "It's my decision to wear the *burquʿ* and it's my desire. I can take off the *burquʿ* whenever I want, but I don't want to. Everyone in my generation wears the *burquʿ*. When they stop wearing it, I may also stop doing it."

All masked respondents stated that they continue to mask of their own will, but they also added that this often created dilemmas between their personal choices and family preferences. Daily conversations between family members repeatedly returned to the continuation of the masking practice. One of the main conclusions to emerge from the interviews is that masked women have great pride in this traditional practice and tend to argue against family members who reject it, with the intention of changing their perspective. One example is the conversation below between Mūza (132), a masked mother, and Shaikha (133), her unmarried daughter:

> Mūza: I asked Shaikha to wear the *burquʿ* but she doesn't want to.

Shaikha: No, Shaikh Zāyed, may God bless him, said if a girl gets married, she must adopt the *burquʿ*. Since I am still single, I don't need to wear it. But also, the *burquʿ* custom became a past tradition!

Mūza: Is it an old tradition? No, it is not. The *burquʿ* is still worn today!

Some women have recently left the masking custom for their own personal reasons. For example, Zakīya (101), from Abu Dhabi, who is in her sixties, recounted that she stopped wearing the *burquʿ* ten years before as she did not like the indigo colours that stained her face—however, up until this point she had worn it every day except during sleep. Another respondent (71) also mentioned that some women unmasked because the doctor advised them to discard the mask as it might negatively affect their eyes.

In the contemporary period, there is a conflict between tradition and modernity within UAE society. Many young women do not mask on a daily basis but choose to wear the mask at henna-night parties that usually take place before weddings as part of a cultural fashion that embeds 'Emiratiness'. Some elder masked women, however, condemn this use of the face mask. Jawhara (116) from Fujairah observed that she does not like the mask being used for fashion purposes because this is, in her view, contrary to the cultural values that the mask embodies. Haila (75) from Dubai echoed this sentiment by complaining that some young women attend weddings wearing the face mask without any head veil. She feels humiliated because she thinks they do not respect the traditional masking custom and treat the mask solely as a fashion item that serves a beautifying purpose. Harima (134) from Khor Fakkan and a few other interviewees suggested that this adaptation of the mask by younger generations reflects the education of their mothers. If a young woman fails to adjust the mask in the right position, concealing the eyebrows and mouth, it is seen as the fault of her mother. Despite masking being perceived as an

old, unmodern fashion, it has gained popularity amongst the younger generation as a cultural icon that reflects the national heritage.

There are also young women who wish to follow the masking custom to preserve it from disappearing, although it should be noted that they are small in number. Mariyam (145), a thirty-four-year-old from Sharjah, made several attempts to leave her home while wearing the face mask. She wanted to adopt the mask as part of her Emirati identity, but was afraid of encountering social backlash because many consider it to be a backward practice that only belongs to older generations. She said she is waiting for the moment when society becomes more tolerant of young women's adoption of the mask. Khūlūd (90), a thirty-six-year-old local teacher from Ajman also decided to mask, having originally made this decision several years previously. Both her mother and grandmother wear the face mask, and she believes that it is a custom representing the Emirati culture that should be passed down to future generations. She has already decided to begin wearing the mask once she turns forty-five-years-old, which is the age she considers appropriate. These women, who have come to realise the uniqueness and importance of the tradition of masking, are often influenced or motivated by their close relatives who have proudly continued to mask themselves regardless of dissenting voices. The revival of masking among younger generations is in fact a visual sign of appreciation towards those who have made the tradition alive.

Another recent development has exerted a particularly strong influence on the veiling practice of Emirati women since 2002. This is the campaign of the Saudi Arabian religious authority (Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the suppression of Vice) and its imposition of a strict veiling practice on women in the country (El Mutwalli 2015, 58). Because many Emiratis frequently visit Saudi Arabia to participate in the ʿUmra and

Ḥajji, the complete concealing style of dress, including the *niqāb*, has been adopted by some Emirati women. A variety of perspectives have been expressed by women who take a sceptical view of the *niqāb*. Sumaiya (99) thinks that wearing the *niqāb* makes it difficult for her to breathe, and this leads her to compare it negatively with the face mask, which is specifically made with the intention of enabling the individual wearer to breathe easily. Ghanīma (103), a sixty-year-old, also reflects that wearing the *niqāb* makes her feel "choked" because it covers every part of her body and psychologically hinders her breathing.

Some interviewees refused to adopt the *niqāb* because it is not part of their tradition, while other observed that men might wear the *niqāb* to enter women-only spaces as a consequence of adopting the *niqāb*. Such incidents have previously been reported, and this is why some segregated places for women prohibit them from wearing the *niqāb.*

Women like Luluwa (127) do however use the *niqāb* on certain occasions. She explained:

> "I wear the *niqāb* so rarely depending on my mood. For instance, I wear it when I go to government offices or shopping malls where there are a lot of men. If I wear it, no one recognises me, so I can finish my work quickly and leave. But I wear it over my *burquʿ*."

This use of the *niqāb* in crowded places is particularly common as this entails contact with strange men. However, issues relating to financial difficulties—that is, a financial incentive to adopt the *niqāb* instead of the traditional face mask (the *niqāb* is washable whereas the mask only lasts for two to three months)—were not particularly prominent in the interview data drawn from Emirati women. ʿAisha (117) from Fujairah does nonetheless point out the increasing cost of the face mask. According to her, the current

price of a set of four *burquʿs* “now became around 100 dirhams.” While the *niqāb* is washable and can be reused, the *burquʿ* can be worn only for a limited period and is not reusable. Women are therefore aware of the economic burden of the masking custom.

More women have begun traveling outside the region, particularly to Europe, and acts of masking and unmasking have therefore become a visual realisation of cultural boundaries. Some respondents told me that they tend to keep their masks on even when they travel outside the region because they view it as part of themselves and a representation of their national identity and pride. Others observe that it depends on the destination, and specifically whether local people are familiar with Gulf culture. For example, Mūza (132) wears the face mask when traveling to Thailand and India and believes that Emirati women must wear it there because “We are locals (Emirati nationals who have Arab tribal backgrounds).” A large number of Thai and Indian citizens work in the UAE and other Gulf countries as maids and in other roles. Many Emiratis and other nationals of the Gulf visit those countries on holiday, and therefore many Thais and Indians are quite familiar with Gulf culture. One of the most intriguing features of Mūza’s statement is that she applies the social function of the face mask distinguishing Emiratis (locals) from non-nationals even in other countries. Because people from the Gulf tend to concentrate in particular areas, such as the so-called Arab Street in Bangkok, Thailand, it might be the case that the socio-cultural values and rules of the Gulf are more applicable there than in other parts of the country. Yet, masking in this context might also indicate an intention to implement the social hierarchy, both in front of other Emiratis and also the local population.

On the contrary, many respondents also declared that they tend to unmask when they travel to European countries. Huda (72) from Ras al-Khaimah who provided general

insight in this regard. She noted:

> "Some men ask their mothers to take the *burquʿ* off especially when they travel outside the Gulf. If a mother refuses to take her *burquʿ* off, no one would take her out. Because people (in the foreign countries) think that the *burquʿ* is made of real gold so they steal *burquʿs* directly from women's faces on the street."

These stories are commonly shared among masked women. Because the stereotype of Gulf women being wealthy was widespread in the Western countries (see Fig. 7.4),[77] in addition to Islamophobic attitudes, many women tended to unmask themselves for the sake of their own security. However, this also occurs in the Gulf Arab states: for example, another respondent (136) related an experience of her face mask being stolen:

> "My *burquʿ* was stolen in Mecca! I and my family went to Mecca for performing the ʿUmra and during a prayer I usually put my *burquʿ* besides me. When I was concentrating on my prayer, a Sudanese woman quickly stole my *burquʿ* because she thought it was made of gold! But I had another *burquʿ* in my bag, so I wore it on my way back."

The UAE government has also recently promoted the masking custom as part of national heritage through cultural events and arts in different countries such as France and the United States, and these will be further discussed in the following chapter.

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[77] Dougie Wallace's photograph series, "Harrodsburg" caused outcry amongst Qataris when the Doha News featured his 'unconsented' work that depicted Qatari and other Gulf women visiting Harrods in London. One of the most debated images was an older Qatari woman with her golden/indigo face mask. https://www.greenprophet.com/2015/10/london-calling-gulf-elite-caught-in-conspicuous-consumption/.

(Fig 7.4) A masked Qatari woman leaving Harrods in London was photographed by Dougie Wallace (Balbo 2015).

The historical analysis of the masking custom in the UAE reveals transitions in the meanings of the act of (un)masking as well as the motivations that underpin these changes, which have been induced by the modernisation of the country. Prior to the 1970s, women adopted the mask to retain modesty; modernisation then promoted the unmasking tendency, and more women have since adopted masking on their own initiative in order to preserve their cultural identity. However, it should be mentioned that women always seem to have confronted and struggled to exercise their agency around (un)masking because of social expectations and family preferences. Before 1970, masking was imposed on women, often by their parents. After 1970, and particularly since 1990, the social tendency has encouraged women to unmask. Social changes and public discourse on (un)masking have therefore provided the wider context in which women have adjusted

and negotiated their practices. This further attests to the complexity and nuances of women's agency in relation to the practice.

Conclusion

The comparative historical analysis of this chapter has revealed differences within the unmasking tendency between Qeshm Island and the UAE, which are often simply equated with the country's development or modernisation. For example, many Qeshmi women, born in the 1970s and 80s and adopted the mask before, later discarding it; meanwhile most of the Emirati women who adopted the mask continued to mask themselves throughout the period of the state's development. Both cases illustrate similar social attitudes towards the practice. Prior to this 'modernisation', masking was considered to be a prerequisite behaviour for physically mature women when they were in the company of marriageable men, and accordingly unmasking caused uproar in the community. In both societies, however, the influence of modern education and women's increased economic and social participation have resulted in the masking custom becoming more and more unpopular.

It is also the case that new religious interpretations of women's attire have been introduced to society. Because Qeshm Island is still at the beginning of the state's 'modernisation' process, unfavourable popular attitudes towards masking have gradually become widespread, and unmasking has come to be considered as a sign of social progress. A similar tendency was also observed in the UAE in the 1970s when the country was at the same developmental stage. However, when the UAE 'modernised' and many citizens departed from 'traditional' customs that were widely practised before its independence, younger generations began to realise the importance of local customs closely associated

with their identities. This led to the current revival of the masking custom in the UAE.

When more Qeshmis adopt a ‘modern’ way of life and abandon ‘traditional’ customs, they might later become aware of the importance of their long-lasting traditions and take on a similar attitude towards the masking custom, thus coming to resemble the UAE. Although concepts of modernity and tradition have been commonly used by the respondents and for the analysis to explain contrasting phenomena, the norms embedded in these concepts have often been constructed and enforced by the states. As the masked mother Mūza emphasised, we may need to change our view of the custom from seeing it as a dying tradition to something still alive and immediate in order to acknowledge the active agency imposed by masked women despite surrounding social pressures. Nevertheless, it is important to examine the state narratives and attitudes towards the masking custom, and the state-imposed concepts of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ in relation to masking. Thus, the following chapter will make a number of important contributions in this respect.

This chapter also made a significant contribution by exploring the agency of women around the act of (un)masking. There is a general perception that masked women are oppressed, which links into the proposition that the practice is based within changing social norms based on male preferences, the dictates of a patriarchal religious institution and/or family pressure. It is important to move beyond the limitations imposed by this perception and engage women’s voiced experiences, as these illustrate complex and nuanced forms of agency that are performed by the women themselves. Though there are exceptions, such as the case of Mohammed’s grandmother who was unable to exercise her active agency due to her unconscious state, both Qeshmi and Emirati women have always negotiated, bargained, and enforced their agency over the act of masking and

unmasking in the traditional patriarchal social system. In other words, women used *patriarchal bargain* (Kandiyoti 1988, 275) in the process of exerting their influence over (un)masking.

While some women exercise their agency over the act of (un)masking as significant actors during the process of social change, others exercise theirs by accommodating social expectations and '(re)act' upon them, and this also involves less aggressive forms of agency (Miller, Das, and Chakravarthy 2011, 47; Mishra and Tripathi 2011, 59). Many of the respondents observe that they do make decisions that relate to acts of (un)masking, notwithstanding concerns over women's attitudes towards their bodily autonomy and freedom of choice in relation to masking. Some women openly acknowledge that there are limitations on individual agency in acts of (un)masking because such agency is generally underpinned by social, family, and institutional expectations. As such, women often tended to prioritise social roles over individual choice or will. These acts are also a way for women to exert individual subjectivity and personality and become "the architect of [their] own life and identity" (Naficy 2012, 50).

Moreover, acts of (un)masking also facilitate the wearer's feeling of connectedness with her peer citizens of the community, culture, and place of belonging—this applies in the case of the UAE, where nationals have become the minority. In such contexts, the roles and embedded meanings attached to masking clearly vary. When observed alongside each other, these results provide important insight into women's agency exercised around acts of (un)masking and individual experiences of decision making. While this chapter shed light on women's experiences at the individual level, the next chapter examines the state's narrative of the face mask, along with the impact of masking on the relationship between women and the mask.

Chapter 8: Cultivating Material Culture: Representing Nation, Locality, or Imagined Community?

"People were the reason for the masking practice to exist. Although that is an obvious point, it is frequently overlooked in the assessment of masking activities. Masking was not an end in itself. It fulfilled the needs and expectations in the host community" (Edson [2005] 2009, 219)

Introduction

On a lovely sunny day, I found myself on a ferry on a regular service from Bandar Abbas to Hormoz Island, twenty-two kilometres northwest of Qeshm City. The strong sunlight was reflecting off the surface of the Persian Gulf onto the ferry windows and then onto my face, preventing me from falling asleep. A few days previously, I had had an unexpected meeting in Bandar Abbas with Leila. I had met her at a handicraft festival in Bandar Abbas during my short visit four months ago, but had lost her business card and was anxious to make contact with her again. She clearly remembered me and peevishly asked why I had not contacted her and visited, as promised. After some efforts on my part to resolve and alleviate the misunderstanding, we made a plan to meet up at her house on Hormoz Island that weekend.

At the entrance to Hormoz Island pier, several women were selling locally made handicrafts for tourists, and some of them wore colourful, squared face masks, the so-called the 'Balochi' mask. When I asked one of the masked girls about her origin, she told me that she was Hormozi but her parents had moved to the island from Minab, which is approximately one-hundred kilometres south of Bandar Abbas. I had not been sure if

Hormozi women had historically worn the Balochi face mask until I interviewed Leila's relatives, who had lived on the island for generations. They shared the family name of 'Hormozi', signifying that they were from the island. All the Hormozi family's elder women wore the face mask, made of an indigo-dyed cotton with a distinctive cut, which was claimed to represent the 'Hormozi style'. Leila was actively engaged in preserving traditional Hormozi community handicrafts by establishing a handicraft centre, providing classes to teach traditional sewing skills, and selling local handicrafts made by women. She explained that the Iranian government had promoted immigration from Minab, especially of Shiites. According to some Hormozis that I spoke to, these Minabis make up eighty percent of the total population of the island, and this has resulted in a change in the culture and customs of Hormoz Island. Leila continued to express her concern about the authentic local heritage representing the Hormozi identity being replaced or erased by the immigrant cultures and traditions.

Despite her efforts to officially register the local traditions and customs as authentic 'Hormozi' heritage from the pre-immigration period, the government has staunchly refused to give permission for such documentation. Contrary to the 'native' Hormozi women's opinions about the traditions, authenticity, and distinctiveness of Hormozi heritage, the cultural landscape of the island has experienced a gradual but notable change. This is reflected in, for example, the museum and gallery of Dr. Ahmad Nadalian[78] on Hormoz Island, which exhibits wall paintings and handicrafts that portray women wearing the Balochi face mask. In addition, tourists and visitors to the island often

[78] Dr. Ahmad Nadalian was born in Sangsar, in the North Khorasan Province of Iran. He is an environmental artist and established two museum-galleries in Hormoz Island and Salakh village (which is on Qeshm Island). Details can be found at: http://www.nadalian.com/.

purchase these masks as a local souvenir and photograph the Balochi-masked salespersons, believing them to be Hormozi women in the 'authentic' local costume.

Today, tangible material cultural artefacts such as face masks are often portrayed by the states in relation to the identity or heritage, and are understood to represent a certain people and a defined space and time. In Iran and the UAE, the governments have historically played an important role in defining and establishing links between the face mask and its various representations, and have done so since both emerged as nation-states. This has not only shaped the public discourse towards masking as a past tradition but has also controlled and limited the uses of the mask and its associated meanings through an application of policy, regulations, and misleading narratives. However, the cases of Qeshm Island and the UAE have a different historical trajectory. By engaging with narratives of heritage and national identity, this chapter considers how the face mask is seen and represented in both geographical locations, namely in governmental discourses. It also seeks to establish that these narratives have a social/political significance and implications, and places particular emphasis on the use of the mask by women.

As discussed in previous chapters, there is no debate as to whether the face mask has been a substantial part of the daily attire of women in the contemporary UAE and Qeshm Island. The diverse uses of the mask over the centuries undermine the argument that its wearing is a newly-invented tradition. However, this is not to say that the face mask has always represented the national identity of the UAE or the regional identity of Iran, as its heritage requires either the acknowledgement of the state or some other authoritarian manifestation. In other words, drawing on the theory of invented tradition advocated by Hobsbawm ([1983] 2013, 1), it could be argued that the symbolic meanings and

associated rituals of the face mask, which appear to endorse national identity and heritage are, in fact, invented, constructed, and administrated by governments. In acting accordingly, the state and local authorities have attempted to, "establish continuity with a suitable historical past" in order to achieve their political aims and interests (ibid., 1), and this includes the promotion of desired or ideal images of women's bodies. Such invented traditions are imposed as means of 'formalisation', 'ritualisation', and 'continuous repetition' (ibid., 4), being enacted, for example, by establishing museums or monuments, organising cultural events and festivals, and producing cultural artefacts and souvenirs.

Heritage as manifested in these invented traditions also helps to construct the political institutions of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006, 24). Heritage refers not to a thing but to relationships with selected objects, places, and practices, which in turn embody the past (Harrison 2013, 14). While *official* heritage is often formed and presented according to values and perspectives that are implied by government (ruling) officials and the nation state, *unofficial* heritage is often associated with specific local values. Here, the particular circumstances are often ignored and under-represented by the state (ibid., 15), as was illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, when reference was made to Hormoz Island. Moreover, local customs and traditions of this kind can be erased or replaced with a newly-invented tradition by using the same method to fit images advocated by states or authorities, aiming to re-write history as forms of "self-definition" (Alsayyad 2001, 2) and "resistance against the homogenizing forces of twentieth-century modernity" (ibid., 3). As Katrak points out, "[b]oth nation and tradition have imagined dimensions" (Katrak 2006, 161) that can face challenges from historical validation.

In Iran, the face-mask custom is largely neglected and marginalised in the national

narrative, as it corresponds neither to popular Persian traditional culture nor the religio-political ideology of the government. The case of Qeshm Island therefore demonstrates contrasting attitudes between the state on the one hand, and local authorities and community on the other. This illustrates the complex use of the face mask and its symbolic meanings in relation to identities which each stakeholder aims to promote. Yet, the UAE has also presented the face-mask custom as part of a revival heritage to unify the Emirati national community and construct a national cultural identity by embedding values, themes, symbols, and memories of an imagined community. Accordingly, the case of the UAE illustrates the gap between the invented traditions of the face-mask custom, an ever-evolving face mask custom in reality, and women's actual struggle to practise and preserve the custom in their individual ways. A comparison of the case studies of Iran and the UAE further demonstrates a difference in identity construction with regard to the use of the face mask, both as an 'invented' tradition in the UAE and an 'evolving' tradition on Qeshm Island.

The following two sections, which examine the cases of Qeshm Island (Iran) and the UAE, broadly divide into three parts each. The first section provides brief notes on the historical policies and attitudes of the Iranian government towards the face mask custom since the 1930s, with particular emphasis on the act of concealing the face. This is followed by a discussion of the overall impact of these policies on the use of the face mask, that engages with personal experiences and the perceptions of local women. Finally, the active engagement of regional or local institutions and communities concerned with preserving the face-mask custom as their regional or local heritage and identity is discussed with reference to socio-political and economic changes within society.

The section that focuses on the case of the UAE initially refers to state-driven initiatives

that support the face-mask custom with the intention of preserving UAE heritage and maintaining national identity. The second part examines the impact of the government's narrative on the public discourse about the face-mask custom by analysing online social media debates that relate to the 'appropriateness' of the Emirati face mask with regard to the ideal image of Emirati women. The third part critically discusses the effects and consequences of these invented traditions on actual practices. This not only reveals a gap between government-led perspectives of the face mask and those held by women, who are often disregarded or overlooked; it also contextualises the changing roles and meanings of the face mask as it vacillates between the concepts of 'tradition' and 'modernity'.

8.1 The Case of Qeshm Island

8.1.1 The Iranian Government's Attitudes towards Masking since the 1930s

The period between 1935 and 1941 was a critical period in the restricting of masking because it coincided with the implementation of Reza Shah's unveiling policy ('*Kashf-e Hejab*' (unveiling)) (Chehabi 2003, 193; Rostam-Kolayi 2003, 167; Mir-Hosseini 2007, 3). Having been influenced by the legal abolition of the veil in Turkey under the Mustafa Kemal Atatürk regime, Reza Shah saw unveiling as a means to accelerate the modernisation of the country, despite the strong opposition of religious clerics (Bagley 1971, 47; Chehabi 1993, 216-17; Mahdavi 2003, 186: 188-89).[79] Although Reza Shah

[79] For further insight into the relationships between the state and clergy around this time, see Akhavi (1980).

himself did not personally favour unveiling, he did believe that the veiling signified women being 'savage and backward', and maintained that the following of Western dress code was essentially to standardise Iran's civilisation and increase women's participation in society (Chehabi 2003, 200, 203; Mir-Hosseini 2007, 3) (Fig. 8.1).[80] This is because the increased social participation of women, as well as the improvement of women's position within the family were, in the Shah's view, a definition of modernity and national progress, which was the core of the nation-building process. 'National dress' and its enforcement also had a further implication for nation-building. As Chehabi noted, through the 'standardisation' of dress and 'Europeanising' citizens (1993, 222), the Shah intended to formulate national identity and unify citizens by "eliminating visible class, status, and regional distinctions," that had been heavily embedded in individual clothing prior to the enactment of the policy (Chehabi 2003, 205).

[80] The memoirs of Ashraf Pahlavi, the last Shah's twin sister and the daughter of Reza Shah, recall that: "At home my father was very much a man of an earlier generation (I remember he ordered me to change my clothes 'at once' because I had appeared at lunch in a sleeveless dress). However, as a king, he was prepared to put aside his strong personal feelings in the interest of bringing progress to his country. When he had made his decision, he came to us and said, 'This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do, but I must ask you to serve as an example for other Persian women'" (1980, 24-25). Shirazi (2001) also describes that Reza Shah's intention for the removal of the veil was not to "reform the status of his female subjects" (89).

(Fig. 8.1) Iranian women's indoor and outdoor costumes before Reza Shah's uniform dress code that aligned with European fashion (after Woodsmall 1936, 64). Photo reproduced from Woodsmall (ibid.).

The gradual but forcible elimination of the veil was strategically achieved through various methods. For example, even before the official announcement of an unveiling policy on the 8th of January 1936, systematic unveiling was carried out by ordering teachers and students in girls' schools to unveil themselves, and they were penalised if they did not do so (Baker 1997, 185; Chehabi 2003, 198; Rostam-Kolayi 2003, 171). Additionally, in order to set an example, Reza Shah's wife and daughters appeared in public revealing their face and hair and wearing Western clothes (Chehabi 1993, 218; Mahdavi 2003, 185). In 1936, the enforcement of unveiling escalated, and local authorities and police began physically removing veils from women and arresting those who did not follow the order (Chehabi 1993, 220; Baker 1997, 186; Chehabi 2003, 201-2; Mir-Hosseini 2007, 3). Thus, through controlling women's bodies and sexuality, in this case revealing the body and 'liberating' women from traditionally constructed norms of sexuality, Reza Shah

attempted to impose his ideology of modernity and development.[81]

While some women welcomed this change as a sign of women's empowerment, others, who could not tolerate the new dress code, left the country or kept themselves indoors (Savory 1978, 98; Chehabi 1993, 220; Chehabi 2003, 202). Brooks ([1995] 1996, 24) describes how:

> "Women who disobeyed the Shah's order and ventured into the street veiled risked having their coverings ripped off and scissored by soldiers. Rather than risk such humiliation, many women simply stayed inside."

Sattareh Farman-Farmaian also refers to her previously-veiled mother's desolation as:

> "When my mother had learned that she was to lose the age-old modesty of her veil, she was beside herself. She and all traditional people regarded Reza's order as the worst thing he had yet done—worse than his attacking the rights of the clergy; worse even than his confiscations and murders" (Farman-Farmaian and Munker 2006, 137).

Ironically enough, while disregarding these women's voices, the Reza Shah-led elimination of the veil did not fundamentally change the status of Iranian women, but rather generated new social divisions. Shirazi explains:

> '[The veiling became] a visible schism among Iran's women: unveiled educated women living in towns tended to belong to "Westernized" upper and middle classes; veiled women living in towns were educated at home, often by tutors, in

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[81] There was also a dress code for men that was consistent with European-style clothing.

> religiously sanctioned subjects; and veiled women living in rural areas were mostly illiterate, having been taught only the rudiments of Islam' (2001, 91).

Within these categorisations, many Qeshmi women belonged to the last group: they refused to take off the veil (in this case, the face mask), and stayed indoors. While it is often assumed that the policy targeted the covering of the hair, its actual aim was to abandon the face covering and the Iranian-style full-covered cloak (*chador*) that were the most common female outer garments in urban Iran in the early twentieth century (Baker 1997, 180; Chehabi 2003, 194; Rostam-Kolayi 2003, 166).[82] Despite the official dress code requiring a European-style hat, some women who could not afford new European clothes or hesitated to renounce their sense of modesty by going out completely uncovered, instead chose to partially conceal their heads with scarfs. This was accepted by the official inspectors as long as women did not cover their faces and bodies with a huge black cloak. However, this strict dress regulation elicited harsh criticism and was partly responsible for Reza Shah's fall from power (Chehabi 2003, 204).

Compulsory unveiling was annulled when Reza Shah abdicated, and his son, Mohammed Reza Shah, succeeded to the throne in 1941. Many urban women instantly readopted the *chador* but not the face veil (Keddie 2006, 120). By 1947, the wearing of the veil officially became a matter of personal choice (Chehabi 2003, 205; Mir-Hosseini 2007, 4). However, during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, under the influence of Islamic ideology propagated

[82] According to Woodsmall, the *chador* at that time was "a loose black sheet of silk, alpaca or sateen, which covered the whole figure and concealed the ankles," and the typical face veil (the *picheh*) was "a coarse black plaque of woven house-hair" (1936, 42). In some places, women wore a long white veil instead of the black one (see Fig. 6.1). For further insight into the various types of face veiling used in Iran, see "Iranian face veils" (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008)

by the revolutionaries, many women went out on the street to protest against the Shah's rule while wearing the *chador* and other Islamic clothing, covering themselves from head to toe. In March 1979, soon after the return of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the first directive calling for the veiling of women was announced (Afshar 1985, 264).[83] Ironically, in 1983,[84] in contrast to the Reza Shah's unveiling policy, the newly-established Islamic Republic legalised the compulsory head veil for girls above the age of six, with offenders being subject to "the 'Islamic' penalty of up to seventy-four lashes" (Mehran 1991, 44; Mir-Hosseini 2007, 7; Winet 2012, 238). Appearing unveiled in public caused not only religious hostility but also political tension as it was perceived to be representative of Western values, and therefore anti-revolutionary behaviour (Shirazi 2001, 92). Thus, another dress code controlling women's bodies and sexuality was introduced by the Islamic regime: this time obscuring their bodies and reducing sexuality.

The state sought to promote the understanding that the sexualisation of women's body was a threat to the Islamic social moral order by attributing this claim a nationalistic significance. After the late 1970s, many women started associating head veiling with "a marker of protest and [a] new Islamic identity" (Mir-Hosseini 2007, 4). This ideology concerning the veil was heavily influenced by Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari and Dr. Ali Shariʿati, respectively a popular religious cleric and intellectual who laid the foundation for the revolution (Shirazi 2001, 92; Mir-Hosseini 2007, 4). For example, Motahhari announced "[t]he jurists' idiom that defines a woman's body apart from her hands and

[83] Some members of *Hezbolahis*, the party of God, even attacked unveiled women with knives and guns and the victims were lucky if they survived (Afshar 1985, 265).
[84] Baker (1997, 188) notes the date as 30th of May in 1981.

face as *awrah*," and this identified it as a shameful part of the body, that needed to be concealed in front of marriageable men (Mir-Hosseini 2007, 5). In other words, a failure to control women's sexuality by enforcing the veiling can "lead to *fitna* (social chaos)" (Shirazi 2001, 92). In building on this religious interpretation, the Islamic Republic imposed the mandatory veiling of the head and body while allowing women's faces to be uncovered (Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang 2008, 153). This new definition of 'veiling' in Iran was based on a national and religious agenda.

Interestingly, the Iran-Iraq War (which took place between 1980 and 1988) was one reason for the legalisation of the veiling in 1983. As Shirazi (2001, 94) observes, at the beginning of the war, the Iranian government intended to avert the citizens' eyes from the fear of the war by tightening regulation of women's veiling in public. However, when the situation began to deteriorate and ran out of control, the government exploited veiling to distinguish themselves from the enemy, Iraq. Thus, in order to unify its citizens and accentuate the national identity, the government reemphasised and reinforced an ideologically defined style of veiling, embedding 'Shiite-ness' and 'Persian-ness' in opposition to the 'Sunni-ness' and 'Arab-ness' of Iraq (ibid.).

'Veiling' came to consist of the black head veil and the *chador*. This 'proper' or 'preferred' style of veiling for Iranian women was visually presented in public spaces, such as murals, posters and newspapers, and signboards (Fig. 8.2). Through the construction of dress code, the state succeeded in establishing a new social norm, defining improperly dressed women as "the nation's enemy," failing to fulfil "the proper behaviour of the female believer" (Shirazi 2001, 108, 180). This repetitive presentation of an appropriate dress code for women has continued until today (Figs. 8.3, 8.4). Therefore, while the black head-veil and the *chador* were practically defined and constantly advocated as the

'Iranian national dress', embodying being Persian and Shiite, other types of closing were obliquely regarded as inessential, minor, and sometimes non-Iranian. Face covering such as the black face-veil commonly worn by Iraqi women and the face mask, largely worn by Sunnis with Arab connections, were therefore often associated with non-Iranian dress, and seen as embodying a foreign cultural tradition.

(Fig. 8.2) Poster entitled '*Pattern of Islamic hijab*', which describes 'the "accepted" or "preferred" styles of veiling' along with two visual drawings of women who are presented in the government-recommended veiling styles (Shirazi 2001, 105).[85] This was obtained by Shirazi in the summer of 1995 (ibid., 192).

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[85] The text of the poster states: "Decree of Imam Khomeini on the subject of Islamic coverage. The body is the instrument of the soul, and the soul is divine air. This sacred instrument must not become a plaything of the desires, passions, and debauchery of anyone. Attention: Working sisters must observe the following: (a) At the place of work, they must appear in full cover in conformity with the presented models without any sort of adornments; (b) The colour of the manteau [the outer gown] should, preferably, be black, dark blue, brown, or dark grey; (c) The use of flat [low-heeled] shoes in the workplace is mandatory; (d) The use of tight and fashionable clothing and any sort of makeup is prohibited. Committed brothers and sisters, we are ready to receive your constructive opinions and suggestions with regard to fighting social corruption." (Shirazi 2001, 105).

(Fig. 8.3) Left: Propaganda poster promoting a proper dress code for Iranian women, which is entitled "The *ḥijāb* (veil) represents the beauty of your soul and mind." Photo taken in Tehran in July 2015. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.4) Right: Propaganda panel promoting the wearing of the Islamic *ḥijāb*: the message is: "Having the Islamic *ḥijāb* (veil) in this complex is compulsory." Photo taken in Tehran in May 2015. (Image: Manami Goto)

Although the Iranian government has not officially denounced face covering as an unpatriotic article of clothing or lawfully forbidden its use in public, the Ministry of Education has nonetheless imposed Islamic uniforms on female instructors as well as students since the academic year 1980/81, and many schools and universities have banned face covering. As a consequence, this has prevented some women from engaging in their face-covering practices, as the case of Zīnat in Chapter 7.1 illustrates. Therefore, by establishing an official Islamic dress code for women requiring head and body covering and restricting the use of face covering in educational institutions; as a result, the view that face coverings are a cultural tradition rooted in a specific community rather than a justified Islamic practice has systematically emerged. This is also reflected in the way

that state museums showcase and introduce the face mask as a part of provincial or local costume folk culture, thus distinguishing it from official or appropriate Iranian dress (Figs. 8.5, 8.6, 8.7, 8.8).

(Fig. 8.5) Left: Dress showcased as the traditional costume of Hormozgan Province: the mask is called '*batūle*' in the caption (see Chapter 1.4). Photo taken at Abyaz Palace (Ethnological Museum) at Golestan Palace in Tehran in August 2014. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.6) Right: Three masks exhibited as "Masks for women of Hormozgan Province" at Abyaz Palace. Photo taken in August 2014. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.7) Left: Museum in Kerman (central Iran) exhibiting a colourful wedding costume with a face mask as "the wedding dress of Hormozgan Province (in general)." Photo taken in Kerman in August 2015. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 8.8) Right: The upper part of the dressed mannequin: wearing the golden/indigo face mask. (Image: Manami Goto)

As the historical analysis of the veiling policies throughout the twentieth century indicates, the state of Iran has controlled and utilised representations of women's bodies and sexuality as a means to achieve its religio-political agendas. While Reza Shah unveiled women's faces and bodies to impose a modernised image and national identity in the 1930s, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered the veiling of women's heads and bodies in order to establish a new form of Iranian identity and a social order requiring modesty. However, this imposed modesty, as Afshar ironically observes, is "not to protect women, but to prevent the endangered male species from total annihilation at the mere sight of women"

(1985, 266). These views of women's sexuality were also expressed by Reza Shah. He said: "[M]an, the ruling sexual force, creates a social atmosphere which is totally male and which conditions women according to male peculiarities" (Baraheni 1977, 47). Therefore, in Iranian contexts, "the veil proved to be the most effective weapon of the rulers, secular and clerical" (Shirazi 2001, 109), while the agency of the wearer over the control of her own body has been ignored because the politics of the veil has always been in the hand of "the guardian of the wearer" (ibid, 108), and not women themselves. Under the control of the state, the face covering has been redefined to symbolise backwardness, the safeguarding of female sexuality, Arab-ness, Sunni-ness, and local identity, and has therefore become distinguished from the national identity of Iran based on the government's specific ideology. These state policies and attitudes towards face covering have both directly and indirectly affected the use of face masks among women on Qeshm Island. The next part of the discussion investigates the consequences of these policies and changes on the relationships between the face mask and women of the island, and their individual lives.

8.1.2 The Impact of the State Policies and Attitudes on Qeshm Island

The use of face covering has been regulated and manipulated as part of dress code by the Iranian state throughout the twentieth century and up until today. This was done in the form of policy, inspection of public spaces, and propagation of 'appropriate' clothing for women. Of these historical events, the most influential ones which affected many Qeshmi women's lives, were the unveiling law enforced by Reza Shah in the 1930s and the enrolment of girls into modern schools (where the use of face veils has been forbidden) since the 1980s. Qeshm Island, which falls under the jurisdiction of Hormozgan Province,

has been easily supervised due to its proximity to Bandar Abbas, the administrative capital. When local officials were ordered to police women's appearances and adherence to removal of the mask, Qeshmi women took different actions and approaches to escape the enforcement of the law. One of the most notable consequences of the law was migration of Qeshmi people to contemporary Gulf Arab countries (Nadjmabadi 2009, 135). While the state's decision to replace traditional clothing for both men and women with a more European style had already raised concerns among inhabitants of the island, when the removal of face covering was officially determined, many chose to leave and start new lives on the opposite side of the Gulf where they could continue their masking practice. My interviews in the UAE engaged a few Emirati respondents (84, 85, 86) whose parents were originally from Qeshm Island. They reported that a large number of people, who relied on family connections, had emigrated from Qeshm Island around 1936, during the course of a migration known as the "*Kashf Ḥijāb*." Many other residents of southern Iran also emigrated for the same reason: for example, one of the immigrants who moved from Bandar Abbas to Sohar of Oman due to the compulsory unveiling policy said:

> "We were much upset. Reza Shah Pahlavi wanted to change people *by force*, make everyone like the Europeans…. Here in Sohar we were free to pursue our own customs. Our customs were like those of Arabs of Sohar already when we lived in Bandar Abbas: *burqas*, turbans, clothes, and so forth. So that's precisely why we moved: Pahlavi banned the *burqa* and the turban: we wanted to keep those things. When today some young men want to leave their customs, and go bareheaded instead of wearing the turban, that is voluntary, with changing times, not *force*" (Wikan [1982] 1991, 108).

Ironically, for the women who were accustomed to wearing the face mask, the mandatory

unveiling law neither modernised nor liberated them, but rather took their basic rights away, such as the freedom of movement and expression of identities.

By comparison, women (as well as their families) who chose to remain on the island also sought to use every means available to preserve their traditional clothing and associated values. Although the degree of the governmental control over unveiling differed from village to village, the closer a village was to highly regulated cities such as Qeshm City, the more supervision was imposed. Thus, when the announcement of the veiling ban reached the island, many women decided to stay inside their houses and avoided going outside their villages. If the inspectors came to individual houses, women would temporarily unveil in front of them or hide in inner rooms. During the imposition of the unveiling law, some new villages were also built in the wild countryside as places of refuge. For example, some families of Ramchah village fled to an inner part of the island, finding particular refuge in areas where the topography was highly diverse and difficult to navigate. These families settled there in order to evade regulation and prevent their masked women from being caught by the inspectors. This is today's Borka Khalaf village.

Moreover, some Qeshmi women individually protested against the veiling ban in various ways. Amene (8) in Bandar-e Doulab village on Qeshm Island shared with me the story of her grandmother, who was originally from Chahu village. The incident happened when official inspectors reached the village to inform people that they were no longer allowed to cover their faces with masks, with one of them going around narrow passages between the houses to ensure the application of the rule. She recalled:

> 'When a governmental official came to take the *burquʿ*s from women's faces, my grandmother, who was around twenty or thirty years old at that time, said, "I and my sister were hiding at the end of the street, when the official came. When he

> approached us to take the *burquʿ*s off, I grabbed his balls [testicles] and crushed them. He ran away! We ran too! After that, he never came back to the village. I protected the women of the village!"'

This legendary victory against the 'invader' and the woman's strong enforcement of her agency to protect her tradition and value has been handed down orally from generation to generation. As this story exemplifies, the face mask was fundamental to the traditions and social values of the communities, and the enactment of the unveiling law in 1936 did not create any lasting change to the custom.[86] Thus, as discussed in Chapter 7, the enforcement of unmasking by state law could not prevent Qeshmi women from masking.

Between 1941 and 1980, the wearing of the face mask was not regulated by the state. However, starting in the academic year 1980/81, the Ministry of Education declared special Islamic uniforms for both female teachers and students (Mehran 1991, 44). In addition, since the state's adoption of compulsory veiling, the school uniform of girls was modified to a dark-coloured dress—either brown, dark blue, black, or grey—and a head covering, while teachers were required to wear the black *chador* (ibid., 44-45).

From its creation, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasised the importance of female access to education, especially for those who lacked economic or social opportunities (Mehran 2003, 276). In the government's view, formal schooling has always been the best instrument to teach women about their expected roles, such as being wives and mothers—this role is clearly distinguished from the wider range of male roles,

[86] It is interesting to note that when the unveiling law was repealed in 1941, those who had emigrated to the opposite shore of the Gulf, as well as those who had moved to new villages, did not return to their previous homes on the island.

and is intended to provide women with enough knowledge to bring up the country's future generations (ibid., 273-76). Education was therefore used by the Islamic republic "to create the ideal female citizen who is socialized, politicized, and Islamized and can serve the traditional needs of a religious society as well as the modern demands of the country" (ibid., 270). Wearing improper clothing and inadequate veiling was considered to be un-Islamic act by the state, and education was used as a means of training "'purified' individuals" who obey religious duties (Mehran 1990, 61).

In this regard, eliminating a face veil from girl's school uniforms provided Qeshmi girls and women with an opportunity to develop a more nuanced and doubting perspective on the use of the face mask in the local community. Young educated women on Qeshm Island frequently expressed such views, as noted in Chapter 7.1.2 and 7.1.3. For example, Marwa (34), a twenty-three-year-old woman from Kavarzin village, explained to me how the growth of formal education led to the masking practice falling out of favour. She said:

> "My mother's generations and the generations older than her didn't go to school. Many of them married at a young age and became housewives. But this has changed now. Many women now go to school and universities. Women are not allowed to wear this [the face mask] to cover their faces either at school or university. It is a school regulation, and if you refuse [to follow the rule], they don't allow you to study there. In the past, nobody went to school in this village because there was no school. Around ten years ago when the number of women who attended school began to increase, the school principle openly announced the regulation [of abandoning the face covering]."

When I asked the woman if the masking practice had prevented young women from going to school, her answer suggested the opposite. Because education had become more

important, many women had no option but to leave the custom, and men also began to think that "education is better than keeping the *burquʿ* tradition." Due to restrictions of the wearing of a mask in educational institutions, the face mask became special-occasion wear for younger generations, and came to represent a local and distinctive identity that differed from the identity created by their everyday attire. Meanwhile, the provincial government, international and local organisations, and local communities in addition to individuals took advantage of the state-imposed norms associated with the face mask to explicitly strengthen their local identity and unity, and to specifically reassert its unique and separate character. This preserved local traditions and produced economic benefits.

8.1.3 Preservation of the Masking Custom

While young Qeshmi women have become less and less fond of the masking custom as a result of the influence of state-imposed Islamic dress codes, different institutions and individuals have been involved in the revival and preservation of the custom. In doing so, they have highlighted the local (Qeshm Island) and regional (Hormozgan Province) identity associated with cultural heritage. With the intention of examining varying perspectives and stances initiated and held by different stakeholders, the following section is divided into three parts, and this enables an investigation of a range of attitudes and contributions to the preservation of the masking custom by the provincial government and international and local organisations, in addition to local communities and individuals. The analysis of these diverse perspectives of unique and complex situations and circumstances provides insight into the important role of the masking custom on Qeshm Island.

8.1.3.1 The Provincial Government

Qeshm Island administratively belongs to Hormozgan Province, whose capital located in Bandar Abbas. Most government offices are in Bandar Abbas, including the Department of Handicraft and Traditional Arts which has actively been engaged with the representation and preservation of the face mask as a regional cultural identity. It operates under the supervision of the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organisation, which was formed by the state in 2004 in order to advance the tourism sector and increase state revenues from it (Ghaderi and Henderson 2012, 48).

In the contemporary period, the department is keen to preserve and promote local handicrafts as part of regional identity formation, and it uses the face mask as a visual symbol of cultural representation and public memorialisation of the past and present, for the benefit of citizens of Hormozgan Province and visitors. In this regard, different types of face mask are displayed in various ways in public spaces as well as in touristic places such as local museums, handicraft centres, exhibitions, and cultural festivals, in addition to being conveyed through the mediums of monuments, murals, images in local newspapers and guide books, and costumes worn by performers at cultural events (Figs. 8.9, 8.10, 8.11, 8.12). As face masks are worn in various parts of the province, the masking custom of Qeshm Island is regarded as the traditional practice of women in the region, which contributes to the construction of the tangible heritage of Hormozgan Province as a whole.

(Fig. 8.9) The website logo of Hormozgan Cultural Heritage Organization.[87] Images of two masked women are illustrated to represent the distinctive tangible heritage of Hormozgan Province: one wears the Balochi face mask and the other wears a golden/indigo face mask.

[87] The page was accessed on November 21, 2018 at https://web.archive.org/web/20050528062850/http://www.hormozganmiras.ir/

(Fig. 8.10) A face mask installation at a busy junction in Bandar Abbas. Photo taken in December 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.11) An advertisement at Bandar Abbas airport that uses an animated image of a woman wearing the Baloch face mask. Photo taken by James Onley in April 2016.

(Fig. 8.12) A wall-painting drawing in Minab that depicts two masked women. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

The department also regularly organises exhibitions in Bandar Abbas and allocates each display area to a specific city, and invites guests from inside and outside Iran to visit. These expositions do not only showcase varieties of artefacts produced by people from different parts of the province or country but also allow visitors to purchase them. For example, during the Hormozgan Handicraft and Tourism Exposition, which took place in Bandar Abbas on July 15th in 2016, the department provided space to each city of Hormozgan Province. People from the selected cities—mainly women—exhibited their handicrafts, and many of their artefacts were either contemporary modified face masks or used designs of a mask or a masked woman. One booth was allocated to display the handicrafts of Qeshm Island, and Qeshmi women used it to exhibit a number of face masks associated with different villages of the island, along with other handicrafts and dress produced by local women (Figs. 8.13, 8.14). Most of the visitors at such events are

residents of Bandar Abbas and the surrounding areas, but on certain occasions foreign guests are invited to consider Iran's diverse artefacts in the expectation that this will open up potential marketing opportunities. At one exhibition ("the Cross-Country Handicraft Exhibition") that was held in Bandar Abbas on December 16th in 2016, I met Omani businessmen officially invited to investigate the possibility of exporting Iran's local handicrafts to Oman. Many of the traditional handicrafts produced in the province are indeed similar to those of Oman and other Gulf countries, but are no longer produced by local women from these countries. Consequently, handicrafts that are actively produced by women in Hormozgan Province at a very low cost are seen as potential exports.

The value of these Hormozgan handicrafts was further confirmed during my field research in Gulf Arab states. Many artefacts, especially hand-sewn traditional clothing that might be observed nowadays only in museums, were still produced and worn by women in Hormozgan Province. I showed different types of traditional dress worn in the province to a female performer, Hamda (79), at the heritage village in Dubai, and she told me that she had been looking for someone who could teach her the specific decorating techniques of a head veil, which was in the recording I showed to her. According to her, the richly-adorned veil was especially worn by wealthy families from the Gulf until the end of the 1980s; she reported that, as many women began adopting industrialised and machined-made clothing, the decorating techniques of a veil and other craft techniques were forgotten. This indicated the economic value of knowledge of these techniques. With her permission, I gave Hamda the number of my Hormozi friend, Leila (161), who taught mask-making techniques to women on Hormoz Island, and a few months later they met in Dubai, and Leila taught her the techniques in person.

Thus, local products and also techniques and knowledge preserved by local people in

Hormozgan have a great deal to offer to the further development of relationships with the Gulf Arab states. The state of Iran, as well as the provincial government of Hormozgan, recognise the economic potential of their local handicrafts, and are seeking to establish economic relationships between local handicraft industries and the Gulf Arab states that are willing to fund cultural heritage projects (Rab 2011, 42). Within such contexts, the face mask can be an ideal tool that emphasises the historical and transnational connections between Iran's Hormozgan and the Gulf Arab states (see Chapter 3 and 4) and promotes future business opportunities that will benefit both parties.

(Fig. 8.13) Left: The signboard of a booth, representing Qeshm City at Hormozgan Handicraft and Tourism Exposition in Bandar Abbas. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 8.14) Right: Face masks produced by Qeshmi women specially for the exposition for sale. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

These provincial government-led-initiatives and activities indicate how the local government aims to maximise the public expression of regional identity through cultural objects such as the face mask, while implementing the public dress code set by the state. The government of Hormozgan Province also utilises the face mask to construct a collective and distinctive identity of space and community, which is separate from the

homogeneous national identity imposed by the state. Moreover, the face mask plays an important role, representing not only different identities within Iran but also the much wider cultural boundaries of the region, and this provides potential economic opportunities to individuals and the local governments and state. At the provincial level, the face mask is used to represent regional identity rather than the identity of a specific local community, and its role is essentially focused on the socio-political aspect along with the involvement of international and local organisations in the preservation of the masking custom. This will be discussed in more detail below, when it will be demonstrated how the case of Qeshm Island further accentuates the economic role of the face mask.

8.1.3.2 International and Local Organisations

The involvement of international and local organisations in the preservation of the masking custom on Qeshm Island provides a unique case study that illustrates the country's complex political and economic dimensions. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, following the 1979 revolution and the 1980-88 war with Iraq, the country's development has been significantly affected by negative images (Ghaderi and Henderson 2012, 48). These images were further reinforced by US sanctions imposed in 1995, which were supposedly introduced in response to Iran's nuclear programme (Katzman 2009, 1). In being confronted by serious economic difficulties, the government of Iran has come to see tourism as one of the main sectors with the potential to bring about economic diversification and reduce reliance on the oil industry (Ghaderi and Henderson 2012, 48).

As part of this national economic vision, Qeshm Island was designated as one of Iran's

Free Trade Zones in 1990, allowing many economic activities to be exempted from taxes, and this has attracted both foreign as well as Iranian tourists to the island (Karner 2016, 19). Qeshm Free Area Organization was established in Qeshm City, the island's capital, in 2006, with the intention of advancing economic and industrial activities on the island. Due to the island's untouched natural surroundings, unique landscape, and strategic location, some parts of the island were officially registered by UNESCO as Qeshm Geopark, the only geopark in the Middle East (Ehsani and Azari 2017, 133). This international recognition has encouraged the state to facilitate the empowerment of local communities in line with the action plan outlined of by Qeshm Geopark (ibid., 141).

The purpose of the Geopark is to preserve geological heritage and to support the regional sustainable economic development of the island.[88] Within this framework, one of the main focuses has been on including local women in tourism activities by assisting them to produce and market local handicrafts. These activities have provided women with opportunities to revive their indigenous arts and handicrafts and have also provided new jobs that improve their livelihoods and the social welfare of their communities (ibid., 138-39). While some men still oppose the idea of their women being engaged with economic activities, many tend to support such initiatives on the grounds that the produced economic benefit is crucial to their living (Manami Goto, field notes). Many of the women are housewives, and activities outside the house provide them with a space for social interactions and open up a source of personal income by utilising their handicraft skills (ibid.). Yet, if the traditional practice of craft production is to become an economic

[88] See Qeshm Geopark ("What exactly is a Geopark?," accessed November 21, 2018) http://qeshmgeopark.ir/en/pages/welcome/what-is-geopark.

activity, their artefacts need to be commercialised. Local women are therefore trained to produce high-quality, customer-oriented products through the application of their traditional craft techniques and designs, and the face mask is often used as a motif or symbol that represents the local cultural identity. Artefacts that adopt a design or motif of the face mask tend to be the most popular products, as they are considered to be unique souvenirs from Qeshm Island.

Both training programmes for local women and the marketing of their artefacts have been funded and arranged in partnership with other organisations that are also interested in the sustainable development of the island. For example, the Avaye Tabiate Paydar Institute, an Iranian organisation, has provided women with training courses and conducted research investigating the role of women in Geopark sustainability (ibid., 141). With the help of other organisations, handicraft shops were established in Borka Khalaf village, selling artefacts produced by trained women of the village, and were also run by these women (Figs. 8.15, 8.16, 8.17, 8.18, 8.19). In order to inspire more women from the island, a traditional dolls' exhibition was held at the Geopark museum, and approximately 180 dolls imitating indigenous women (with the specific mask and clothing of each village) were displayed (ibid., 142). In 2016, two handicraft shops were established in the village as part of a project organised by Qeshm Geopark, which had the intention of attracting tourists who visit Stars Valley, the most popular Geosite on the island.

Another example is the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) which is funded by the government of Japan to assist the economic and social growth of developing countries. In 2015, JICA agreed with the Cultural, Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization of Qeshm Free Zone Organization to carry out a project called 'The Project for Community-Based Sustainable Development Master Plan of Qeshm Island toward

"Eco-Island"'. It was implemented between November 2015 and November 2018, and has provided financial and technical support that enhances domestic industries and creates job opportunities for local people (JICA 2018).[89] As part of this project, a handicraft shop ('*Qeshmineh*') opened in the largest shopping mall in Qeshm City in February 2018. It sells artefacts including face-mask-pattern-printed or attached handbags and pouches that have been produced by rural women from eleven different villages (Qeshm Tours 2018)[90] (Fig. 8.20).

(Fig. 8.15) A handicraft shop in Borka Khalaf village. This was established as part of a collaboration between Qeshm Geopark and other international and local organisations. Photo taken in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

[89] https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/thematic_issues/environment/c8h0vm0000bq16uo-att/projects_10.pdf.

[90] https://qeshmtours.com/en/posts/view/41.

(Fig. 8.16) Handmade dolls imitating the indigenous women of Qeshm Island. Different face masks that are either drawn or attached to them represent the identity of each village on the island. Photo taken in the shop in July 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.17) Another handicraft shop located in Borka Khalaf village. This shop also operates in partnership with Qeshem Geopark. Photo taken in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.18) Left: A female mannequin dressed in the traditional costume of Qeshm Island. The specific design of the face mask worn by the mannequin represents the identity of Borka Khalaf village. Photo taken in the shop in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 8.19) Right: Ready-made face masks sold as souvenirs from the island. Varying styles of face masks indicate the style of each village on the island. Photo taken in the shop in November 2016. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.20) Variety of artefacts sold at a handicraft shop ('*Qeshmineh*'). Bags patterned with a face mask (the upper middle) and decorative face masks (the lower middle) are displayed in the shop. Photo reproduced from Qeshm Tours (2018).

All those investments and aid received from outside and inside Iran for the purpose of

promoting the sustainable development of Qeshm Island have encouraged the Iranian government to respect the social rights of indigenous people on the island (Ehsani and Azari 2017, 142). In particular, the local women's active engagement with the economic development and improvement of the island's livelihood has attracted substantial international attention. This experience further encouraged the government to invest in the island's public health and socio-economic development (ibid., 143). Preservation of the local tradition and the emphasis on its uniqueness play a crucial role in tourism, which has become an increasingly important source of national revenue; despite the Iranian government's unfavourable attitude towards masking, the government has therefore been left with no choice but to accept and preserve it on Qeshm Island.

At the same time, projects funded and coordinated by both international and local organisations have widened the social role of Qeshmi women and also enabled them to gain more respect from society, especially male community members. In addition, they also have developed self-confidence and knowledge about the importance of preserving their cultural traditions, including masking (ibid.). These attitudes are commonly seen as an impact of geotourism, which creates "ethnic and cultural pride" among local residents (Shahhoseini, Modabberi, and Shahabi 2017, 35). In the case of Qeshm Island, the commercial activities initiated by various organisations have provided opportunities for women to learn about the economic value of the face mask and the masking custom. This has led to a rediscovery of preservation and a revival of the vanishing masking custom among both older and younger generations of Qeshmi women.

8.1.3.3 Local Communities and Individuals

The economic benefits of the face mask have been underlined by its sale as a local handicraft, and this complements the recognition that it is a tangible part of Qeshm Island's heritage. Both benefits have resulted in its value being recognised by the native population. The increasing presence of migrant populations from other parts of Iran due to job opportunities created by foreign and domestic investments on the island has further strengthened awareness of the need to sustain masking as a means of identity preservation. Local communities and individuals have taken various approaches to preservation by utilising different means of communication.

One interesting example of this is the increased use of the face mask at traditional rituals, particularly when performances are given for the benefit of visitors from outside the community. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 7, Zīnat (62), a woman from Salakh village, has refurbished her house into accommodation and built a large garden named "Zinat Rituals Garden," where different cultural ceremonies are frequently performed. One well-known ceremony in the village is Zar, which is "a type of healing cult" (Khosronejad 2011, 4). It is often privately organised to cure people affected by "illnesses or misfortunes caused by possession by a species of spirit" (Natvig 1987, 669). The ceremony in Salakh village usually takes place between a patient and a person, either male (*Baba Zar*) or female (*Mama Zar*), who is believed to be able to control these spirits, and it is often accompanied by other community members who assist the ceremony with drumming and dancing.

Customarily *Mama Zar* unveils herself during the ceremony; however, according to Sara Zavaree (162), a PhD candidate researching the Zar, who conducted fieldwork extensively in the Western Indian Ocean, the *Mama Zar* of Salakh village attends Zar

ceremonies while wearing a face mask (Fig. 8.21). In Zavaree's view, this uncommon act can be explained by the ceremony becoming an entertainment show rather than an actual healing session: in order to attract more visitors, women tend to wear face masks to emphasise the 'folkloristic' images of the ritual. Although I did not personally attend Zar ceremonies, my observations and conversations with the people of the village suggest that another possible explanation could be to keep their anonymity in front of foreign guests and cameras. Nevertheless, the face mask is used both to fulfil visitors' expectations and represent local identity to 'others'.

(Fig. 8.21) Zar ceremony in Salakh village. Photo retrieved from Trip Advisor website: submitted by Mohsen S in September 2017.[91]

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[91] https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g946486-d11996012-Reviews-Zinat_Rituals_Garden-Qeshm_Hormozgan_Province.html#photos;aggregationId=101&albumid=101&filter=7&ff=278403672

This symbolic representation of the face mask in ceremonial shows tends to be closely linked to other tourism businesses. In the compound where these shows are usually performed, one room is specifically designated to sell local handicrafts as well as artefacts. It is often decorated with face-mask patterns, and these products are also hung in spaces where visitors eat and rest (Fig. 8.22). Many of these were produced as part of a collaborative project with Ahmad Nadalian (64), an Iranian artist, who has also renovated an old house and turned it into an exhibition gallery called 'Paradise Art Gallery', which is located within walking distance of Zinat Rituals Garden (WWW.RiverArt.Net 2018). The visual representation of the face mask at ceremonies does not only emphasise its relation to local identity but also intentionally attracts and encourages visitors to buy mask-patterned artefacts as commemorative souvenirs from the village and the island.

(Fig. 8.22) Glass-drawing artefacts with illustrations of masked women exhibited at Paradise Art Gallery at Salakh village. Photo reproduced from Ahmad Nadalian's official web page.[92]

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[92] http://www.riverart.net/salakh/paradise/index.htm

While the above cases illustrate the preservation of the masking custom, which is motivated by tourism and its economic interests, other practices targeting the local population as a means of identity preservation have also become prevalent in recent years. The usage of images of a face mask or masked women for advertisements, in music videos, and in cultural commemorations circulated on social media platforms (Figs. 8.23, 8.24) is commonly seen at both the individual and community level. Young generations who do not practise masking in their daily lives are employed to produce modern images of the masking tradition. Today, most girls over the age of fifteen have their own cell-phones and constantly exchange these images between friends and families as part of their everyday communication. In this way, women visibly express their cultural identity and continue to update and modify the face mask and the act of masking as a form of fashion.

(Fig. 8.23) Image of a woman wearing a heavily-decorated face mask used to advertise a beauty salon. Image retrieved from Instagram (@borke.poosh, November 24, 2018).
(Fig. 8.24) Image of a woman with a face mask and in the colourful local costume along with a poem, circulated on social media. Image retrieved from Instagram (@qeshm_pic, November 24, 2018).

Another example is the recent creation of an animation for children. The animation, called ‘Dange Rang’, is a social-media-based personal animation that depicts the everyday lives

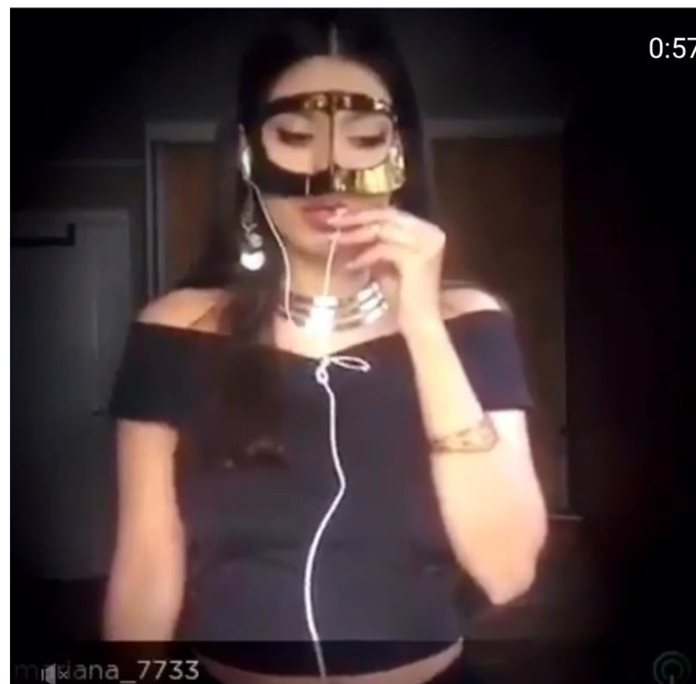
of Qeshmi people in a humorous way (Fig. 8.25). One of the main characters is a middle-aged Qeshmi woman, Maryam, who appears with her face mask and the traditional long, one-piece dress, *kandūra*, and speaks in Qeshmi dialect. The animation is anonymously created by a group of individuals, and its short episodes are regularly shared only on Instagram and Telegram: the official page has over 18,700 followers and 1,500 subscribers in November 2018. Because it appears on an accessible online platform, this children's animation has been used to both consolidate local identity and pass down indigenous traditions to children. In engaging online, I observed a number of hand-drawings by children who watched these episodes on their parents' phones and then drew the characters (Fig. 8.26). These cartoon animations became a tool for teaching and embedding children in their local identity and cultural values. Within this context, the face mask plays a significant role, reinforcing its intimate relationship with local populations and denoting their distinctive cultural pride.

(Fig. 8.25) A logo for Dange Rang, a cartoon animation. Image retrieved from the official page on Instagram (@dange.rang, November 24, 2018).
(Fig. 8.26) A child's drawing of the female Qeshmi character in the animation. Photo retrieved from the official page on Instagram (@dange.rang, November 24, 2018).

The increasing popularity and promotion of the face mask as a cultural representation of Qeshmi women has obtained a certain recognition on mainland Iran and is sometimes even used out of its traditional context (Manami Goto, field notes). For example, a 2016 movie called 'A Dragon Arrives!' (*Izhudihā wārid mishavad*!) was filmed on Qeshm Island, and it comes close to depicting masked women as mystical and continuing to live in an uncivilised world (Fig. 8.27). Although these images of masked women were romanticised to contribute a degree of uniqueness to the story, it offers an important message about the diversity of people and cultures that exist in Iran, and it also captures and records the island's disappearing traditional practices. The depiction of masked women along with other indigenous populations and rituals provides and exemplifies stereotypical images of the island people and their lifestyles.

There are also cases where the face mask is adopted by women elsewhere in Iran, especially Tehranis. There are shops and organisations in Tehran that sell local products as well as handicrafts from southern Iran, including Qeshm Island. One of these, is Tehran's Baghe Ferdows Garden, normally sold types of face mask, but these were all out of stock when I visited several times in 2016. When I asked young women (163, 164, 165) in Tehran why people in the city purchase those face masks, they told me that some women use them as room decorations, while others wear them during intercourse to pleasure men who enjoy the mystic and unusual atmosphere created by the masked face. Moreover, some young women even wear either the traditional or heavily-decorated contemporary-style mask on social media just to attract more viewers (Fig. 8.28).

(Fig. 8.27) One of the scenes of the movie, depicting a mystic ritual performed by masked women on Qeshm Island. Proto retrieved from the official trailer on YouTube (The Mach Factory, 2016).



(Fig. 8.28) A non-Qeshmi woman appeared on social media while wearing the golden/indigo face mask. Image retrieved from Instagram (@port_kong, November 24, 2018).

The attitudes that different stakeholders hold towards masking tend to vary in accordance with their socio-political and economic agendas, and this has greatly influenced the current status of the face-mask tradition on Qeshm Island. The outcome of the

implementations of their agendas through policies, projects, and everyday communication have also continued to mutually affect and develop their stance on masking customs. This is reflected in the contradictory attitudes of the current government of Iran: while imposing unveiling of the face as part of female dress code in alignment with the religio-political ideology of the regime, it also promotes the custom as a local tradition for tourism promotion and heritage preservation.

Although masking has often represented the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, local and national, and religious and non-religious practice by external agents, Qeshmi women have made conscious decisions in their relationships with the custom. However, it is important to mention that the preservation of the face-mask tradition as a means of economic gains and identity preservation was introduced and promoted by the international and local organisations. While such projects have encouraged younger generations to participate in the preservation of the mask tradition, the tourism-oriented approach may have imperialised the tradition by re-inventing it upon the basis of outsider views towards Qeshmi people—though here it needs to be recognised that the tourism-specific dimensions of the custom need to be further explored. Nevertheless, representing the masking custom as a symbol of local identity and as a tangible legacy for the communities tends be the only way to recast, present, and preserve their Qeshmi identity under the current regime in Iran, which restricts the use of the face mask as daily attire.

8.2 The Case of the UAE

The Iranian government has imposed the school uniform on female students and promoted the 'appropriate' Islamic dress code for women in public, and this has resulted in the masking custom becoming unpopular among younger generations on Qeshm Island.

It is therefore instructive to note that the UAE government has also applied the same restrictions to face covering in schools since the early 1970s (see Chapter 7.2.2). However, contrary to the case of Iran, the UAE government has recognised and utilised the face mask as a tool to construct a new emerging national identity. This was meant not only to unify its citizens who share the same historical and cultural past within this "imagined political community" (Anderson 2006, 5) but also distinguish them from non-Emiratis both within and outside the country.

In fact, 'nationalism' is a modern manifestation. In recognising this, Gellner states:

> "the nationalist principle requires that the political unit and the ethnic one be congruent. In other words, given that ethnicity is basically defined in terms of shared cultures, it demands that everyone, or nearly everyone, within the political unit be of the same culture and that all those of the same culture be within the same political unit. Simply put: one culture, one state" ([1997] 1998, 45).

In the case of the UAE and other Gulf Arab states, territorial boundaries were decided on the basis of "British interests rather than local traditions and histories in an area characterized by fluid territorial claims and shifting alliances" (Lootah 1999, 99; Al-Rasheed 2005, 4; Freer 2018). The seven emirates that came to unite as the UAE were a political creation intended to "deal with foreign invasions" (Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa 2006, 267). Thus, upon the establishment of the nation-state, it was necessary to construct a homogeneous national/ethnic identity to make different tribes and ethnicities loyal to the nation and unite them under the authority (Kanna 2010, 104; AlMutawa 2016, 10). This identity formation became even more important when the state's rapid economic development attracted migrant workers and non-citizens outnumbered the citizens in the country. Thus, the purpose of identity construction has

shifted to reaffirmation of the '"ownership" of the state' (Koch 2015, 522). By doing so, the state has aimed to make a clear distinction between Emirati citizens ('owners' of Emirati heritage and historical narrative) and the latter group [non-citizens] who are "'guests'" (Freer 2018).

In this respect, the UAE government has invented new cultural traditions or utilised what was commonly held amongst people of the community and re-invented it in line with national narratives (Khalaf 2005, 261). These include heritage sports such as camel-racing (Khalaf 2000), falconry (Wakefield 2012; Koch 2015, 2018a), traditional economic activities such as pearling (Hightower 2014; Simpson 2014) and dhaw seafaring (Gilbert 2011; Rab 2011, 44); they extend to local landscapes and architectures such as Bastakiya (or *al-fahidi*) district[93] (Haggag and Rashed 2003, 256-58) and the Islamic domes (Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa 2006, 284); and are also evidenced in other material cultures such as national dress (Khalaf 2005; Ledstrup 2019) and the face mask, both of which will be further discussed in this section.

The first part of this section, which relates to the case of the UAE, observes how the UAE government has utilised the face mask as a representation of the national identity and its tangible heritage. Drawing on Hobsbawm's "invented traditions" ([1983] 2013, 1), I argue that the UAE government articulated their narrative of 'Emiratiness' by re-inventing the pre-existing masking custom as a part of its nation-building and construction of homogeneous identity. To illustrate this point, I examine how state-defined symbolic meanings embedded within the face mask have been repeatedly

[93] The district previously known as *Bastakiya* (the name of an Iranian town) was recently Arabised and renamed as *al-fahidi* (Sindelar 2018).

promoted in various spaces and mediums, including museums, cultural events, TV shows, educational materials for children, and souvenirs.

The second part looks at how government narratives have influenced and shaped current public discourse on the face mask. Recently, some Emiratis, especially men, have criticised a contemporary version of the Emirati face mask—the *burqu' bushanab*, which consists of a narrower frame and does not conceal the face like 'traditional' versions (Manami Goto, field notes). Their main argument is that the contemporary mask does not fulfil the 'authentic' purpose of the mask, which is to represent an 'appropriate' image of Emirati women and their identity. Through observations of online discussions on Instagram, I aim to contextualise what is considered to be the 'appropriate' Emirati face mask along with the public expectation of the ideal representation of Emirati women in relation to the face mask.

While the preceding online discussions and the state discourse regarding the face mask often ignore the narratives and perspectives of masked women, the third part explores the perspectives of both Emirati women who have adopted the contemporary Emirati face mask and young Emiratis who promote the face mask as being integral to their national identity in various respects.

8.2.1 The UAE Government's Attitudes towards Masking since the Late 1960s

The construction of national identity has been one of the most strongly promoted projects in the UAE's nation-building. In order to cultivate a sense of history among the populace, the state has utilised customary and traditional materials from the pre-oil or pre-industrial societies and re-invented them as 'Emirati' cultural traditions and heritage. In this manner,

it sought to depict them as embodying the appropriate historical past (Blau 1995, 124; Bristol-Rhys 2009, 116).

In the official narrative, 'history', which is considered to be part of the preservation of heritage, is referred to as the time prior to 1960, when oil was discovered and the nation started to become independent (Caton and Ardalan 2010, 50). The face mask worn by all married women in the pre-oil UAE is now one of the most utilised material culture in heritage construction, especially since the 1990s. In order to closely examine the shifting role of the face mask from the daily attire to the cultural symbol of Emirati identity and heritage, the analysis below divides into two historical periods: 1) between the late 1960s and 1980s; and 2) after 1990.

8.2.1.1 Between the Late 1960s and 1980s

The inflow of oil revenue to the society in the 1960s and 1970s affected every aspect of Emirati people's life including their attire (El Mutwalli 2015, 88-95). In this period, the government discouraged the use of the face mask as part of a woman's daily attire, especially amongst younger generations, and at the same time sought to depict it as a traditional dress of the pre-oil period to be exhibited in state museums.

During the modernisation of society in the 1960s and 70s, the younger generations, especially men, who received a modern education and were influenced by the Egyptian cinema and the Western social movements such as the Hippie movement, adopted Western-style clothes and negatively viewed pre-oil clothes such as the *kandūra* (robe) and *ghutra* (headdress), claiming that they belonged to the past (Crocetti [1996] 1999, 126; Khalaf 2005, 252). Although the majority of women continued to wear an evolved

version of the pre-oil clothes such as the *shaila* (head veil) and *kandūra* (robe), the face mask began to disappear (El Mutwalli 2015, 105). Firstly, the settled (*Ḥaḍar*), educated women in Dubai and Sharjah started removing the mask, followed by others in Abu Dhabi, Ajman, and Ras al-Khaimah (Soffan 1980, 37). This was caused by school policies that regulated the use of the face mask by imposing a uniform (El Mutwalli 2015, 289-90) (see Chapter 7.2). At this time, many educated women went out in public without concealing their face (Manami Goto, field notes).

The unpopularity and declining use of the face mask further accelerated during the Islamic revival process in the Gulf region that began at the end of the 1970s (Khalaf 2005, 251). Contrary to changes in attire in the 1960s and 70s, many women began to dress more conservatively and modestly upon the basis of the 'Islamic' dress code appropriated for women, and accordingly adopted a thicker headscarf (*sheila*) and black-cloak (*ʿabā* or locally known as *abaya*) (ibid.; El Mutwalli 2015, 107). During this time, some women also began to conceal their face with a black face veil (*niqāb*) (El Mutwalli 2015, 105-6). While a religiously designed form of dress was adopted in society, the face mask came to be defined as non-Islamic and was no longer publicly considered as a necessary piece of daily attire (Soffan 1980, 37; El Mutwalli 2015, 292).

Thus, as a result of the introduction of school uniforms and a more conservative Islamic dress code, the face mask, which had previously been an intimate object for married woman, lost its traditional function in Emirati society. However, the government recognised its cultural value and started preserving masking custom as part of their pre-oil tradition and used it to construct an Emirati national identity. This was mainly achieved through the establishment of state museums that introduced visitors to Emirati cultural traditions and the lifestyles of the pre-oil period.

In fact, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the UAE, along with other Gulf states, established state museums that “intended to legitimise the rulers of the newly independent Gulf states and to cohere a new form of identity—the national—drawing on shared traditions and activities” (Exell 2018). For example, the Al Ain Museum (also known as the Al Ain National Museum), which was the first museum in the country, was established in the UAE in 1969 under the guidance of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. At the beginning, it only had two sections: the archaeology and ethnography sections. The latter introduced “the life of the people before a couple of decades” (Al Ain National Museum, “Al Ain National Museum”), and showcased traditional objects, such as traditional cooking utensils, decorative ornaments, and tools for livelihood. In this section, the face mask was presented as part of the traditional attire of the pre-oil period and was attached to female wax-figures that were placed in various social landscapes (Fig. 8.29). In this context, the face mask was given a new symbolic meaning, and was seen as embodying the national past and pride and representing a unified ‘Emirati’ identity. This new function of the mask, in which it appeared as an embodiment of ‘Emirati’ material culture, took on an enhanced importance during the state’s heritage development projects that began in the 1990s. This should be considered in the wider context of a large demographic imbalance between nationals and non-nationals (Lootah 1999, 97).

(Fig. 8.29) A female wax-figure exhibiting the traditional 'Emirati' bridal costume. Photo taken at Al Ain National Museum in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

8.2.1.2 After 1990

The impact of sudden economic, demographic, and cultural transformations occasioned by oilwealth was clearly visible in Emirati society (Bristol-Rhys 2009, 108), and the changes were particularly conspicuous among the growing non-national population, who came to account for approximately 71 percent of the total population in 1993 (Khalaf and Alkobaisi 1999, 272). The UAE government recognised that this was a threat to national identity that could lead to cultural disorder or a loss of identity (Al-Rasheed 2005, 10; Khalaf 2005; Picton 2010, 69; Hertog 2016, 348; Koch 2018a).

This cultural threat motivated the government to further enhance national heritage development while shifting their aim from legitimisation of the ruling power and unification of nationals (Khalaf 2000, 259; Prager 2015, 30-31). Instead, they focused on cultivating a strong sense of 'Emiratiness' that was rooted in the cultural history of Bedouin Arabs, who were considered to be the 'original' and 'authentic' inhabitants, thus establishing the basis for a clear distinction between nationals and non-nationals (Khalaf 2005, 259; Hawker 2002; Akinci 2018). A sense of state ownership and belonging was cultivated amongst nationals, and it was envisaged that both would increase as a result (Hawker 2002). This culminated, for example, in the invention of a national dress that became "a significant boundary marker for maintaining their distinct national identity" (Khalaf 2005, 265).

Simultaneously, individual emirates, such as the emirates of Dubai and Sharjah, have strategically intensified heritage development as part of tourism attraction with the aim of gaining economic benefits (Hawker 2002, 6; Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa 2006, 268-69). Khalid bin Sulayem, the director general of Dubai's Development of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, sought to explain the notions in the official heritage discourse in more detail. He said:

> "The UAE's culture and heritage are among the keys to successful future growth of the tourism industry. Our heritage and cultural assets will help in the development of a sustainable tourism program" (Gulf News 1999, 2).

A government strategy of reconstructing and preserving heritage was intended to reshape "both self-identity and outside perceptions" in the UAE (Hawker 2002, 7). It is in this context that the face mask was re-defined as an 'Emirati' face mask, and this attested to a monolithic historical past and social value. This is reflected, for example, on the official

website of the Department of Culture and Tourism of Abu Dhabi, which introduces the face mask as a traditional handicraft (for example, "[i]n the United Arab Emirates, the Burqa'a [face mask] is a traditional form of modesty" (Abu Dhabi Culture 2018)). By repeatedly presenting the 'Emirati' face mask in the context of Emirati heritage, the state presented it as "one of the most important heritage icons of the Emirates" (AlMoughanni 2018, 39) and sought to promote it through various mediums.

One example of this can be seen in the state museums where the face mask has continued to play a significant role in these state-owned cultural institutions, providing a visual distinction to illustrations of Emirati women. Each emirate has its own museum: the Al Ain National Museum in Abu Dhabi (1969); the Dubai Museum (1971); the Ras al-Khaimah National Museum (1987); the Fujairah Museum (1991); the Ajman National Museum (1991); the Umm al-Quwain Museum (2000); and the Sharjah Heritage Museum (2012). Many of these museums have been renovated since the 1990s (Prager 2015, 25). Today, all these state museums of the seven emirates display wax-figures of Emirati women with face masks, or old photographs of masked women, as a means of documenting the memory of 'traditional' ways of life in the pre-oil period (Manami Goto, field notes) (Figs. 8.30, 8.31, 8.32). In these displays, the face mask is described as the folkloric cloth of Emirati women and a symbol of female modesty. In Fujairah Museum, where a replica of masked woman is showcased in the glass cabinet, the label clearly states: 'They [women] also put the "Burqua" [face mask] to hide their faces when they go outside the house. Hence, the UAE women look respectful and beautiful" (Folkloric clothes section, Fujairah Museum, 1 April 2017) (Fig. 8.31).

Meanwhile, Sharjah Heritage Museum allocates a section to narrate the masking custom by showcasing materials and tools used to make the mask—modesty is provided as the

reason why women wear the mask (‘Al Burga’, Sharjah Heritage Museum, 28 March 2018). The same museum also held an exhibition entitled “The Emirati *Burqa*: An Intimate Object,” which was organised by Dr. Karima Al Shomaly between November 15 in 2017 and June 4 in 2018 (Fig. 8.33).

In the introduction to the exhibition, Al Shomaly defines the Emirati *burquʿ* as “a specific type of face covering worn by Muslim women in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)” that was commonly worn until the late 1960s (‘The Emirati *Burqa*: An Intimate Object’, Sharjah Heritage Museum, 28 March 2018). This exhibition, which consists of her personal collections, includes: masks; fabrics; metal tins; and her artworks in the form of photographs, multi-media, and watercolours, and this further reinforces the idea of an ‘Emirati’ face mask through the use of both materialistic and scholarly contributions. In addition, some of these state museums of individual emirates aim to cultivate their own local identity as being different from the generic national one, and achieve this by exhibiting specific ethnographic and archaeological materials that belong to a particular emirate (Blau 1995, 120; Prager 2015, 24; Hightower 2016, 71). As for the face mask, the museum curators, mostly ‘indigenous’ people (ibid.), demonstrate these local identities by emphasising the particular cuts and designs of the mask (Manami Goto, field notes).

(Fig. 8.30) Wax-women in the traditional dress and the face mask, representing the historical ways of living in the Ajman National Museum. Photo taken in March 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.31) Left: A masked mannequin in the Fujairah Museum. Photo taken in April 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.32) Right: A masked wax-woman in the Women's Handicraft Centre in Abu Dhabi. Photo taken in March 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.33) The entrance of the exhibition, 'the Emirati Burqa: An Intimate Object', in Sharjah Heritage Museum. Photo taken in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

Heritage villages and festivals that are more audience-orientated provide another example of utilising the face mask to imagine the 'traditional' life of the pre-oil UAE. These heritage villages, such as Dubai Heritage Village and Abu Dhabi Heritage Village, are, as Simpson observes, "one of the most recognisable forms of officially sanctioned heritage" (2016, 38). Unlike the museums, living persons are hired to act as the inhabitants of particular settings in these heritage villages and cultural festivals (Prager 2015, 31). Most old women, who demonstrate the traditional handicrafts, offer traditional food to visitors, and perform 'folk' dance and rituals, appear in the 'traditional' dress and face masks to enact ways of life in the pre-oil period (Manami Goto, field notes—also see Figs. 8.34, 8.35).

These visual representations and performances enable visitor audiences to acquire

experiential impressions about past traditions and inform the cultural identities of the community. The impact that these heritage representations can create is massive as approximately 275,000 people annually visit these heritage sites, of whom 40% are Emirati nationals (Hobbs 2017, 69). These sites are also used as educational tools that benefit the younger generation, mostly university students (Caton and Ardalan 2010, 51). In addition, these heritage representations are closely connected with the tourism economy as various objects adopting designs of the face mask or masked woman are sold at local markets and airports as cultural souvenirs from the UAE (Figs. 8.36, 8.37).

(Fig. 8.34) A masked woman demonstrating local food making in front of tourists at the heritage village in Dubai. Photo taken in August 2010. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.35) A masked woman demonstrating traditional handicrafts in front of tourists in a cultural institution in Dubai. Photo taken in March 2017.

(Fig. 8.36) Left: Decorative objects designed as a masked woman that are sold as cultural souvenirs for 50 UAE dirhams each at Dubai International Airport. Photo taken in June 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)
(Fig. 8.37) Right: Pens designed as a masked woman that are sold for 15 UAE dirhams each at Dubai International Airport. Photo taken in June 2017. (Image: Manami Goto)

In the contemporary period, as a result of the government's positive attitudes and encouragement of local women to engage in heritage preservation, many women have begun to take part in performative activities at cultural events. However, until recently, many of the hired performers were non-Emiratis who originally came from Oman or Iran's Baluchistan (Manami Goto, field notes). In fact, during my field research in the UAE, I encountered a few non-Emirati performers (79, 80, 81) who were officially employed to work in these heritage villages and perform 'Emirati' traditional activities. In order to imitate 'traditional' Emirati women, these performers consciously wore so-called 'Emirati' face masks that were different from those from their home towns in that they often consisted of a wider frame and covered more parts of the face. In such contexts, the 'Emirati' face mask is the one that makes the wearer 'Emirati', and not vice-versa. This is why Miller argues "objects make people" (2010, 53)—in this presentation, "[t]he clothes were not superficial, they actually were what made us what we think we are" (ibid., 13). This use of the 'Emirati' face mask ultimately characterises its politically embodied symbolic meaning, and this delineates the invented past.

Moreover, the cultural authorities also impose the idea of the face mask being a symbol of Emirati heritage by providing visitors, especially foreign ones, with a more direct form of heritage experience. This is done, for example, in places such as Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding in Dubai and at events such as the International Book Fair in Sao Paulo (Brazil) and Paris (France) where the government of Sharjah was invited to present Emirati and Arab cultures (Gulf News, August 27, 2018).

Masked Emirati women dressed the visitors in Emirati traditional attire and masks and explained how these garments were closely connected to their lifestyles and cultures (Khaleej Times, March 20, 2018; Manami Goto, field notes) (Figs 8.38, 8.39). In addition,

cultural events for children were held as part of the 47th National Day celebrations in Kings' School Nad Al Sheba in Dubai. These included a handicraft workshop organised by the Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council[94], where the participating children were invited to make keychains with motifs for an Emirati man and woman. They were provided with boxes of materials from which to construct their own motifs. The boxes given to girls contained a face mask, a black veil, and materials representing the eyes and mouth. This activity therefore emphasised the face mask as a cultural norm for traditional Emirati women (Fig. 8.40). Through such tactile experiences, the visitors are imbued with the state-authorised imagined past, reinforcing the idea of 'local' heritage.

(Fig. 8.38) A visitor trying on traditional Emirati attire and face mask at the Sharjah stall during the Paris Book Fair in March 2018 (Khaleeji Times, March 20, 2018).

[94] The Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council was established under the patronage of Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, the wife of the ruler of Sharjah. Official website is: https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/organisations/irthi/.

(Fig. 8.39) Left: A visitor in traditional Emirati attire and face mask in the Sharjah pavilion during the Sao Paulo International Book Fair in August 2018 (@ummazzan, August 14, 2018).
(Fig. 8.40) Right: A keychain with a motif of a traditional Emirati woman that was crafted by a child (@irthicouncil, November 29, 2018).

Heritage construction and preservation through the use of the face mask does not only take place in these cultural institutions and events, but also occurs in everyday life. For example, a masked woman is used as a symbolic sign for the female reception room at Oasis Hospital in Al Ain. This image also appears in a painted motif that is part of a 600-metre long mural art that can be viewed at Al Raha Beach Club in Abu Dhabi (Figs. 8.41, 8.43). Special stamps issued in 2004 that featured the traditional fashion of Emirati women also used an image of a masked woman (Fig. 8.42). In TV dramas and cultural programmes, the face mask is worn to portray either Emirati women in the pre-oil period or contemporary elderly Emirati women (Fig. 8.44). One weekly cooking programme on the state media channel, Dubai Media, features masked Emirati women demonstrating and introducing traditional Emirati cuisines, and this clearly links the face mask with state-imposed cultural heritage (Fig. 8.45).

Furthermore, in 2006, Freej, UAE's first animated TV series, was launched on national television, and it portrayed the everyday lives of four masked Emirati women in modern-day Dubai (Freej 2018) (Fig. 8.46). In January 2019, this animation was translated into Japanese and began airing on Japanese TV as the first Arab-produced animation (Newbould 2018). At the same time, these animation characters of masked women are also used in the flydubai safety video, adding local cultural aspects to the government-owned airline promotion. Consequently, the face mask plays a significant role as a cultural symbol at both the domestic and international level, helping to inform dispersed audiences about Emirati national heritage and identity.

(Fig. 8.41) Left: An illustration of a masked woman that was used as a sign in a female reception at the Oasis Hospital in Al Ain. Photo provided by an interview respondent in March 2018.
(Fig. 8.42) Right: An image of a masked woman used for a stamp design. Photo taken at the Umm al-Quwain Museum. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.43) The 600-metre long mural, including paintings of masked women, located in Abu Dhabi (Fitter 2016).

(Fig. 8.44) A drama broadcast on Emirati TV, depicting an old woman with a face mask. Photo taken in my respondent’s house in March 2018. (Image: Manami Goto)

(Fig. 8.45) Umm Hasan, a masked woman, demonstrating her cooking in a studio imitating a traditional kitchen as part of a cooking TV series on Dubai Media (Awaan Ṭabakh 2015).

(Fig. 8.46) Four masked female characters from Freej, the Emirati animation (The National, June 15, 2015).

Schools are also considered to be an important platform for cultivating Emirati national identity and a sense of cultural belonging, and this is reflected by the Ministry of Education's vision and school curriculums, as indicated by the inclusion of subjects related to the UAE's customs and traditions (Godwin 2006 10; Ministry of Education

2017). Some of my respondents were actually invited to their communities' public schools to demonstrate mask making or exhibit the traditional attire of the UAE by using wooden dolls dressed in the traditional robe and mask. One respondent (91), who worked as a primary school teacher in Ajman, also said that some English textbooks use examples related to Emirati society, and said she saw a sentence referring to the face mask ("My mother always wears her *burqu'* [face mask]"). Although younger generations might not have opportunities to personally experience masking customs, the face mask and its associated tradition are introduced and repeatedly promoted in classrooms as a symbol of the UAE's national identity and heritage.

These examples show how the state's cultural authorities have strategically used the face mask and masking custom as Emirati cultural heritage to construct national identity and history, and disseminate its narrative both inside and outside the UAE. However, these heritage practices mobilise masking customs selectively, drawing on certain aspects or values of masking while downplaying others, upon the basis of the state's narratives. For example, the transnational aspect of the custom—specifically that women on both sides of the Persian Gulf have historically practised masking—is often disregarded in the state narrative. The diverse meanings and functions of the mask, especially the religious function, are also excluded or even strongly denied. Instead, the state advocates a particular type of face mask, (which consists of a wider frame, covering the eye-brows, lips, and a large part of the cheeks), asserting it as the traditional 'Emirati' face mask while emphasising masking as a means of preserving modesty.

This government-promoted narrative of the 'Emirati' face mask has been solidified and successfully shared among nationals as a symbol of national identity and heritage. This has, at the same time, created sensitivities around the representation of the 'appropriate'

Emirati face mask. In recent years, a contemporary version of the face mask—the *burqu' bushanab* (the moustache-style face mask) which consists of a narrower frame and does not conceal the face like 'traditional' ones—has become popular. This is worn by both middle-aged women, who adorned the mask on marrying, and younger generations, who wear it for special occasions. However, this contemporary face mask has been criticised by local people, and particularly by men. Their main argument is that this mask does not fulfil the authentic purpose of the Emirati mask, which is to cover the face and therefore provide modesty. Thus, the contemporary face mask does not represent an 'appropriate' image of Emirati women and their identity, and this is also causing issues of belonging. The following section therefore investigates perceptions of the 'Emirati' face mask by engaging with online discussions that relate to the contemporary face mask.

8.2.2 Public Attitudes towards the Face Mask: Online Discussion of the 'Appropriate' Emirati Face Mask

As social media has become an increasingly popular tool of everyday communication (Wally and Koshy 2014, 7; Marzouki 2018, 67), it has also become an important part of the UAE's heritage construction and promotion. While the cultural authorities, such as the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, the Sharjah Department of Culture and Information, Sharjah Institute for Heritage, and Abu Dhabi Culture, have utilised their official accounts to advertise their events or share information and knowledge about Emirati cultural traditions, many individual Emiratis have also created accounts with the intention of posting historical and cultural images of the UAE (el-Aswad 2014, 150; AlMutawa 2016, 5). Instagram is one of the most commonly used social media that is mainly used to share pictures, but also enables users to comment and interact with each other (Marzouki 2018,

73). A survey that was conducted by the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority of the UAE in 2017 reported that 78 percent of the UAE's national population used Instagram (Khaleej Times 2017). In contrast to the state cultural institutions such as museums, where objects and their associated meanings are controlled and re-framed upon the basis of the state's authorised heritage discourse, this social media platform provides space for individuals to express and present their own interpretations and constructions of Emirati heritage.

While many of the cultural imaginaries that individuals depict as symbols and representations of Emirati heritage align with what the government promotes, these contributors also tend to include both historical imaginaries such as photographs of people and objects of the pre-oil periods, including these in addition to contemporary representations of cultural traditions. Even in this social media platform, the face mask is one of the most illustrated symbols, and is viewed as representing Emirati heritage (Figs. 8.47, 8.48); however, today there is a debate over the 'appropriate' representation of the Emirati face mask. This is exemplified by negative comments directed towards images of a contemporary version of the face mask—the *burqu' bushanab*, which consists of a narrower frame and reveals large parts of the face. This controversy was first mentioned to me by Dr. Reem El Mutwalli (166), who has extensively published books and articles about Emirati dress in local magazines and also has 279,000 followers on her Instagram account, from which she shares images and her knowledge of different types of Emirati dress, jewellery, and ornaments on a daily basis.

(Fig. 8.47) Left: Abu Dhabi Culture's post celebrating Mother's Day, using an image of a masked Emirati woman (@abudhabiculture, March 21, 2018).
(Fig. 8.48) Right: A photograph of a masked woman used as an event advertisement that was posted on the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority's account (@dubaiculture, March 3, 2018).

In my interview with El Mutwalli, she said that she usually received many positive comments and additional information on her posted images of Emirati traditional dress and other objects; however, when she posted an image of an Emirati woman, Umm Saʿīd, who appeared with her contemporary Emirati face mask, the post received many negative comments (Fig. 8.49). She said:

> "The reactions of people especially men were surprising. People were angry, accusing her [Umm Saʿīd] not representing *proper* or *real* Emirati cultural heritage. When I posted old pictures of women wearing bigger face masks, nobody said anything. Or even [when posting] women without veiling! But when it comes to current Emirati women trying to preserve her national, traditional dress, and culture and if it is not what they believe as a *proper* Emirati representation of culture, they would go against them" (emphasis added).

Although El Mutwalli told me that she responded to those negative comments by suggesting that every person is free to choose what he/she wants to wear, and reminded contributors that we all need to respect personal decisions, she continued to receive negative comments about the ‘inappropriate’ representation of the Emirati face mask.

(Fig. 8.49) A picture of a woman with the contemporary Emirati face mask that was posted on El Mutwalli’s Instagram account (@sultanibookuae, July 30, 2017).

It is not only this particular image that gave rise to criticisms, but there were often negative comments under images portraying the contemporary Emirati face mask. I therefore observed comments provided in response to three images (El Mutwalli 2017a; 2017b; Umm Saʿīd, 2017) that portrayed the contemporary Emirati face mask and identified issues expressed by contributors (Figs. 8.49, 8.50, 8.51). Despite the fact that many did not use their real names, it was clear from the contexts of their comments and information indicated on their personal pages that they were Emiratis, and included both men and women.

(Fig. 8.50) Another photograph of a woman with the contemporary mask that was posted on El Mutwalli's Instagram account (@sultanibookuae, September 16, 2017).

(Fig. 8.51) A 'selfie' taken by Umm Saʿīd who wears the contemporary Emirati face mask, which was posted on her Instagram account (@um_saeed176, December 17, 2017).

Based on my observations, the criticisms of these images of the contemporary face mask could be broadly categorised into three themes (although they sometimes implied more than one). These were: issues concerning the function of the mask; its relationship with Emirati heritage; and the wearer as a representor of Emirati heritage. Firstly, the

comments that criticised the design of the contemporary face mask often raised the issue that the mask fails to fulfil its 'authentic' purpose, which is to hide the wearer's face and therefore ensure modesty. These criticisms took the following forms:

> "The central [purpose] of [wearing] the face mask is concealing the woman's face and not showing [her] eyebrows or lips" (@mozah 72536o); "Seriously, this face mask is neither concealing [the face] nor leading to modesty. If they don't wear it for modesty, then it is better that they don't wear it at all" (@isvs_511); and "The face mask which our mothers wore was for modesty and not for embellishment. This face mask which you wear is better to be thrown away" (@dubai_jory).

These comments mainly illustrated that people perceived the face mask to be a 'fixed' object of the past with a specific design and function rather than a 'traditional' object that can develop and be modified according to social changes and the wearers' preferences. These perspectives are exactly what the state has conveyed and promoted through forms of heritage preservation used to enhance feelings of national belonging. In fact, some comments directly referenced the idea that the face mask is a symbol of national heritage.

The contemporary face mask was also frequently criticised on the grounds that it is an 'inappropriate' representation of Emirati heritage. One wrote: "May God guide the one who wears this type of a face mask and conceal them [their faces]. This [face mask] should be called a mask not the Emirati or *Khalīji* [Gulf] face mask" (@baby_face). Another comment reacted strongly to the proposition that the contemporary face mask was identifiably indebted to the Al Ain style. It said:

> "This [face mask] does not originate in the city of Al Ain. This is a distorted image of the face mask. It is worn by some women who don't want to wear the

[traditional] face mask or think it [the traditional one] does not suit them or makes their appearance ugly. This [contemporary face mask] doesn't belong to the Emirati society where the purpose of [wearing] the face mask is identified for modesty and showing the women's beauty in a modest way" (@Saifaalhemeiri).

Others also expressed negative sentiments, they included:

> "What is this face mask. Basically, in the past, the face mask was not like this. This narrow [framed] face mask does not represent our heritage [*turāthnā*]. We should pass on our heritage of the face mask which our mothers wore to our children, and not [allow the Umm Saʿīd's version to take over]" (@loly_8_8) and "This face mask is not the authentic one and is not the one which our mothers and grandmothers wore" (@wasst_44).

These comments reflect how contributors came to see the face mask as a symbol of Emirati heritage. In this form, it conveyed national identity and pride, and was no longer simply an object that was part of women's daily attire in the pre-oil period. This constructed, newly-invented idea of 'Emiratiness', which the face mask primarily embodies in the state narrative, even leads to the idea of belonging, as other comments further demonstrated.

Some negative comments on images of women wearing the contemporary Emirati face mask raised issues for the wearers. For example, Umm Saʿīd, who holds an Emirati passport and is one of the Emirati influencers on social media with over 85,800 followers, wears the contemporary mask on a daily basis and attends various TV shows and cultural events both inside and outside the UAE to present Emirati cultures and traditions (@um_saeed176, September 29, 2018). While some people criticised her mask for not

being ‘traditional’ or ‘authentic’ in its representation of Emirati heritage, others instead suggested her personal ‘background’ was a reason for her wearing this ‘inappropriate’ face mask. These comments included the following: “Neither the indigenous Emirati woman [*al-marāʾ al-imārātīya al-aṣlīya*] [nor] the girl of this country wears such a face mask” (@shamsiia55); “Umm Saʿīd is not from the country [the UAE]” (@n6_007); and “Umm Saʿīd is from the Arab Republic of Egypt” (@alia3040).

In accusing her of being ‘non-Emirati’ and therefore overlooking her Emirati passport, these comments attempt to explain this ‘error’ on the grounds that the wearer is ‘foreign’ and, by virtue of this fact, lacks knowledge of the ‘authentic’ meaning of the masking custom. These attitudes do not only invoke a public discourse on an ideal image of an ‘Emirati’ woman, which is associated with the ‘appropriate’ representation of Emirati face mask; to the same extent, they also raise the issue of belonging by reaffirming ‘indigenous’ Emiratis as “the rightful ‘owners’” (Koch 2015, 531) of Emirati heritage.

These three variations of negative comments about the contemporary Emirati face mask make it clear that there is a sensitivity around the representation of the face mask that arises from a current public recognition of the mask being a symbol of national heritage and identity. Yet, again these perspectives are formed by the state narrative, which gives rise to the impression that the face mask has a fixed design and monolithic function. Nevertheless, these state and public narratives of the Emirati face mask do not take into account the perspectives of women who are the main agents despite their intimate relationships with the face mask. The next part of the discussion therefore investigates multiple forms of the masking custom that Emirati women currently employ to convey their personal views and identities.

8.2.3 Individual Women's Practices of Preserving the Face-Mask Tradition

As the previous section (8.2.1) illustrated, the state has controlled and re-invented the masking custom and has constructed the idea of the 'Emirati' face mask in order to enhance feelings of national belonging and convey knowledge about the state-defined past. In one respect, this state narrative of the face mask has limited women's freedom to practise their masking custom by enforcing a certain idea about the 'appropriate' mask; conversely, however, it has also encouraged younger generations to appreciate and preserve the custom as part of their 'Emirati' identity and heritage. Yet, in both cases, women have continued to build their own relationships with the face mask and contribute to the current heritage production. For example, despite the negative attitudes taken by some towards the contemporary Emirati face mask, some Emirati women have made a conscious decision, upon the basis of various reasons, to wear it as an everyday practice.

Salama (88), a 53-year-old woman from Ajman, adopted a mask upon her marriage, and she currently wears the contemporary face mask both inside and outside the house. In my interview she said that some people, including her husband and neighbours, criticised her for wearing such a revealing type of the mask, and her husband even suggested that she instead remove it. The attitude of Salama's husband's (93) and El Mutwalli's experience (Chapter 8.2.2) reveal that the Emirati women's act of unmasking is not what people are concerned about; the issue is instead the modification or 'modernisation' of the traditional face mask, which changes the 'authentic' meaning and function of the mask. This is because changing the 'tradition' is perceived as a loss of identity. Moreover, in their views, the contemporary face mask, which fails to fulfil its purpose of 'concealing', does not play any role, and they therefore do not see the need for the wearer to have a mask.

Yet, for Salama, the contemporary face mask does play an important role as the purpose

of her masking is not to conceal her face for modesty; rather it is instead a way of expressing her sense of belonging and self-confidence. According to Salama, it was traditionally the case that older women were expected to conceal wider parts of the face by adopting a large-framed mask in order to hide ageing signs. By wearing a narrow-framed face mask that indicates the wearer's young age, Salama attempts to resist the aging process. In her words, "Wearing the contemporary mask makes me feel younger. And it is my public statement that I am not old yet!" By wearing the contemporary face mask, Salama aims to showcase her Emirati identity and to express her self-confidence, giving the appearance of being beautiful and youthful despite her age.

Luluwa (127), another Emirati woman in her late 30s from Al Ain, also wears the contemporary face mask on a daily basis. When I was invited to her house for an interview, she appeared with her contemporary mask and explained that she always keeps her mask on even inside her house as her extended families live in the same compound. Although she wears the contemporary mask when going to the neighbourhood, she wears a black face veil when visiting a traditional market (*sūq*), as this helps her to avoid people's gaze. Unlike the husband of Salama, Luluwa's husband prefers to see her with the contemporary mask because he believes it beautifies her face, she said. Yet, she was also aware that some hold negative views towards the contemporary mask, and therefore rejected her reasoning that it is a means of beautification. She said, "I know my *burquʿ* is not the authentic one. And I know some people criticise it. But I am wearing it to beautify myself and I choose to wear this one." In a similar manner to Salama, Luluwa takes the view that masking provides a sense of belonging as Emirati while also preserving this vanishing tradition. However, from her perspective, it also provides a way of fashioning herself and pleasing her husband.

It is important to note that Salama and Luluwa are both Emirati and know the historical and social contexts of the face mask; however, they chose to wear the contemporary face mask for their own reasons. Although both referred to a sense of belonging (i.e. being Emirati) as their motivation for continuing to mask, their method of preserving the custom does not simply entail following the practice of the pre-oil period. For them, the face mask is not a fixed object, but is instead a traditional tool of expressing identities and fashioning the individual wearer. Nevertheless, adopting the contemporary face mask does not make them less Emirati. Hessa (130), an Emirati face-mask seamstress, said in an interview with me that "the face mask changes," which confirms that the face mask is still a living tradition which continues to evolve. Therefore, imposing the idea of 'appropriation' on the face mask does not only prevent its living tradition from being practised or passed down, but also limits its evolving nature, a feature that reflects and represents the values and attitudes of Emirati women.

Meanwhile, Emirati women who are not accustomed to masking have also taken part in preserving and reviving the face mask in order to promote Emirati identity and heritage. For example, Abeer Mohammed (142), an Emirati Canadian born in Abu Dhabi and raised between Abu Dhabi and Canada, is a contemporary face mask designer. Through her work, she aims to salvage the face mask from extinction in order to benefit her culture and correct the misconception that the mask is an Islamic fashion or symbol of oppression. In her opinion, the face mask represents a traditional fashion of the Gulf region, particularly the UAE. However, at the beginning her uniquely-designed face masks were viewed as an 'insult' despite her intention being the exact opposite. During our personal conversations, she recalled how people's attitudes towards her work gradually changed. She said:

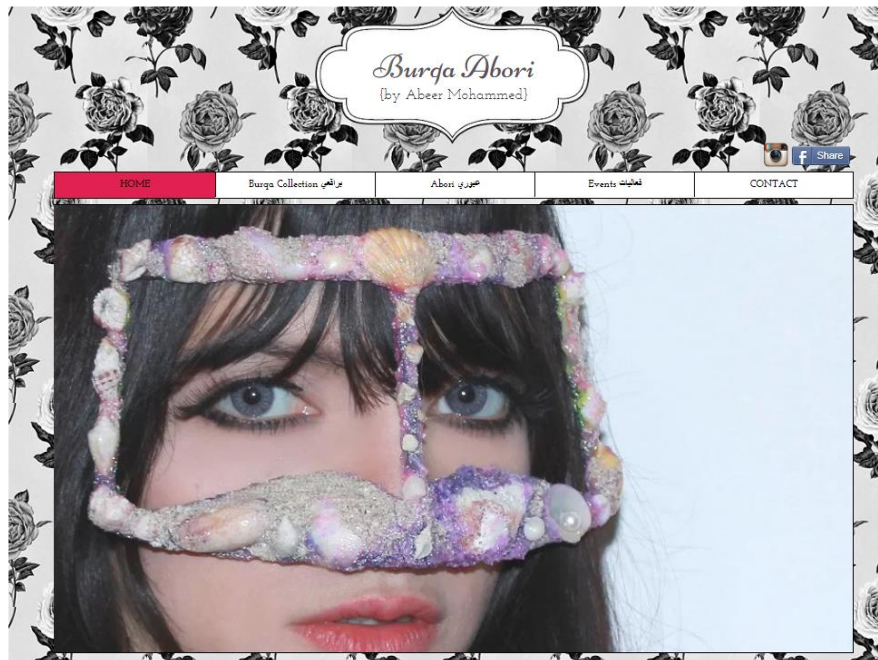
> ‘Back in 2010 when I started wearing my burqa [face mask] designs to fashion events, I was laughed at by most people. However, when I launched my brand in 2011, I received mixed responses. On one hand, I was harshly criticized not only by people from [the] UAE, but people from the [G]ulf. They were angry because I was “playing” with the culture. And they were afraid I'd “ruin” the elderly women by making them want to wear my modern burqa [face mask] designs. On the other hand, I was celebrated and applauded for trying to revive the burqa [face mask] from extinction, as back in 2010, only few elderly women continued wearing it. Young women saw the burqa [face mask] as outdated and “grandma-style” and you wouldn't see a single young woman wearing it. The burqa [face mask] was associated with elderly women and was not fashionable.’

Unlike the UAE government, Abeer’s approach to preserving the masking custom did not seek to reproduce the ‘traditional’ face mask and revive it as the ‘past’ tradition; on the contrary, she sought to re-invent masking custom as a form of fashion that would enable young women to wear a mask in modern society. She said:

> “I knew that by making the burqa [face mask] fashionable, and by presenting a new way of wearing it (my way of wearing the burqa reveals the lips and eyebrows, the traditional way of wearing the burqa covers the lips and eyebrows) that I will make the burqa appealing and attractive for younger women and young girls as well, and therefore I'd be able to revive this iconic piece from extinction. And, I was right.”

By intentionally modifying the design and introducing a new way of wearing the mask, her masks were recognised as an iconic fashion item of Emirati culture by both domestic and international fashion industries. Her work also became popular amongst women of

the Gulf, and the UAE in particular, and many began to purchase her designed masks, despite the fact that they cost more than traditional versions (her masks sell online for between 300 and 700 UAE dirhams, which is equivalents to between 60 and 140 British Pounds) (Fig. 8.52). However, she emphasised that her intention in designing and introducing fashionable masks was that they would be worn at celebrations and personal events with the purpose of matching the fashionable dresses being worn at these largely women only events. She did not intend these highly stylised masks to be worn in open public or as a way of attracting men's gaze, although she had been criticised for this by some.



(Fig. 8.52) A photograph of Abeer Mohammed with her designed face mask that features on her business Homepage (Burqa Abori 2019).[95]

Another Emirati woman, Maitha Al Khayat (141), is one of the most well-known children's book authors and illustrators in the UAE. Although she spent most of her

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[9595] https://www.burqaabori.com/

childhood in the UK and the US, masking custom had a great impact on her personal identity and work, as she clarified during personal conversations with me. She said:

> "As a child being brought up in the west, I found it [the face mask] very fascinating when I saw my grandmother wearing it every time we visited her in the UAE during the summer. To me it looked like a crown and gave her authority as if she was a legendary chieftess. That image still stayed in my mind till I grew up, maybe that's why I chose to cover my face."

Maitha covers her face with a black face veil not the mask, and this is mainly for a practical reason. However, she views the mask as a representation of the Emirati culture and tradition, and it is often depicted in her books (Fig. 8.53). She gave me one example:

> 'In my second book, "Grandma Moody in Venice" was about a traditional Emirati grandmother whose hobby is crafting traditional Borgas [face mask] and decides to take her grandchildren to Venice to enjoy Italian culture. She gets lost in a Mardi Gras party and wins in a mask competition which in the end teaches an Italian salesman how to make an Emirati Borga [face mask]…. To sum up [,] my stories do not preach or lecture about the attire, the stories completely have other motives yet presenting our culture in the context to engage more local children to books and promote reading which is a struggle with the new gadgets that are repacing [*sic*] books for entertainment.'

While framing the face mask as a representation of Emirati identity, Maitha also conveys her pride in masking custom by providing illustrations that depict the masked woman as being strong and openminded and rewarded for her mask-making skills. By delivering the story in a global context, she aims to revive the custom in the context of contemporary

society and teach children about this vanishing custom as a means of preservation.

(Fig. 8.53) Maitha giving a reading of *Grandma Moody in Venice* to children (@maithaalkhayat, December 19, 2018).

In a similar manner to Maitha, Fatma Lootah (143) also expresses her intimate relationships with masking custom, although in her case this is done through arts. Fatima is an Emirati artist whose paintings have greatly contributed to presenting Emirati cultures and heritage both inside and outside the country. In her work, an image of a masked woman is often portrayed to express her Emirati identity and heritage, and her iconic paintings of masked women have been displayed in Dubai's Sultan Bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Foundation and on the facade of Nasdaq Tower in New York's Times Square (Fig. 8.54).

In our personal conversations, she discussed her reason for drawing masked women. She

said:

> "The beauty that can't been [*sic*] seen but reflected under a copper colour mask which reflects the golden desert sun. Eyes that shows the depth of our mother's souls. A concentration of beauty of a land where women had and has words of wisdom that must be heard... for me... it is a must memory... that colour [*sic*] our heart and keep [*sic*] it warm."

Although she does not wear the mask, her memory of seeing her masked mother built her relationships with the custom and also inspired many of her artworks. Some of her paintings include a young woman with the contemporary face mask—in this manner, Fatma documents both 'past' and 'present' Emirati heritage.

(Fig. 8.54) Fatma Lootah's artwork displayed in New York's Times Square (@fatmalootah, July 25, 2018).

These examples illustrate unofficial or bottom-up heritage practices of the face mask, with Emirati women articulating their individual perspectives and interpretations as forms

of belonging. Contrary to the state narrative and public perceptions, which orientate towards a particular symbolic meaning and monolithic function of the face mask, the mask continues to be modified, fashioned, and utilised by individual women who often seek to keep the custom alive and remembered. Though these practices are performed in a more flexible and personalised way, it should be noted that the association of national identity and heritage with the mask is in fact an invention that is embedded by the state. Thus, despite its varied perceptions, the mask is currently closely connected with the narrative of Emirati identity, and this is enhancing individuals' belief that they belong to this 'imagined community'.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the impact of the state attitudes on the use of the face mask was demonstrated by individually examining the cases of Qeshm Island (Iran) and the UAE. The modernisation and development of both societies has resulted in the two states either legally restricting or socially discouraging the use of the face mask as daily attire, and this has led to the masking custom becoming unpopular among women in both communities. However, the states became aware of the fact that they can utilise the face-mask tradition to achieve specific political and economic agendas, they began to acknowledge its importance and preserve it in a form of heritage in different ways. For example, while Iran's state leadership continues to strongly disapprove of face coverings at the state level, it has nonetheless upheld the mask at the regional level. It has therefore defined the face mask as a traditional costume of Hormozgan Province that is associated with 'provincial' or 'local' identity and heritage.

Most notably in the case of Qeshm Island, the state has promoted the face mask as one of

the island's unique local traditions with the intention of attracting more tourists and therefore gaining economic benefits. In the UAE, the state has instead used the mask to construct a unified identity and cultivate a sense of belonging amongst its citizens. In this process, the face mask has been reinvented as the 'Emirati' face mask, embodying the distinctive cultural and historical past of the "imagined community" (Anderson 2006, 24).

These state narratives of the face mask have further shaped the current perspectives of women as well as communities towards the mask and have also impacted their engagement with its tradition. Today middle-aged or elder Qeshmi women continue to practise masking as part of their custom, and many younger generations who do not mask also help to preserve this tradition: for example, by crafting products that use designs of face masks and then selling them to tourists. However, many of these women were often motivated by the economic benefit of the tradition, having often been alerted to this by international organisations.

In recent years, Qeshmi people have increasingly become aware of the need to preserve local identity, resulting in them creatively engaging with the face mask. Similarly, many Emirati women, both old and young, actively engage in preserving the face-mask tradition in order to contribute to 'Emirati' identity and heritage preservation. Yet, the associated meanings and functions that individual women attempt to employ through the face mask are often different from those of the official state discourse, which instead seeks to valorise a specific form of mask as being authentically Emirati. In addition, as the online comments attest, it is important to acknowledge a gender dimension, specifically that men, in comparison with women, tend to be more closely aligned with the state narrative. This is a particularly important observation because it has a clear implication for the 'authentic' or 'correct' image of Emirati women. However, this is a relatively limited observation

and therefore requires further investigation.

In this chapter, a comparative study of Qeshm Island and the UAE illustrated how the perceptions towards the face mask have developed differently in each society. However, here it should be acknowledged that these two societies are closely connected, and their cultural practices and values are often exchanged and shared. Perhaps the clearest and most striking example in this regard is the fact that the UAE's contemporary face mask has become a fashion and highly valued item on Qeshm Island. This can in turn raise questions about the 'authentic' representation and function of the face mask and specifically its relation to socio-cultural identities amongst Qeshmis, and men in particular. It is ultimately important to take into account the influence that neighbouring states and societies may possibly have on the narratives and use of the face mask in the local community. Overall, this chapter provides important insight into the politicisation of the face-mask tradition and its impact on communities and women. It also highlights the significant role that the face mask plays in identity formation and heritage construction, while providing insight into the top-down and bottom-up aspects of both processes on Qeshmi Island and in the UAE.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

In July 2018, after returning from my final fieldwork session in the UAE, I curated an exhibition entitled "Masked Faces: Untold Stories of the Arabian-Persian Gulf" in the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter. In the exhibition, I showcased material collected from my fieldwork, which included various face masks, tools, artefacts with representations of face masks, and photographs of masked women that had captions alongside explaining different aspects of the tradition. The exhibition was advertised within and outside the university.

A few days after the opening, I received an email from a Saudi student who was also doing her PhD in a different department at the University of Exeter. In it she said:

> "It is a wonderful and very interesting subject and exhibition about Nekab [*niqāb*] or Burqa [*burquʿ*]. that [*sic*] as I am Arabic [*sic*] and Muslim women [*sic*] [and] I am proud of it [the face covering tradition]. However, it [the face covering] reflects mainly Arabic [*sic*] and Islamic culture and there is no Parisian [*sic*: Persian] strong connection so no need to push the Parisian [*sic*] name on it [*sic*], even if they [Persians] tried to mix the facts. The Parisian [*sic*] involve in Arabic culture when they become [*sic*] Muslims, but when they tried to change the history and the name of ARABIC [*sic*] GULF and the rights, it is time to speak load [*sic*]…."

Although this email was sent before her visit to my exhibition as a response to the advertising flyer, the student's ethnocentric views illustrate many of the points made in this thesis when reporting the thinking of respondents and some researchers. These include reported generalisations about all types of face coverings; a somewhat limited

perception of various aspects of the face mask, which means this subject is often discussed within the contexts of religion and politics; ethno-sectarian issues between the Gulf Arab states and Iran; and a lack of awareness of the transnational aspects of material culture in the Gulf.

Through an exploration of ethnographic data collected on both sides of the Persian Gulf, with a specific focus on Qeshm Island and the UAE, this thesis has aimed to deconstruct and challenge assumptions and popular narratives that tend to underestimate the significance of the face-mask tradition and the intimate and continuous relationships between women and the face mask. It has analysed, through investigating the symbolic meanings and functions of the mask, women's agencies in relation to the act of (un)masking, and the impact of the national narratives of the face-mask tradition on the making practice amongst women. This research did not simply examine and document varied styles and functions of the mask, but also illustrated the social realities of women's lives by employing the face-mask tradition as a medium of investigation.

Chapter Four provided the collective oral histories of the origins and diffusion of the face-mask tradition. This oral history suggests that the face mask emerged as a form of protection against Portuguese soldiers in the early sixteenth century and has spread from southern Iran to the eastern Arabian Peninsula and East Africa through people's interactions, migrations, and intermarriages. My fieldwork data combined with the previous studies on the mask offered further first-hand, large-scale information on the current practice of masking on both sides of the Persian Gulf. Four different types of face masks identified in this thesis represent certain attributes such as geographical location, ethnicity, and class, and their distributions across the Persian Gulf and the Western Indian Ocean, attesting to the maritime historical connections between specific communities in

the region.

While Chapter Four presented an overall picture of the mask tradition, Chapter Five identified materials and tools used to produce face masks and investigated the historical changes in the raw materials, production methods, and mask makers. It revealed that specific materials are often adopted and preferred in relation to the local beliefs and socio-economic situations. For example, the golden/indigo fabric, which was used to produce masks, was also utilised for cosmetic or medication purposes, and the wooden/plastic sticks inserted to constitute the structure of a mask are selected depending on the availability and fashion trend of the time. Moreover, individually hand-sewn masks not only represent the maker's qualified skills and artistic capability, but also constitute relationships between the maker and her families and embody their living memories and sentiment. Following social and economic developments that began in the mid-twentieth century, some shifts in masking have taken place—for example, the transformation from hand-made to machine-made, and from local female seamstresses to foreign tailors. However, it is still the case that personal stories and experiences associated with the production continue to be part of collective memories within families and societies and become intangible heritage.

Visual indicators of the mask such as style, colour, material, size, and adornment also embody specific social meanings within an individual community, and women purposely select these elements to design their own masks in order to transmit their personal information and views. Thus, Chapter Six investigated symbolic meanings and diverse functions of the mask that are broadly divided into six dimensions: social, religious, physical, cultural, political, and economic. The chapter demonstrated how, for some women, the face mask has become an extended part of their bodies and is no longer

perceived as just a piece of attire or adornment. The face mask also has a unique attribute in that it conveys apparently 'contradictory' effects simultaneously: concealment and beautification, unification and individualisation. These associated meanings and expected functions of the mask differ depending on social context and have changed over time. While the population of masked women has decreased in the last few decades, the mask continues to act as a medium of the expression of individual identities, an aesthetic sense, and a reflection of the social, political, and economic circumstances of the wearer.

Masking, which traditionally signified women's marriageable status in the communities of Qeshm Island and the UAE, has also become a method of communication. Chapter Seven, which focused on women's agency around the act of (un)masking, illustrated that women convey their social politeness and personal expression through the act of (un)masking. For example, choosing to mask in front of other women indicates the wearer's self-consciousness and emotional distance, while unmasking during sexual intercourse was one tactic used to please and entice husbands. Yet, observation on the decline of masking revealed that the changes in society (both socio-political and economic) and actors (especially male family members) have often influenced women's decisions concerning (un)masking. Nevertheless, unlike the general perceptions of masked women being oppressed or lacking individual agency, the results showed that these women have practised their complex and nuanced form of agency to negotiate, bargain, and enforce their influence over husbands, family and society through the act of (un)masking.

Although the face mask offers numerous nuanced interpretations, as Chapter Eight examined, there is an official level of control as well. The states of Iran and the UAE have controlled its practice and re-framed or re-invented its representation according to their

political agendas. This politicisation of the face-mask tradition has not only contributed to erasing its significant role in the collective socio-cultural history of women in the Gulf but has also limited the mask's use in present-day society. Yet, despite nationalist narratives that assert the face mask as a symbol of the 'past' or the 'heritage' of a particular group, it is still a living tradition that continues to act as an instrument of cultural expression that, in various forms, fulfils the needs and expectations of women and society.

In undertaking a close investigation of associated meanings and functions, agency and the representation of the face mask in national narratives, this thesis has revealed that the mask is not a simple material object but is instead a symbol of social reference and a reflection of women's individual and formative identities, as well as their aesthetic values. Furthermore, the comparative approach has further extended our knowledge about the face-mask tradition in the Gulf region and has made several contributions to the current literature.

Firstly, comparing the diverse roles and meanings of the face mask between the case studies of Qeshm Island and the UAE illustrated that, on the one hand, they share a number of similarities in its functions and attributes: for example, in both societies, the adoption of a mask indicates the marriageable or married status of the wearer, and the older a woman gets, the bigger her face mask becomes. On the other hand, some of the features are deeply associated with each specific social context: for example, on Qeshm Island, each village identity has long been represented through a particular style of the mask while in the UAE a particular style embodying national or local identity of a particular emirate, has been newly re-framed or re-invented to represent the state-defined political unit. In addition, in contrast to Qeshmi women who tend to associate masking as

part of religious practice, Emirati women perceive it as part of their cultural tradition and often deny its relationship to Islam.

Secondly, the findings indicated that the decline of the face-mask tradition in the region was substantially caused by girls' enrolment in modern school education where the school uniform is imposed and the use of the mask is forbidden. At the same time, people's perceptions of the mask have often been constructed by the states: in other words, the mask is utilised as a political tool to formulate and enforce an ideal image of women in each country, and to construct both collective and distinctive identities.

Thirdly, a comparative study between Qeshm Island and the UAE portrayed the impact of the historical cross-national connectivity across the Persian Gulf on the mask tradition. For example, family interactions and visits to the UAE have influenced some Qeshmi women's decisions over unmasking, and today the machined-made face masks imported from Dubai have become a popular fashion icon in Qeshmi society and are more valued than the local hand-made masks. As cross-national connectivity of the tradition has not been studied in the literature, the results of the comparative study reconnect the mask tradition and women's lives to the surrounding socio-political settings.

In focusing on and articulating the viewpoints of women who have experienced masking, this thesis also provides new insights into the marginalised social history of women in the Gulf and contributes to broader discussions about Muslim women's veiling practices. This is primarily achieved by rendering material cultural perspectives through a rigorous ethnographic report of the women's own voices. This research has documented the data at a moment when profound change is occurring with many aspects of the mask, and at the same time, as a different and more varied cultural past is still being remembered.

However, despite the ethnographic data that I collected through my fieldwork in the Gulf: interview data of more than 280 individual women and the collections of over 300 masks, the data has not yet been fully explored in this thesis. That is to say, other aspects, such as the transnational dynamics and circulations of the mask tradition, the mechanisation of the production, and the relations with fashion, need further investigation, which also contributes to preserving this vanishing tradition. In addition, expanding the research to a wider area by including East Africa and India, where the mask tradition had been practised or its materials have been produced, would offer more in-depth knowledge and help us to establish a great degree of accuracy on the tradition and the socio-historical connectivity of material culture in the Indian Ocean.

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Fieldwork Locations in Iran

Please see the locations of the places below in the map (Fig. 4.2).

Asaloyeh	Bochir	Kolahi
Baghestan	Chabahr	Larak Island
Bahl	Chahu	Lirdaf
Banak	Chelogāvmishi	Milani Guli
Bandae Lengeh	Chiruyeh	Minab
Bandar Abbas	Darake	Mishi
Bandar Bushehr	Dayyer	Moghdan
Bandar Hameyran	Dingomaro	Mohammed Abad Yekdar
Bandar Jask	Dorahak	Nakh Taghi
Bandar Khamir	Gachin Paeen	Parsian
Bandar Kong	Gadir Kuhi	Posht band
Bandar Moallem	Gazidar	Qeshm Island
Bandar-e Kangan	Gerouk	Sandsar
Bandar-e-kargan	Gorazuiyeh	(Sarari)
Bandar-e-Mogham	Gwater	Shah Monsour
Bandar-e-pol	Himan	Shaheed Mardan
Bandar-e-Shenas	Hormuz Island	Sikuyee
Bandini	Jaliyan	Sina Abad
Bawaridan	Jod	Sirik
Bazreh	Kahir	Suru
Behdeh	Kanakh (Konj)	Zaraabad
Berkeh-ye Soflin	Kashi	Zitkdaf
Bilal Abad	Kish Island	

Appendix 1.1 Locations on Qeshm Island

Bandar Moghuyeh	Konar Siah
Bandar-e-Charak	Laft
Bandar-e-Divan	Mollu
Bandar-e-Doulab	Moradi
Bandar-e-Hasineh	Paiposht
Bandar-e-Taooneh	Qeshm City
Basaidu	Ramchah
Basyaneh	Ramkan
Borka Khalaf	Salakh
Daraku	Shib Deraz
Giahdan	Tabl
Kavarzin Jadiid	

Appendix 2: List of Fieldwork Locations in the UAE

Abu Dhabi	Dubai	Ras al-Khaimah
Ajman	Fujairah	Sharjah
Al Ain	Khor Fakkan	Umm al-Quwain
Al Dhaid	Madha	

Appendix 3: List of Fieldwork Locations in Oman

Al Ashkharah	Bandar Qurun	Mutrah
Al Hadd	Barka	Nizwa
Al Mudayq	Bidiyah	Qahid
Al Suwayq	Bimma	Salalah
Albandar Jadid	Bimmah Sinkhole	Sarej
Al-Bar	Diqqa	Seeb
Aljafun	Fins	Sinaw
Aljawirah (Ghalat)	Gadhina	Sohar
Alkhaba	Ibra	Sur
Alsuwaih	Khasab	Tharmad
Alwatiye	Khowimah	The Masirah Island
Asileh	Kumzar	Tiwi
Awrab	Muhut	
Bahla	Muscat	

Appendix 4: List of Fieldwork Locations in Qatar

Al Khor	Al Wakrah	Doha

Appendix 5: English Consent Form

The following is an English language translation of the text of the consent form that I submitted and reviewed by the University's Institutional Review Board.

My name is Manami Goto. I am a PhD student at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom, working with Dr. James Onley and Prof. Christine Allison in the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study for my doctoral thesis, which focuses on the female face masks in the coastal cities of western Iran and the eastern Arabian Peninsula. The purpose of this study is to discover similarities and differences in the use of face masks between the coastal cities of Iran and the eastern Arabian Peninsula and how individual experiences and perceptions of the face mask have changed. This process will be examined through interviews which will be conducted with women who wear or used to wear a face mask and live in the targeted coastal cities.

If you agree to participate in this research, I will conduct an interview with you at a time and location of your choice. The interview will include questions about your past and present daily life practices and your perceptions of the face mask. With your permission, I will take notes and record the interview. If you do not wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time. You are also not required to answer questions that you do not want to answer. There is no penalty for discontinuing the participation. I expect to conduct an interview only once; however, follow-ups may be needed for added clarification. In this case, I will contact you via email or phone. Your name and identifying information will be kept anonymous. All the data obtained or acquired will be coded or de-identified and protected. Under no circumstances will the identifiers be made available to individuals besides the interviewer. The information gathered in the interview will be used for my PhD thesis and further research, and may be published in academic journals and books.

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact either my supervisor, Dr. James Onley, by email: j.onley@exeter.ac.uk or the researcher (Manami Goto) by email: Mg428@exeter.ac.uk.

Appendix 6: Arabic Consent Form

The following is an Arabic language translation of the text of the consent form that I submitted and reviewed by the University's Institutional Review Board.

أنا منامي غوتو. أنا طالبة الدكتوراه بجامعة اكستر في بريطانيا, وأعمل مع الدكتور جيمس أنلي و أستاذة كرستين ألسون في معهد الدراسات العربية والاسلامية. أود أن أدعوكن للمشاركة في دراسة بحثية الأطروحة دراسة الدكتوراة, التي تتعلق بأقنعة للوجه للإناث في المدن الساحلية في إيران الغربي, وشرق الجزيرة العربية .الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو اكتشاف التشابه و الاختلافات في طريقة استخدام أقنعة للوجه بين مدن ساحل إيران الجنوب الغربي و شرق الجزيرة العربية. وكيف تغيرت التجارب و التصورات الشخصية للغطاء للوجه .سيتم فحص هذه العملية من خلال المقابلات التي ستجري مع نساء ترتدن قناعا للوجه أو كن ارتدنه سابقا و تعيشن في المدن الساحلية المستهدفة . إذا وافقت على المشاركة في هذا البحث, سأجري مقابلة معك في الوقت والمكان اللذين تختارينهما. سوف تشمل المقابلة أسئلة حول الماضي و الحياة اليومية و ممارسات الواقع الحالي و نظرتك نحو قناع الوجه .سوف أدون الملاحظات و أسجل المقابلة, من بعد إذنك. إذا كنت لا ترغبين في الاستمرار, يمكنك إيقاف المقابلة في أي وقت. كما أنه ليس مطلوبا منك أن تجيبي عن الأسئلة التي لا ترغبين في الجواب عنها .ليس هناك عقوبة عند التوقف عن المشاركة .سأجري المقابلة مرة واحدة فقط; ولكن لهدف التوضيح, قد تكون هناك حاجة للمتابعة. وفي هذه الحالة, نتصل بك عبر البريد الإلكتروني أو الهاتف. أسمك و المعلومات الشخصية عنك ستبقى مجهولة .كل البيانات المحصلة سيشار اليها برمز ولن تعرف وستبقى محمية. تحت أي ظرف كان, لن يسمح لاحد بالاطلاع على هويات الأشخاص عدا المسؤول عن المقابلة. ستستخدم المعلومات التي جمعت خلال المقابلات لبحثي التخرجي للدكتوراه و بحث المستقبل, ومن الممكن أن تنشر في مجلة أكادمية و كتب. إذا كان لديك أي سؤال أو استفسار عن حقوقك كمشارك في هذا الاستبيان, يرجى التواصل عبر البريد الالكتروني .

المشرف الدكتور جيمس أنلي:j.onley@exeter.ac.uk

أو الباحثة مانامي غوتو:Mg428@exeter.ac.uk

Appendix 7: Persian Consent Form

The following is a Persian language translation of the text of the consent form that I submitted and reviewed by the University's Institutional Review Board.

اسم من مانامی گوتو است. من دانشجو دکترا در دانشگاه اکستر بریتانیای کبیر هستم، و دکتر جیمز أونلی و پروفسور کرستین الیسون در مؤسسه ی مطالعات عربی و اسلامی استادان راهنمای من می باشند. دوست دارم از شما برای پایان نامه دکترایم که در مورد برقع زنان در شهرهای ساحلی غرب ایران و در شرق شبه جزیره عربی دعوت کنم. هدف این مطالعه این است که تشابه ها و تفاوتها در استفاده ماسک صورت زنان میان شهرهای ساحلی غربی ایران یا شرق شبه جزیره عربی دریابم، وچطور تجربیات و انتظارات فردی- شخصی افراد تغییر کرده است.این جریان از داخل مصاحبه ها با زنانی که در شهرهای ساحلی مورد نظر زندگی می کنند و برقع می پوشند یا می پوشیدند، و اجرا و بررسی خواهد شد. اگر موافق هستید در این پژوهش شرکت کنید، من در محلی که از نظر مکان و زمان برایت مناسب است با جنابعالی مصاحبه خواهم کرد. با اجازه شما این مصاحبه شامل، در باره زندگی روزانه شما در حال و گذشته و انتظارات شما از برقع خواهد بود.اگر دوست ندارید مصاحبه را ضبط و یادداشت خواهم کرد. لازم نیست به سوالاتی که دوست ندارید پاسخ دهید. برای ادامه ندادن مصاحبه از نظر قانون هیچگونه و مجازات و مسولیت متوجه شما نخواهد شد. من فقط برای یک بار انتظار دارم مصاحبه را انجام بدهم.

بهرحال مصاحبه نیاز به توضیح دارد. در این مورد من از طریق پست الکترونیکی یا تلفن با شما تماس خواهم گرفت. در تمام زمان پروژه است و اسم و اطلاعات شخصی شما محرمانه خواهد ماند.همه اطلاعات اکتسابی کد گذاری خواهد شد و قابل تشخیص نخواهد بود. در اصلاعات جمع آوری شده. به هیچ وجه جز مصاحبه کننده کسی نمی تواند شما راشناسایی کند. مصاحبه برای رساله دکتری من و پژوهش بیشتر استفاده خواهد شد. اگر شما هر سوالی برای حقوق یا نشریه تخصصی دانشگاه و با کتابهای که چاپ می شود. اگر رفتار من به عنوان مثال با پست الکترونیکی تماس بگیرید.

لطفًا به مدیرم، دکتر جیمز اونلی، با پست الکترونیکی تماس بگیرید:j.onley@exeter.ac.uk

یا پژوهشگر مانامی گوتو با پست الکترونیکی تماس بگیرید:Mg428@exeter.ac.uk

Appendix 8: List of Brand Names of the Golden/Indigo Fabric Used in Mask Masking

The following list of brand names applied to the 'golden' or 'indigo' fabric used in mask manufacture is adopted from the table produced by Al Shomely (2016, 74-75).

No.	Brand name	Date of production	Notes
1	Sun	1903	
2	Aristocrat	1932	
3	Telephone	1955	
4	*Abo Abryg* (teapot)	1960 – 1970	
5	*Abo Shahhof* (boat)	1960 – 1970	
6	*Malikah Alkhel* (Horses Queen)	1965	
7	*Abo Korah* (ball)	1970 – 1980	
8	*Abo Thawoos* (Peacock)	1970 – 1980	
9	*Abo Sarookh* (Missile)	1970 – 1980	This is one of the best quality fabrics
10	*Bint Al Balad* (Country Girl)	1972	
11	*Abo Tayerah* (Aeroplane)	1974	
12	*Medkhan* (Incense Burner)	1974	
13	Flower	1975	
14	*Bint Alkhaleej* (Gulf Girl)	1975	
15	Precious	1978	
16	*Abo Thlat-Najmat* (Three Stars)	1979	
17	*Abo-Aarnip* (Rabbit)	1980	
18	*Almas* (Diamond)	1985	
19	Wedding Burqa	1985	
20	Emirates Burqa	1985	
21	Nimex	1985 – 1986	
22	Al Zahra	1990	
23	*Abo-SabiyNajmat* (Seven Stars)	1991	
24	Miss World	1992	
25	Map World	1994	
26	Necklace	1999	This is exclusively produced for the Royal Family
27	Mama Fatimah	2001	
28	*Malikat Alkhaleej* (Gulf Queen)	2002	
29	*Abo Safeen* (Two Swords)	2007	
30	Palm Tree	2013	
31	Three nine	2014	

Appendix 9: List of Persons Interviewed on Qeshm Island and the UAE

The following is an (anonymised) list of people interviewed during the course of theis research:

Persons Interviewed on Qeshm Island:

1. Masked seamstress, Qeshm City, November 2016.
2. Masked woman, Qeshm City, November 2016.
3. Unmasked Daughter-in-law of (2), Qeshm City, November 2016.
4. Son of (2), Qeshm City, November 2016.
5. Unmasked saleswoman at Qeshm old bazar, Qeshm City, November 2016.
6. Salesman selling face masks at Qeshm old bazar, Qeshm City, November 2016.
7. Salesman selling face masks at Qeshm old bazar, Qeshm City, November 2016.
8. Unmasked woman who formerly wore a mask, Bandar-e-Doulab village, July and December 2016.
9. Husband of (8), Bandar-e-Doulab village, July and December 2016.
10. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (8), Bandar-e-Doulab village, July and December 2016.
11. Masked mother-in-law of (8), Bandar-e-Doulab village, December 2016.
12. Husband of (10), who worked in the Gulf Arab countries and spoke Arabic, Bandar-e-Doulab village, December 2016.
13. Unmasked woman, Bandar-e-Doulab village, December 2016.
14. Husband of (13), Bandar-e-Doulab village, December 2016.
15. Masked woman, Basaidu village, December 2016.
16. Masked woman, Basaidu village, December 2016.
17. Unmasked sister of (16), Basaidu village, December 2016.
18. Unmasked sister of (16), Basaidu village, December 2016.
19. Unmasked woman working for a handicraft shop, Borka Khalaf village, July 2016.
20. Masked woman working for a handicraft shop, Borka Khalaf village, December 2016.
21. Unmasked sister of (20) who formerly wore a mask, Borka Khalaf village, December 2016.

22. Unmasked sister-in-law of (20) who formerly wore a mask, Borka Khalaf village, December 2016.
23. Masked woman working for a handicraft shop, Borka Khalaf village, December 2016.
24. Unmasked woman working for a handicraft shop, Borka Khalaf village, December 2016.
25. Woman from Borka Khalaf village who occasionally wears a mask, Qeshm City, December 2016.
26. Masked woman, Daraku village, December 2016.
27. Masked woman, Daraku village, December 2016.
28. Unmasked woman who formerly wore a mask, Daraku village, December 2016.
29. Masked seamstress, Giahdan village, December 2016.
30. Unmasked daughter of (29), Giahdan village, December 2016.
31. Unmasked daughter of (29) who formerly wore a mask, Giahdan village, December 2016.
32. Masked woman, Giahdan village, December 2016.
33. Masked seamstress, Kavarzin village, November 2016.
34. Unmasked daughter of (33), Kavarzin village, November 2016.
35. Masked woman, Konar Siah village, December 2016.
36. Unmasked daughter of (35), Konar Siah village, December 2016.
37. Unmasked daughter of (35), Konar Siah village, December 2016.
38. Masked woman, Laft village, November 2016.
39. Unmasked daughter of (38), Laft village, November 2016.
40. Unmasked daughter of (38), Laft village, November 2016.
41. Unmasked daughter-in-law of (38), Laft village, November 2016.
42. Masked woman, Moradi village, December 2016.
43. Masked woman, Moradi village, December 2016.
44. Unmasked daughter of (43), Moradi village, December 2016.
45. Masked woman, Paiposht village, December 2016.
46. Masked woman, Paiposht village, December 2016.
47. Masked woman, Paiposht village, December 2016.
48. Daughter of (47) with the full-black face veil, Paiposht village, December 2016.

49. Woman with the full-black face veil, Paiposht village, December 2016.
50. Woman with the full-black face veil, Paiposht village, December 2016.
51. Masked woman, Ramchah village, November 2016.
52. Unmasked unmarried daughter of (51), Ramchah village, November 2016.
53. Masked sister of (51), Ramchah village, November 2016.
54. Masked woman, Ramkan village, December 2016.
55. Masked woman, Ramkan village, December 2016.
56. Unmasked daughter of (55), Ramkan village, December 2016.
57. Masked seamstress, Salakh village, December 2016.
58. Unmasked daughter of (57), Salakh village, December 2016.
59. Unmasked daughter-in-law of (57), Salakh village, December 2016.
60. Son of (57), Salakh village, December 2016.
61. Masked woman, Salakh village, December 2016.
62. Zīnat Daryāī who formerly wore a mask, Salakh village, November and December 2016.
63. Son of (62), Salakh village, November 2016.
64. Dr. Ahmad Nadalian, Salakh village, November 2016.
65. Masked woman, Salakh village, October 2016.
66. Masked woman, Salakh village, October 2016.
67. Masked seamstress, Shib Deraz village, November 2016.
68. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (67), Shib Deraz village, November 2016.
69. Masked woman, Tabl village, December 2016.
70. Masked woman, Tabl village, December 2016.

Persons Interviewed in the UAE:

71. Masked woman, Ras al-Khaimah, March 2016.
72. Unmasked daughter of (71), Ras al-Khaimah, March 2016.
73. Unmasked daughter of (71), Ras al-Khaimah, March 2016.
74. Masked woman from Dubai, Hatta, March 2017.
75. Unmasked daughter of (74), Hatta, March 2017.
76. Unmasked sister of (74), Hatta and Dubai, March 2017.
77. Unmasked sister-in-law of (74), Dubai, March 2017.
78. Female Omani entrepreneur producing products using motifs of masked women,

Abu Dhabi, March 2017.

79. Non-Emirati masked woman working for an UAE heritage institution, Dubai, March 2017.
80. Non-Emirati masked woman working for an UAE heritage institution, Dubai, March 2017.
81. Non-Emirati masked woman working for an UAE heritage institution, Dubai, March 2017.
82. Son of a masked seamstress, Ras al-Khaimah, March 2017.
83. Unmasked woman from Ras al-Khaimah whose mother practised masking, Abu Dhabi, March 2017.
84. Masked woman, Ajman, February and March 2018.
85. Masked sister of (84), Ajman, February 2018
86. Unmasked daughter of (84), Ajman, February and March 2018.
87. Unmasked granddaughter of (84), February and March 2018.
88. Masked woman, Ajman, February 2018.
89. Masked mother of (88), Ajman, February 2018.
90. Unmasked daughter of (88), Ajman, February 2018.
91. Unmasked daughter of (88), Ajman, February 2018.
92. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (88), Ajman, February 2018.
93. Husband of (88), Ajman, February 2018.
94. Unmasked woman who formerly wore a mask, Dubai, March 2018.
95. Unmasked daughter of (94), Dubai, March 2018.
96. Masked woman, Abu Dhabi, March 2018.
97. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (96), Abu Dhabi, March 2018.
98. Unmasked, unmarried granddaughter of (96), Abu Dhabi, March 2018.
99. Masked woman, Abu Dhabi, March 2018.
100. Unmasked granddaughter of (99), Abu Dhabi, March 2018.
101. Unmasked woman who formerly wore a mask, Abu Dhabi, March 2018.
102. Unmasked daughter of (101), Abu Dhabi, March 2018.
103. Masked woman, Fujairah, March 2018.
104. Unmasked daughter of (103), Fujairah, March 2018.
105. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (103), Fujairah, March 2018.

106. Unmasked woman whose mother practised masking, Ras al-Khaimah, March 2018.
107. Masked seamstress, Al Dhaid, March 2018.
108. Unmasked daughter of (107), Al Dhaid, March 2018.
109. Unmasked daughter of (107), Al Dhaid, March 2018.
110. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (107), Al Dhaid, March 2018.
111. Dr. Karima Al Shomely who experienced masking, Sharjah, March 2018.
112. Senior salesman of a gold retailer, Dubai Gold Souk, March 2018.
113. Senior salesman of a gold retailer, Dubai Gold Souk, March 2018.
114. Senior salesman of a gold retailer, Dubai Gold Souk, March 2018.
115. Masked woman, Dubai, March 2018.
116. Masked woman, Fujailah, March 2018.
117. Masked woman, Fujailah, March 2018.
118. Masked woman, Fujailah, March 2018.
119. Unmasked woman, Fujailah, March 2018.
120. Unmasked woman who formerly wore a mask, Fujailah, March 2018.
121. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (120), Fujailah, March 2018.
122. Unmasked sister of (120), Fujailah, March 2018.
123. Bangladeshi face-mask maker, Umm al-Quwain, March 2018.
124. Bangladeshi face-mask maker, Umm al-Quwain, March 2018.
125. Unmasked woman from Giahdan village of Qeshm Island, Ajman, March 2018.
126. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (125), Ajman, March 2018.
127. Masked woman, Al Ain, March 2018.
128. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (127), Al Ain, March 2018.
129. Unmasked sister of (127), Al Ain, March 2018.
130. Unmasked seamstress who formerly wore a mask, Al Ain, March 2018.
131. Unmasked daughter-in-law of (130), Al Ain, March 2018.
132. Masked woman, Ajman, March 2018.
133. Unmasked, unmarried daughter of (132), Ajman, March 2018.
134. Masked woman, Khor Fakkan, March 2018.
135. Unmasked daughter of (134), Khor Fakkan, March 2018.
136. Masked woman, Ajman, March 2018.

137. Unmasked woman whose mother used to be a seamstress, Ajman, March 2018.
138. Man whose grandmother and aunts practise masking, March 2018.
139. Masked woman, Ajman, March 2018.
140. Shop owner selling the face-mask textiles and ready-made masks, Dubai, March 2018.
141. Maitha Al Khayat, direct message on social media, December 2018 and January 2019.
142. Abeer Mohammed, direct message on social media, May and June 2018 and January 2019.
143. Fatma Lootah, direct message on social media, January 2019.
144. Female visual artist working on Emirati heritage, direct message on social media, January 2019.
145. Unmasked woman, Sharjah, March 2017.
146. Unmasked woman, Sharjah, March 2017.
147. Unmasked woman whose grandmother practised masking, Ajman, March 2018.
148. Unmasked woman whose mother and mother-in-law practise masking, March 2018
149. Masked woman, Al Ain, March 2018.
150. Masked sister of (149), Al Ain, March 2018.

<u>Persons Interviewed in Other Places</u>:

151. Unmasked woman engaging in the local handicraft, Bandar Abbas, November 2016.
152. Masked woman, Banak, July 2016.
153. Historian at the Iranology Foundation, Bushehr, July 2016.
154. Historian at the Iranology Foundation, Bushehr, July 2016.
155. History professor at the Persian Gulf University in Bushehr, Tehran, October 2016.
156. Male villager, Gazidār, November 2016.
157. Unmasked woman who formerly wore a mask, Lalū Bāzār, November 2016.
158. Masked, unmarried girl, Jaliyan, November 2016.
159. Masked, unmarried girl, Jaliyan, November 2016.
160. Masked woman, Minab, November 2016.

161. Unmasked woman whose mother practice masking, Hormoz Island, July and November 2016.
162. Sara Zavaree, London, September 2018.
163. Unmasked woman, Tehran, May 2016.
164. Unmasked woman, Tehran, June 2016.
165. Unmasked woman, Tehran, June 2016.
166. Dr. Reem El Mutwalli, London, August 2017.
167. Female Saudi student, emails and in-person in Exeter, July, September, and December 2018.
168. Unmasked woman, Doha, April 2016.
169. Local male researcher, Bandar Abbas, November 2016.
170. Ehsan Mirhosseini, Bandar Abbas and Minab, July 2016.
171. Local male journalist, Bandar Kong, December 2016.
172. Female PhD candidate working on Abadan, Exeter, July 2017.
173. Woman from Ahvaz, Isfahan, August 2015.
174. Woman from Abadan, Minab, November 2016.
175. Prof. Baqer Alnajjar, Newcastle, April 2017.
176. Prof. Timothy Insoll, Exeter, January 2018.
177. Nasser Parvez Khatri, email messages, May 2017.

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