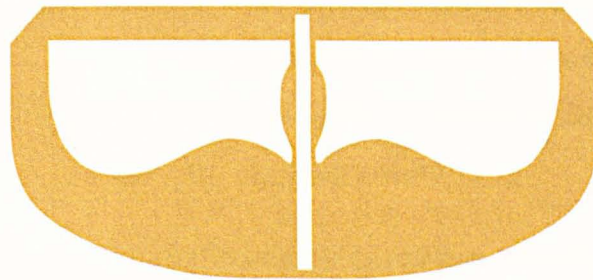


An Intimate Object:
A Practice-based Study of the
Emirati Burqa



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Abstract

This practice-based thesis focuses on the Emirati burqa or 'mask', a form of face covering worn by the majority of Emirati women in the United Arab Emirates until the late 1960s that reveals the eyes but does not cover the hair or body. Framed by Daniel Miller and Aida Kanafani's theories of material culture and embodiment that focus on dress as an intimate sensory object, this practice-based thesis is the first in-depth study of the Emirati burqa that engages with the histories and materiality of the burqa as an intimate object once made and worn by Emirati women.

At the core of this thesis is women's practice: the practices of women burqa makers, the diverse female practices of burqa wearing and my practice as a woman artist from the UAE. Through experiments with traditional craft materials, inscription methods, workshop initiatives, film, photography and installation, my engagement is with performing the material culture of the female burqa as a response to its disappearing practices and its previously little recorded history.

The thesis first analyses the history of the burqa face covering in the Arabian peninsula through a specific focus on the written and visual accounts of mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth-century British travellers in Arabia. It then examines and records the material craft of Emirati burqa-making based upon interviews with burqa makers and textile producers and accompanying ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the UAE and India. This includes photographic documentation of the processes involved in the production of the burqa textile, a study of burqa manufacturing brands and packaging, and an analysis of the material construction of the burqa and how it is worn in the UAE. Based on interviews in the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar and a variety of visual and textual sources, the thesis identifies the different types of Emirati burqa in relation to age, status, and regional identities. It further shows that the Emirati burqa differs from those worn in the neighbouring Gulf States of Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia, and focuses on burqa wearing practices and associated uses of the burqa textile in the UAE.

Engaging with these research findings, the culmination of the thesis is the body of art works exhibited in the 2014 London exhibition, 'An Intimate Object', that re-animates the burqa as a living object with its own history and new contemporary meanings. Focusing

on the significance of the body and senses in knowledge production, the art practice shows the burqa has 'a voice' in a conversation that draws upon past traditions referencing protection and its value as a personal and precious object. The burqa speaks, its indigo residue bleeds as an active witness to its lost past. It also plays a part in rediscovery or keeping the past of this material object alive through contemporary art practice as an aesthetic and political strategy.

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Fig.15 Karima Alshomely, 'Open Display Cabinet', 2014

Introduction

"It is not that we wear the burqa because it is shameful to go without it, but because it is beautiful to go with it."

Unni Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman*, 1982

The above quote cited by the social anthropologist Unni Wikan at the opening of her chapter on the Omani burqa refers to the fact that burqa-wearing women in the Gulf countries consider their burqa as an adornment much like Western women regard the use of makeup, it enhances their beauty by accentuating the eyes and displaying their personal identity. Referring specifically to this form of either whole or partial face covering that reveals the eyes; Wikan also alludes to the burqa as a material object that carries multiple religious, cultural and social meanings.¹ My practice-based research focuses on the Emirati burqa as a specific type of face covering worn by Muslim women in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Consisting of a piece of cotton cloth saturated with indigo dye that covers the face, either wholly or partially while revealing the eyes, the burqa was once considered an item of traditional everyday dress for the majority of Emirati women until at least the late 1960s. Changes within Emirati society have led to fewer women wearing the burqa and it is now rarely seen as an everyday item of clothing.² Indeed, the Emirati burqa has now taken on a heritage role and is worn for official occasions and ceremonies becoming one of the most important heritage icons of the Emirates.³ Surprisingly, however, little is known about the history of the Emirati burqa, the traditional craft of burqa making, the practice of burqa wearing or its various associated rituals and social and cultural meanings. In this respect, this thesis reflects my concern that if this little understood or acknowledged history is not recorded and saved, it might be lost forever. To begin to address this gap in existing scholarship and to preserve a record of the fast disappearing craft of Emirati burqa making, this thesis engages with the histories and materiality of the burqa as an intimate object once made and worn by Emirati women. As

¹ Unni Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.88.

² Souad Athman, 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrh Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aymarāt' [Changes in Women's Traditional Dress, Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society], in Al Gohary, M. (ed.) *Dirasat fi Elm Alfolklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore], (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1998), p.364.

³ Azizah Al Hammadi, *Snahah Alburqas* [Making Burqas], (Abu Dhabi: Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.6.

an artist this engagement includes the production of art work that responds to these histories, the accompanying social practices and the material qualities of the burqa.

An important starting point for this research is the unravelling of the inaccuracies and misunderstandings surrounding the main types of face covering worn in the region often referred to as the Middle East,⁴ and more specifically those in the Arabian Peninsula. As this thesis will show, the lack of accurate information about such traditions and social customs are historical partly due to Western misconceptions from nineteenth and twentieth-century diplomats, anthropologists and travellers, together with the accompanying undervaluing of 'dress' and of indigenous female craft practices that have further compounded this gap in knowledge.⁵

At the same time, Arab writers of the past rarely mention the burqa as a specific form of face covering. Generally, in historical Arab writing if the burqa is mentioned, it is merely referred to in passing as a traditional costume worn by women.⁶ To date, as discussed in detail below, there exists no in-depth or comprehensive study of the history of the Emirati burqa, little documentation of its different forms, the qualities of the textiles, the craft of burqa making, or the experiences, rituals and beliefs associated with wearing this type of face covering.

This hitherto overlooked subject of the material culture of the Emirati burqa is further complicated by the confusion surrounding the meaning of the often interchangeable terms 'burqa', 'face covering', and 'veil', that abound in both English and Arabic texts. Definitions of the burqa in both Arabic and English dictionaries and encyclopaedias vary significantly. First, taking the term 'burqa' in English, it has spelling variations but all refer to the same thing: burqa, burka, burha, and burgh.

Two examples clearly show the confusion. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1999) defines

⁴ As James Canton notes, 'There is a plurality of terms which could potentially be applied to define the geographical region under consideration. 'Arabia' is the most specific and appropriate. The term Arabia describes the area comprising the Arabian Peninsula and neighbouring Arab lands. While expressions such as 'the Middle East' or even 'the Near East' are commonly used to refer to an area that also encompasses Iran and Turkey, and 'the Levant' and 'the Orient' have almost no specificity.' James Canton, *From Cairo to Baghdad Traveller: British Travellers in Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011), p.3.

⁵ Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (New York: Berg, 2000), pp.6-10.

⁶ Ibid, pp.6-10.

the burqa as follows:

A long, loose garment covering the whole body from head to feet, worn in public by women in many Muslim countries. Origin, from Urdu and Persian *burqa'*, the burqa, from the Arabic *burqu'*, is a full-body covering with a small opening for the eyes. Muslim women wear it over their clothing in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province and Tribal Areas. Women remove the garment only when they're home.

Strictly speaking, the burqa is the body covering, whereas the head cover is the niqab, or face-veil. The sky-blue burqa popularized in Afghanistan has come to symbolize, in Western eyes, repressive interpretations of Islam and the backward treatment of women in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Definition: Hijab is the Arabic term most commonly translated as "veil" in English—the traditional head, face or body covering of women in the Middle East and the Islamic world. Hijab, however, does not necessarily mean "veil" in the English sense of a headscarf, and has no exact translation in English.⁷

In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (2009) the burqa is defined as:

A distinctive 'veil' covering the entire body, worn by women in some parts of the Muslim world. The style of the burqa varies among cultures, but the term is most often associated with the type of chador (or chadri) worn by Pashtun women in Afghanistan. Legally mandated by the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, the burqa emerged as an icon of the gender debate on Islam and women. Covering a woman's hair, face, and body, this type of burqa usually consists of a round cap on top and long fabric extending on all sides, with webbing or lace in front of the eyes to allow women to see.⁸

As these two definitions reveal, the dominant meaning of burqa in the English language refers to a body covering worn by Muslim women that covers or veils the face and the hair, and no reference is made to the burqa as *only* a form of face covering.

Turning to parallel contemporary Arabic dictionary sources, the burqa still retains its meaning as solely a face covering. For example, the Arabic lexicographer Mohammed Al Razi in *Mojam Mukhtar Al Sahah* [Mukhtar Al Sahah Lexicon, 2000] defines the burqa thus: 'Al burqa'a is a cover used for women of Bedouins and their animals. The verb '*tabarqa'a*' means to put the burqa'a on; that is, the mask.'⁹ Similarly, the Egyptian

⁷ *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), Pearsall, J. (ed.), p.244.

⁸ John Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.379-380.

⁹ Mohammed Al Razi, *Mojam Mukhtar Al Sahah* [Mukhtar Al-Sahah Lexicon], (Cairo: Dar-Al-Hadeth, 2000). p.43.

lexicographer Rajab Abdel Jawad Ibrahim in *Almojam Ala'rbi Laasma Almellabs* [Arabic Lexicon of Clothes Names, 2001] explains that the Egyptian *Burqu'* or *Baraq'ie* covers the face only from the bottom or base of the nose and is tied to the turban at the forehead and sides. It is made of a Mosul textile (from the Syrian town of Mosul) a white soft textile, which extends over the face and goes down to the knees.¹⁰ (Figs. 1 & 2)



Fig.1 Unknown, 'Portrait of a young Cairo woman', 1870, Albumen silver print from glass negative, Photograph, 27.1cm x 21.6 cm, (*Focus Orient*, 2008), p.133

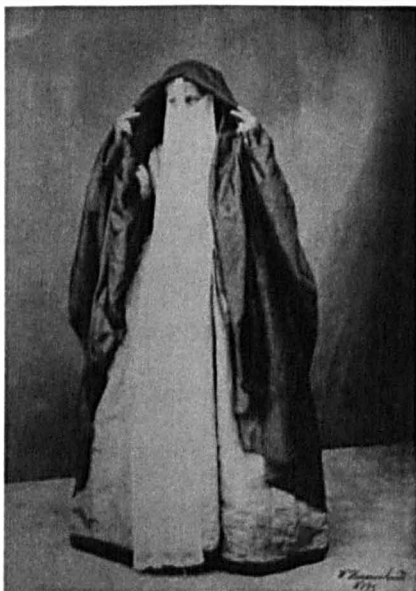


Fig.2 Wilhelm Hammerschmidt, 'Untitled', 1860, Albumen silver print from glass negative, Photograph, 26.4cm x 20.5cm, (*Focus Orient*, 2008), p.125

¹⁰ Rajab Abdel Jawad Ibrahim, *Almojam Ala'rbi Laasma Almellabs* [Arabic Lexicon of Clothes' Names], (Cairo: Dar-Afrq, 2001), pp.57-58.

According to Ibrahim, this type of face cover is indispensable for women when they leave the house. Although Ibrahim refers to the Egyptian rather than the Emirati burqa, his study of cultural heritage and contemporary life in Egypt during the Mamluk era of the 13th century provides new material and definitions relating to dress in the Arabic world.¹¹

The confusion surrounding the term burqa is clarified by the textile and dress historian Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood who states that:

The 'traditional' face veils worn in the eastern parts of the Arabian Peninsula are different from those in the west and southwest ... The face veils in question come from eastern Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. Two main types of face veils are worn here, the niqab and batulah. Somewhat confusingly, both are often locally called a burqa.¹²

This observation accords with the accounts of several women that I interviewed as part of this research who state that in some Gulf States such as Bahrain and Qatar the burqa was called the batulah whereas in Oman and United Arab Emirate the same face covering was called the burqa.¹³

As the above shows, the many nuanced variations of 'face covering' depend upon the country, language and culture within which the 'face covering' appears. However, such variations have invariably been elided and in contemporary western culture the most commonly used terms are the 'veil', the 'burqa' and 'niqab'.¹⁴ Referring to these misunderstandings in direct reference to the Gulf States, the political anthropologist Rebecca Torstrick notes that:

Although the *shayla* is a form of veil in that it covers the hair, women in the Gulf employ other types of veils that cover the face as well. Thus, when speaking of veiling, most people refer to facial veils, rather than those that cover the hair. Two of the most common types of facial veils are the *niqab* and the *burqa*; the latter differs significantly from the veil in Afghanistan that shares its name.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid, pp.5-6.

¹² Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, (September 2010) *Face Veils*. Available at: <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/BEWDF-v5/EDch5079.xml> (Accessed: 26 September 2015)

¹³ Appendix 1, Interviews. Latifa Yusuf Yaqub (Um Hassan), 08.07.2013, p.234.

¹⁴ A piece of cloth that covers the face but not usually the eyes, worn in public by some Muslim women, Available at: <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/niqab?q=niqab>, (Accessed: 11 September, 2014); Nadia Al Qazi, *A'raas Alturath* [Heritage Brides] (Damascus: Dar Al Faker, 2008), p.95.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Faier and Rebecca Torstrick, *Culture and Customs of the Arab Gulf States* (USA:

Similarly, in *A'raas Alturath* [Heritage Brides], a social research study by Nadia Al Qazi, Al Qazi clarifies the differences between each face covering in the Arabian Peninsula and states that the veil covers a woman's head and neck down to her shoulders and back. The *niqab* is made from black fabric and a woman wears it over her nose to cover her face (leaving a gap for her eyes) to the top of the chest. The burqa is a mask or patch for women or animals covering the face.¹⁶ All three facial coverings come in different shapes, sizes and materials and also have different purposes, whether symbolic or practical.

In response to existing confusions in western sources, the accompanying photographic self-portrait clarifies the differences between these different forms in the UAE (Fig. 3). Henceforth, I am using the term burqa throughout this thesis to denote a particular form of face-covering that is a material object that reveals the eyes and does not cover the hair or body as the Afghani burqa does. It is also worth noting at the outset of this thesis that although the UAE is a predominately Muslim country, there is no evidence from my research that indicates that the practice of burqa wearing was based upon the teachings of Islam.¹⁷



Fig.3 Karima Alshomely, 'Veil (Shayla), Burqa, Niqab', Self-portrait, Photograph, 2013

Overview of Thesis

This thesis examines the Emirati burqa as an embodied material object made and worn by

Greenwood Press, 2009), p.100.

¹⁶ Nadia Al Qazi, *A'raas Alturath* [Heritage Brides], (Damascus: Dar Al Faker, 2008), pp.97-119.

¹⁷ The Quran states that women do not need to cover their faces, only to use a veil to cover their hair. It further instructs, 'and tell the believing women to restrain their looks, and to guard their privates, and not display their beauty except what is apparent thereof, and to draw their coverings over their breasts, and not expose their beauty (Quran 24:31),' The interpretation by religious scholars accounts for a great deal of the misunderstandings surrounding the burqa. Nevertheless, their views have been accepted by some as representing the true conduct expected of women under Islam. In their argument, they cite when A'ishah, the Prophet Mohamed's wife, recounts: 'Asma' bint Abu Bakr came to the Prophet wearing thin clothes. The Prophet turned his head away and said, "When a woman reaches puberty, it is not proper that any portion of her body should be seen by a man except these parts," and he pointed to his face and hands.' (Al-Darsh, 2003).

women. My research takes into account the historical and contemporary cultural contexts of the burqa as well as documenting and reflecting upon the body of artistic work that I have produced in response to these histories and contexts. This includes my personal perspective as a non-burqa wearing, Emirati woman artist, currently studying in Britain.

In terms of Christopher Frayling's influential practice-based research methodology, this thesis can be situated as both research *into* art and research *through* art.¹⁸ By exploring and analysing the history of the burqa and the craft of burqa making, this 'research into art' has led me to reflect on my artistic practice; experimenting and engaging with the material culture and rituals of the burqa through the making of contemporary work is a form of 'research through art'. These two research methods and processes have been interconnected throughout the PhD. As part of my research enquiry this has involved both the uncovering of the burqa's history and the production of art works in different media that explore and respond to specific parts of this history, as well as to the materiality of the burqa itself. My body of artistic work has been inspired by and drawn upon a wide range of research methods: material gained from interviews, historic archival material, literature and storytelling traditions, examination of craft processes, and my engagement with the burqa as specificity of the Emirati burqa as a material object acknowledging that, as Karen Hansen notes, 'there is an experiential dimension to the power of clothing, both in its wearing and viewing.'¹⁹ My theoretical and performative engagement with the burqa as an item of embodied clothing also draws significantly upon my Emirati heritage and upon my personal reactions and feelings in response to my research findings.

As the subtitle of this thesis suggests, I perceive the burqa to be an intimate object. As a material object, an item of dress, an accessory or a marker of status, the burqa can be seen as a thing in the world that exists outside of the individual subject. Yet, as this thesis will show, the burqa has been part of Emirati women's social and cultural identity and it is also deeply personal to each individual woman. Daniel Miller has argued that 'clothes are among our most personal possessions. They are the main medium between our sense of

¹⁸ Christopher Frayling, *Research in Art and Design*, v.1.no.1 (London: Royal College of Art, 1993), pp.1-8.

¹⁹ Karen Hansen, 'The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspective on Clothing Fashion and Culture', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, v.33, p. 373. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/25064858 (Accessed: 30 November 2012).

our bodies and our sense of the external world.’²⁰ Furthermore, in his detailed study of the Indian sari, he proposes that this item of dress ‘plays a considerable and generally unacknowledged role in creating a specificity to being an Indian woman that is distinct’.²¹ This thesis explores this concept of specificity in relation to the Emirati burqa acknowledging that, as Karen Hansen notes in her overview of recent shifts in anthropological perspectives on clothing, fashion and culture, ‘Dress has been analysed, by and large, as representing something else rather than something in its own right, although new efforts to reengage materiality suggest this approach is changing.’²² As I will show, not only is the burqa imbued with the smell/odour of its owner, it holds their physical imprint and carries many memories akin to a personal diary. Equally, Emirati women burqa makers each have their own special rituals for making burqas and understand the importance of their entrusted role in making such intimate objects that mark key passages in women’s lives.

‘An Intimate Object’ also foregrounds and characterises my mode of engagement with the burqa as a material object and subject for my artistic practice. This includes experimentation with the burqa fabric as a support for my practice and a series of performative photographic and film works that seek to explore experience and re-present differing social, cultural and personal understandings and imaginative experiences of the burqa as an embodied object.

The sub-title also holds another and more personal meaning. Brought up in an urban family setting in the UAE, I did not wear the burqa and neither did my mother, though it was a common feature of everyday dress in the UAE. My first intimate experience of the burqa was when I was ten years old. My grandmother came to stay with our family after her husband died. She wore a burqa that completely covered her face except for two small holes that exposed her eyes but hindered her range of vision. I found it fascinating to watch her eat as she carefully lifted up her burqa without revealing her face - she herself admitted she found this difficult. The burqa was her real face as far as I was concerned because it was the only face I ever saw. She did take it off to pray but still used

²⁰ Daniel Miller, *Stuff*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p.23.

²¹ Ibid. pp.23-29.

²² Karen Hansen, *The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspective on Clothing Fashion and Culture*, Annual Review of Anthropology, v.33, Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/25064858 (Accessed: 30 November 2012), p.369.

her head covering to mask her nose and mouth and this seemed highly strange to me. One day, when my grandmother was taking a nap, my mother asked me to fetch something from her room. When I entered, I found her sleeping without her burqa on. I was shocked because this sleeping woman was a stranger to me. Her face was covered in wrinkles and most of her front teeth were missing (Fig. 4).

This moment affected me deeply and I buried it in my subconscious for many years. Although I had used the motif of the burqa in artwork first shown at the Sharjah Biennale in 2000 in which my grandmother features (Fig. 5) and also as a basis for an artist in residency undertaken at the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen in 2002 (Fig. 6), it was only at the beginning of this research that I realised that the personal significance of the motif was rooted in this forgotten childhood memory. It was due to this desire to know more about the burqa in the UAE, to understand why some women wore this adornment and to delineate the physical and lived material processes involved in burqa practices that I undertook this PhD. Emirati history and folklore associated with the burqa has been passed down by word of mouth over the years and these sources have intrigued me.²³ Additionally, the burqa is an aesthetic symbol that reflects my own culture, making it a subject that resonates strongly with Emirati women such as myself. To first locate the subject of the Emirati burqa it is vital to know something of the geography and history of the UAE.



Fig.4 Fatimah Alshomely, 'Grandmother Portrait', 1972, Photograph, 5cm× 7cm

²³ Sayyid Harreiz, *Folklore and Folklife in the United Arab Emirates*, (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2001), p.30.



Fig.5 Karima Alshomely, 'Invisible', 2000, Installation, 8m×5m×10m



Fig.6 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa', 2002 Installation, 5m×7m×2m

Overview of United Arab Emirates: Geography and History

A brief overview of the complex historical and contemporary politics and economy of the region that is now known as the United Arab Emirates shows its transition from a traditional Bedouin lifestyle where the burqa was prevalent to a highly modernised society where this custom is fast disappearing.²⁴ The history of the UAE dramatically changed after the 1950s with the discovery of oil and its subsequent exploitation, both politically and socially, and its accompanying demographic changes through

²⁴ Mohammed Alidaroos, *Alimarat bayn Almady wa Alhader* [Emirates between Past and Present] (Dubai: Modern Books, 2001), p.18.

immigration.²⁵ The UAE was essentially transformed from being a territory of nomadic peoples living predominately in the desert and engaged in migratory seasonal work to a modern twentieth-century state.²⁶

As part of the Arabian Peninsula, the UAE is located between the Red Sea in the west, the Arabian Gulf in the east, the Arabian Sea in the south and the southern limits of the Jordanian desert in the north.²⁷ Located on the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, its shores extend along the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Qatar lies to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the west and south, and Oman is to the south, southeast.²⁸ Alongside its neighbours in the east of the peninsular - Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman - the UAE looks toward Iran and the Indian subcontinent for trade and cultural contacts.²⁹ These have had a major influence on immigration and, in this context, dress (Figs. 7 & 8).



Fig.7 Karima Alshomely, 'Drawing of Arabian Peninsula', 2014

²⁵ Hind Al Qasimi, *Al Thabit wa Al Motaqyer fi Thaqafah Almrah fi Alimarat* [Fixed and Variable in the Women Cultural in UAE], (Sharjah: Social Association, 1998), p.138.

²⁶ Fatimah Alsaayegh, *Alimarat mn Alqabila el Aldulah* [United Arab Emirates from the Tribe to the State], (Al Ain: Dar Alkatab, 2000), p.19.

²⁷ Mohammed Alidaros, *Alimarat bayn Almady wa Alhader* [Emirates between Past and Present], (Dubai: Modern Press, 2001), p.3.

²⁸ Mohammed Morsy Abdullah, *The United Arab Emirates: a Modern History* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p.23.

²⁹ Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, (September 2010), *Face Veils*. Available at: <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/BEWDF-v5/EDch5079.xml> (Accessed: 26 September 2015)

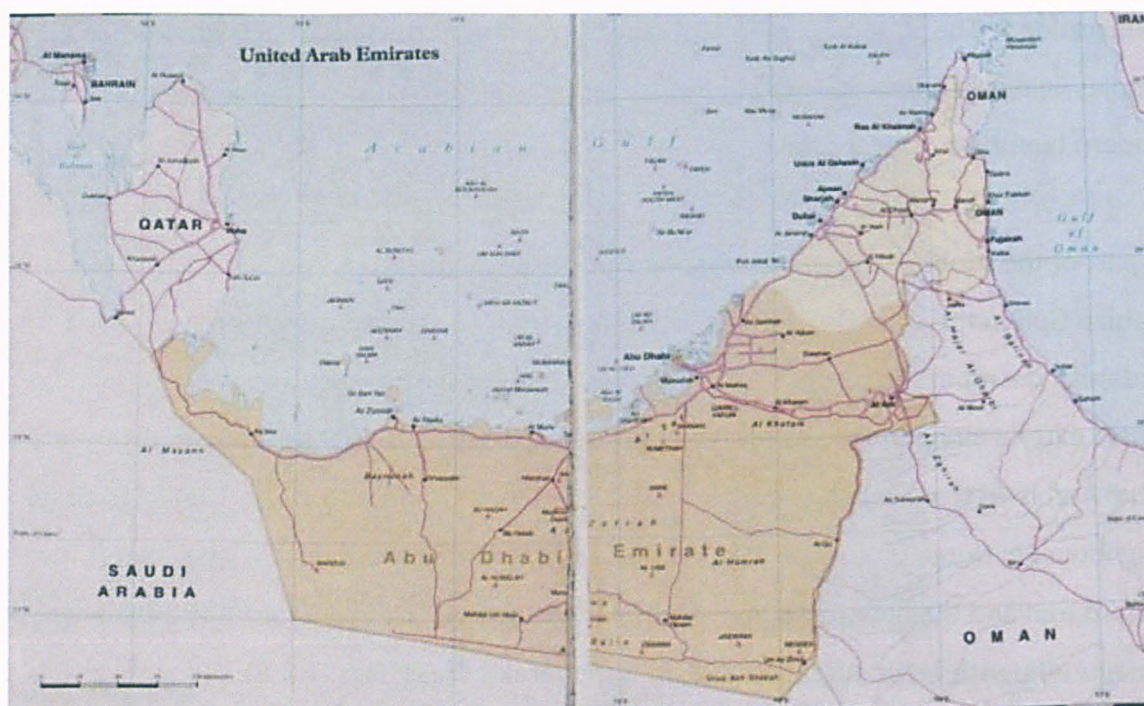


Fig.8 Robin Bidwell, 'Drawing of Emirates', 21cm × 19cm, (*Travellers in Arabia*, 1995), p.1

The climate of the UAE greatly influences the type of clothing worn. A subtropical and arid climate, its temperatures range from 38° to 49° C (100° to 120° F) between May and November along the humid coast and the hotter (but drier) interior. Winters, by contrast, are temperate with temperatures ranging from 21° to 32° C.³⁰ Consequently cotton is generally worn at sea level and wool in the mountains. The design was, and still remains, loose fitting. Traditionally, men and women covered up to protect their bodies and faces from the scorching sun. Women wore the burqa, the veil,³¹ and the *abaya*, 'a large piece of fabric that covers the body on all sides reaching down to the ankles with an opening in the front and two openings on the sides for removal.'³²

The Arabian Peninsula during the pre-Islamic era and up until the discovery of oil in the 1950s was tribal. Each tribe was a single unit of clan and family, giving a sense of cohesion, solidarity and integration, and was a source of political power and security against enemies. The prevailing system of government was the sheikhdoms. Sheikh were

³⁰ Bernard Gerard, *Les Emirates Arabes Unis* (Abu Dhabi: Ministry of Information and Tourism, Abu Dhabi, 1973), p. VIII.

³¹ Sayyid Hamid Harreiz, *Folklore and Folk life in the United Arab Emirates* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2001), pp.7-8.

³² Julia Al-Zadjali, (September 2010) *Omani Dress*. Available at: <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/BEWDF-v5/EDch5042.xml> (Accessed: 24 September 2015).

chosen by the ruling council of each individual tribe and their inherited chiefdoms were usually passed down from father to son.³³ Present day UAE, previously known to the British as the 'Pirate Coast', was made up of such sheikhdoms, or emirates and from 1820 was known as the Trucial States³⁴ based upon a series of treaties with the British government that established an informal protectorate by Great Britain until independence in 1971.³⁵

As various historians have shown, from the beginning of the nineteenth century the British Empire's trade interests resulted in various treatises between Britain and the Trucial States (Fig. 9). According to historian and political social researcher Shamsh Hamad Dhaheri, under pressure from the colonial administrators, the tribal sheikhs were forced to sign the 'General Maritime Treaty' with the British in 1820 granting Britain the freedom to navigate the Arabian Gulf. The treaty prohibited tribal sheikhs from entering into any agreement of an economic or political nature other than with Britain. With the threatening of Britain's trade routes with India along the Iranian coast from at least 1800, Britain decided to station its troops along the Trucial coastal area.³⁶ As a result the British created a protectorate region where the Emiratis were completely isolated from their neighbours with deliberate repression of the local economy and education. Neighbouring countries were stopped by the British from helping the Emiratis because Britain feared a loss of control in the area.³⁷ As John Gordon Lorimer in *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān and Central Arabia (1908-1915)* notes, at the beginning of the twentieth century the Arabian Peninsula consisted of the Trucial States, the Oman Sultanate, Qatar, the

³³ Hassan Abo Alaunan, *Dirasat fi Jughrafiyat li Doulah Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthah [Geographic Studies about United Arab Emirates]*, (Oman: Dar- Alsafia, 1996), p. 56.

³⁴ From the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the two most powerful tribes in southeastern Arabia (now the United Arab Emirates) were the Bani Yas and the Al Qasim, both an accumulation of smaller tribes. The Bani Yas, a nomadic tribe of Bedouins from Liwa in the south of present day UAE, moved to the fertile area of Abu Dhabi in 1761 and controlled nearby Dubai. In 1833 the Dubai and Abu Dhabi branches separated, with Dubai under the leadership of the Al Maktum. The Al Qasim, Bedouins from Julfar (now known as Ras Al Khaimah), dominated the 'Pirate's Coast' from the eighteenth century. Mohammed Abdullah, (1999) *Kra'ah Hadithah fi Tarikh Doulah Alimarat Ala'rbiah Almtduh* [Modern History of the United Arab Emirates], (Abu Dhabi: Research Centre Studies, 1999).

³⁵ Bernard Gerard, *Les Emirates Arabes Unis* (Abu Dhabi: Ministry of information and Tourism, Abu Dhabi, 1973), p. viii.

³⁶ Ali Mohammed Rashed, *Alaittifaqiat Alssiasia alty Eaqqadat bayn amarat Eamman wa Britania 1806-1971* [Political and Economic Agreements between the Emirates Oman Coast and Britain 1806-1971], (Sharjah: Emirates Writers Union, 2004), 2nd ed, p.31.

³⁷ Shamsh Hamad Dhaheri, *Emirates Alsahhel Almatssalah (1900-1971)* [Trucial Coast of Emirates (1900-1971)], (Abu Dhabi: the National Centre for Documentation and Research, 2010), pp.17-27.

Principality of Bahrain, Hasa, Nejed and the Principality of Kuwait.³⁸



Fig.9 Taylor Marvin, 'The Trucial States', (*Vanished Territories, Borders, and Names*. (<http://smokeandstir.org/category/history/>) (Accessed: 3 December 2013)

As the historian Mohammed Morsy Abdullah shows in *A History of the United Arab Emirates*, in 1922 Britain forced the sheikhs to sign the 'Concession Agreements' allowing Britain exclusively to excavate for oil.³⁹ (Fig. 10) Unfortunately, there was no decisive division of land and the sheikhs did not receive the intended compensation for the excavations from the British. This caused problems between the sheikhs and led to the subsequent creation of borders in 1935.⁴⁰ From 1952 there was a transition period. Under British rule a Board of Governors was established, and every four months there was a board meeting of all the sheikhs, which met under the chairmanship of the British until 1971, when UAE became an independent country.⁴¹

³⁸ John Gordon Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān and Central Arabia (1908-1915)*, Calcutta, India: Superintendent, 1915).

³⁹ Mohammed Morsy Abdullah, Leslie McLoughlin, *Tarikh Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah: Mokhtarāt mn Ahim Alwithaaq Albritini (1797-1965)* [History of United Arab Emirates: A Selection of the Most Important British Documents (1797-1965)], v.1, (England: Antony Rowe Ltd, 1996), p.514.

⁴⁰ John Wailiankson, *Hudud Aljazira Alarabiyya qiss Alddawr Albritani fi Rusim Alhudud eabr Alssahra* [The Borders of the Arabian Peninsula: the Story of Britain's Role in the Drawing the Border through the Desert], (Cairo: Madbouli Library, 2009), p.89.

⁴¹ Mohammad Morsy Abdullah, *The United Arab Emirates: a Modern History*, (London: Groom Helm, 1978), pp.247-262.

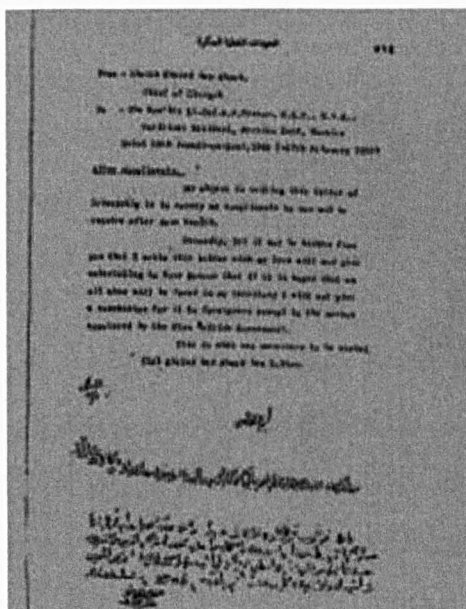


Fig.10 'Concession agreement', 1922 (*Tarikh Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah: Mokhtarat mn Ahim Alwithaaq Albritini (1797-1965)* [History of United Arab Emirates: A Selection of the Most Important British Documents (1797-1965)], p.514.

The British oil excavations were to substantially change the UAE. Until the 1930s the Emirati economy relied on basic human productivity such as fishing, pearl diving and limited farming. The most important was pearl diving. Pearls were sold to Indian dealers until the natural pearl trade collapsed in 1928 when the Japanese developed cultured pearls and began selling to India thus wiping out the industry in the Emirates. The discovery of oil in the 1950s was to change the economy dramatically in the 1960s, allowing the erstwhile pearl divers (and others) to work in the oil industry.⁴² Cities such as Abu Dhabi, for example, were transformed by the introduction of paved roads and low-rise concrete buildings that gradually replaced the previous dwellings constructed of palm fronds (*barasti*) or the mud huts of the wealthier families.⁴³

Following the British government's announcement of its intention to end its protectorate over the Trucial Coast in 1968, the United Arab Emirates became an independent federal state in 1971 consisting of six of the seven Emirates, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain and Fujairah, with Ras Al Khaimah joining in 1972. By this point it was one of the largest oil producing areas in the world.⁴⁴ (Fig. 11)

⁴² Shams Hamad Dhaheri, *Emirates Alsaheel Almatssalah (1900-1971)* [Trucial Coast of Emirates (1900-1971)], (Abu Dhabi: The National Centre for Documentation and Research, 2010), pp.18-21.

⁴³ Rashed Elwan, *Halah Aleqtasadeuh wa Alijymiah li Saheel Alimarat (1945-1971)* [Economic and Social Conditions in the UAE's Coast (1945-1971)]. (Sharjah: Gulf Press, 2011).

⁴⁴ Mohammed Abdullah, *Kra'ah Hadithah fi Tarikh Doulah Alimarat Ala'rbiah Almthduh* [Modern

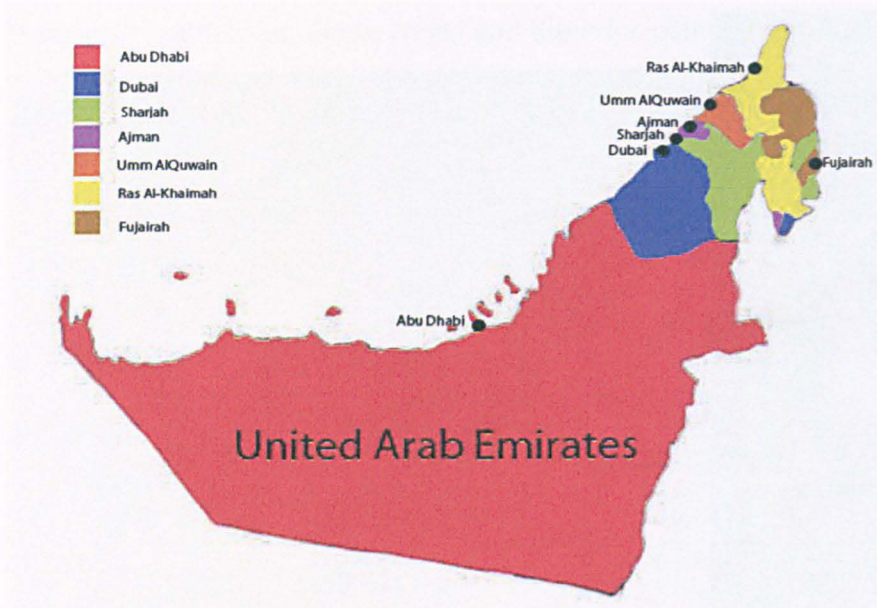
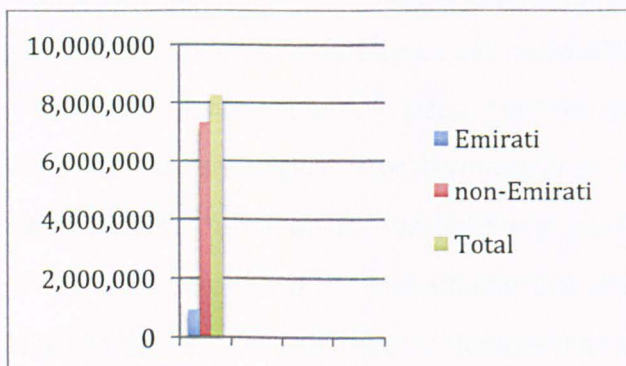


Fig.11 Karima Alshomely, 'Drawing of UAE map showing the seven Emirates', 2014

In 2010, no longer a Bedouin society and with over 88% of the population from different nationalities, the practice of Emirati burqa wearing had dramatically declined.⁴⁵ (See chart below).



Emirates population in 2010

Overview of Literature on the Burqa

Amidst the complexities of language and translation identified above, although there is extensive literature about veiling practices in the Middle East, little specifically refers to the burqa as a particular form of face covering or to the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁶ Further, as J.

History of the United Arab Emirates], (Abu Dhabi: Research Centre Studies, 1999), p.23.

⁴⁵ Eabir Abdalhalim, *Alimart lihsa' Sukani* [Emirates Population], Emarat Alyoum (April 2011), Available at: <http://www.emaratalyoun.com/local-section/other/2011-04-04-1.376712>, (Accessed: 16 March 2016).

⁴⁶ Major studies on veiling and face covering include: Katherine Bullock, (2007) *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes*; Emma Tarlo, (2010) *Visibly Muslim: Bodies of Faith*; Fatema Mernissi, (2011) *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a*

E. Peterson notes in his historiographical survey of twentieth century publications on the Arabian Peninsula, relatively few publications focus on the Emirates. Peterson observes that the principal focus has been on monarchies and ruling families and 'As one might expect, the strongest focus has been on Saudi Arabia and Oman. The smaller Gulf States have been the subject of relatively less attention.....particularly the UAE.'⁴⁷

From my research I have identified two key bodies of literature that specifically reference the burqa as face covering. The earliest, are nineteenth century accounts written in English by British explorers or archaeologists who were part of the apparatus of the British Empire. The second body of literature more explicitly referencing the burqa dates from the 1980s, post-independence, and includes the work of western and Arab ethnographic and social researchers interested in documenting the changing dress customs and social rituals in the Arabian peninsula, including, in some cases, the United Arab Emirates.

If we look to the earliest sources, the accounts and myths surrounding the burqa are based primarily on Western encounters through ethnographic studies, anthropological research, travelogues and photographs, most notably from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These inevitably originate in the main from colonial power nations and are thus influenced by colonial attitudes of thought. Such sources are closely associated with discourses of Orientalism and the majority of the writers that I discuss in chapter one worked for the British government within the Middle East. As James Canton notes:

The relationship between British imperial activity in Arabia and travel writing about the region is intimate. In the period prior to 1882, travels were undertaken by singular individuals (or married explorers), without exception from upper reaches of British society, who possessed independent incomes and the freedom to plan, execute and write up their adventures' specificity.⁴⁸

Muslim Society, Reina Lewis, (2004) *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* and Leila Ahmed, (2003) 'The Discourse of the Veil', in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* pp. 40-57.

⁴⁷ J.E. Peterson, 'The Arabian Peninsula in Modern Times: A Historiographical Survey of Recent Publications', *Journal of Arabian Studies*, Available at: http://www.jepeterson.net/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/arabian_peninsula_in_modern_times.pdf, v.4, (2), (2014), pp.247-248, (Accessed October 2015).

⁴⁸ James Canton, *From Cairo to Baghdad Traveller: British Travellers in Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011), p.4.

Their style of writing is frequently report-like with observations allegedly detailing what was seen and heard as an outsider. These accounts have been useful for my research because they contain the first identifiable references to the burqa in the Arabian Peninsula. As discussed in-depth in chapter one, the earliest written account that I have been able to find on the burqa is in the writings of Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890), the British explorer, spy and ethnologist and soldier. In *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (1855), one of Burton's best-known popular works, his well-documented journey of 1853 to Mecca discusses and illustrates the burqa. James Theodore Bent (1852-1897), an English archaeologist based in Bahrain, documents his observations of this area in his publication *Southern Arabia* (1900). This includes reference to the Bahraini burqa, locally referred to as the 'Buttra'.⁴⁹ The writings of his wife Mrs. J. Theodore Bent (1883-1898) in *The Travel Chronicles of Volume III: Southern Arabia and Persia*, published for the first time in 2012, provide further description of the Muscat burqa in Oman, including schematic drawings that I will discuss in relation to the Emirati burqa.⁵⁰

In *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sa'udi Arabia* (1949), the colonial administrator Harold Richard Patrick Dickson (1881-1959) focuses on Bedouin life: the areas they lived in, their tools, hunting traditions, cooking utensils, clothes, communal celebrations and laws of births, marriage, divorce and death. Dickson, an Arab speaker like Burton, wrote about colloquial sayings and expressions, seasonal work, and religious traditions. He also describes women's clothing, jewellery, hair coverings, veils and masks (burqas), and details the different forms of face coverings in Saudi Arabian tribes. He also used drawings for notation and description that are relevant to my study.⁵¹

Whilst these accounts are useful for a broader understanding of the burqa form in different areas of the Arabian peninsula, none of these early writers refer specifically to the burqa form in the Trucial States that later become the UAE.

⁴⁹ Theodore Bent; Mabel Bent, *Southern Arabia* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1900), pp. 16-17, available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/21569/21569-h/21569-h.htm> (Accessed: 28 October, 2012).

⁵⁰ Mabel Virginia Anna Bent, *The Travel Chronicles of Volume III: Southern Arabia and Persia* (London: Blenheim Colour Ltd, 2010).

⁵¹ Harold Richard Patrick Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sa'udi Arabia* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1865), 2nd ed.

Turning to the second body of more contemporary writing from the early 1980s onwards, these can be broadly characterised as ethnographic and anthropological studies employing oral history interviews to portray the everyday lives of Arab women and their perceptions. Seeking to avoid the exotic views associated with Orientalism, they frequently draw parallels with western attitudes. These accounts are important, as I will show, because they engage with aspects of the burqa in relation to specific regions and specific social practices.

In one of the earliest of such works published in 1982, *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman*, the anthropologist Unni Wikan focuses on Omani women in the 1970s who wore the burqa in the town of Sohari. Wikan shows the diversity of ethnic and cultural groups, and focuses on the segregated lives of the women discussing marriage, daily customs, living accommodation and so forth rather than specifically on the burqa face covering. Wikan's rich research observations were based on a six months stay as a non-Arabic speaker in Oman and provide important background material, though, as she acknowledges, her research is not an in-depth study of burqa practices.⁵²

The anthropologist Dawn Chatty, in a chapter entitled 'The Burqa Face Cover: An Aspect of Dress in Southeastern Arabia' in *Languages of Dress in the Middle East* (1997), writes briefly and generally on the burqa and its role past and present in the whole of this region with specific discussion of the Omani burqa at the end of the chapter. This section provides insights into the social practice of burqa wearing. However, her focus is primarily about the wider topic of the veil, its history, and social context in relation to the new feminist movement.⁵³

Various Arab writers working in the fields of Arab ethnography and the material culture of dress have noted the dearth of research on the Emirati burqa.⁵⁴ The first writers to address this absence are Aida Kanafani, Souad Athman and Reem El Mutwalli. Three

⁵² Unni Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp.88-108.

⁵³ Dawn Chatty, 'The Burqa Face Cover: An Aspect of Dress in Southeastern Arabia', in *Languages of Dress in the Middle East* (London: Curzon Press, 1997), pp.125-147.

⁵⁴ Examples of Emirati dress studies include: Abdullah Abdul Rahman, (2001) *Mellaabs wa Taqlediush Alzawje fi Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah fi Almady* [Historical Costumes and Traditions of Marriage in United Arab Emirates]; Mohammed Abdullah, (2007) *Aziah wa Zeenah Almrah Alemiratiuah* [Costume and Adornment of Emirati Woman]; Fatimah Al Mughanni, (2012) *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Women's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates].

works in particular consider the Emirati burqa from the differing perspectives and interests of an anthropologist, a cultural studies scholar and a historian. The first, by the Lebanese anthropologist Aida Sami Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment Among Arabian Women* (1983), is based on interviews with Emiratis who are familiar with local and national rituals. Kanafani's study aims to show how the embodied experience of smell, taste, and touch is ritualized in the United Arab Emirates. She presents a description of the ritualized serving of meals, with their range of complementary and contrasting tastes, textures, and colours constituting a nonverbal communication system and the placement of these aesthetic practices within such cultural beliefs as those of hospitality, purification, or scents. In the chapter entitled 'Body Rituals: The Mask', Kanafani discusses the Emirati burqa and its relation to society in general terms, preferring to use the word 'mask' throughout.⁵⁵ Kanafani interviews concentrate on the rituals associated with the practice of burqa wearing within the two areas of Ras Al Khaimah and Al Ain rather than covering all of the Emirati states and as a Lebanese woman she found it difficult to gain the complete trust of Emirati burqa-wearing women. Kanafani's writing is important as one of the first detailed accounts of empirical, social observation in the UAE and, in particular, her understanding of burqa wearing as an embodied social practice has informed my methods. Her approach is representative of the shift identified by Hansen of anthropologists who since the late 1980s:

have set a new research agenda on clothing, placing the body surface at center stage...Rather than defining culture in the foundational sense of comprising the shreds and patches of a specifically bounded society, we now view culture processually as created through agency, practice and performance.⁵⁶

The second work by the cultural studies scholar Souad Athman, is a chapter entitled 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrah Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aymar'at' [Changes in Women's Traditional Dress: Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society], in *Dirasat fi Elm Alfloklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore], (1998). Athman focuses on traditional women's dress according to political, social and economic changes within the UAE, however only within the specific area of the city of Al Ain. Athman discusses changes

⁵⁵ Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment Among Arabian Women* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), pp.64-72.

⁵⁶ Karen Hansen, 'The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspective on Clothing Fashion and Culture', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, v.33, p.373. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/25064858 (Accessed: 30 November 2012), p.370.

in types of fabric, jewelry, henna and perfume. Souad acknowledges the burqa as part of an Emirati women's adornment. She looks at the burqa's history in Al Ain, its colours, parts, and functions past and present, the practice of wearing the burqa and includes photographs and drawings.⁵⁷ By contrast, my research engages with the whole of the UAE and shows that the burqa form differed from region to region and even within each region according to a number of factors.

The third work by the historian Reem El-Mutwalli focuses specifically on dress in the UAE. Entitled, *Sultani, Traditions Renewed: Changes in Women's Traditional Dress in the United Arab Emirates During the Reign of Shaykh Zâ'id bin Sultan Âl Nahyân, 1966-2004*, the 2011 publication is based on her PhD study, completed in 2007. As the title states, El-Mutwalli's records the changes in women's traditional clothing styles in the UAE during the key period of its economic and social transformation from 1966 onwards and seeks to show how distinctive types of dress helped UAE women come to grips with modernity and their Arab Muslim identity. She includes the abaya, hijab, niqab, jellabya, undergarments, sandals and jewellery. She writes about the types of textiles used to make garments and includes a brief survey of the Emirati burqa. El-Mutwalli's method is based primarily on interview as a means to understand the changes that have occurred in the past forty years.⁵⁸ Her selected interviewees were those in or on the periphery of the royal family, well educated men and women who would have limited knowledge of the differing practices of burqa wearing or of burqa making. As a consequence this historical account pays little attention to the craft of burqa making, the different types of Emirati burqa or the everyday embodied social practices and rituals associated with the burqa.

Building upon and extending these contemporary studies my research is concerned specifically with the Emirati burqa from an aesthetic, artistic, cultural and historical point of view. In particular, I am interested in the historical traces of the burqa in the UAE, the practices of women burqa wearers and burqa makers, the intimacy between the burqa and its wearer, the associated rituals and how these inform my artistic practice. In this sense, my research can be seen as part of a broader shift in recent approaches to clothing,

⁵⁷ Souad Athman, 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrah Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aymarât' [Changes in Women's Traditional Dress: Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society], in Al Gohary, M. (ed.) *Dirasat fi Elm Alfolklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore], (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1998), pp.351-419.

⁵⁸ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani, Traditions Renewed* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority of Culture and Heritage, 2011), pp.266-294.

fashion and culture since the 1990s, where, as Hansen observes in relation to anthropological perspectives, 'The most noticeable trend is a preoccupation with agency, practice, and performance that considers the dressed body as both subject in, and object of, dress practice.'⁵⁹ In particular, Daniel Miller and Aida Kanfani's theories of the material culture of dress and of embodied performativity have provided a theoretical framing for my research.

In order to contextualise my research it has been necessary to engage with an extensive body of published literature in Arabic and English covering a number of disciplines including history, politics, cultural anthropology, psychology, dress, fashion, heritage, herbal remedies, religion and the visual arts. I have uncovered some of the most revealing facts from my numerous interviews due to the fact there has been virtually no published, in-depth research into the Emirati burqa.

Research Methods

My research methods have been drawn from a range of disciplines that could be described as an interdisciplinary journey from history, to anthropology, ethnographic observation, auto-ethnographic and analysis,⁶⁰ a study of dress, fashion, art and design and material culture alongside empirically led archival research, workshops, and documentation through drawings, photography, and video. Centrally, my research methods are those of a fine artist who engages with the materiality of the burqa and its histories as part of the process of making art and experimenting with new materials, technologies and concepts.

In establishing a history of the burqa and its making processes, I have chiefly employed methods drawn from ethnography, the study of human life at a specific time and in a specific place.⁶¹ My chosen methods have included using tools such as observation, interviews and questionnaires alongside empirical research.

⁵⁹ Karen Hansen, *The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspective on Clothing Fashion and Culture*, Annual Review of Anthropology, v.33, p.369. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/25064858 (Accessed: 30 November 2012).

⁶⁰ Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (New York: Berg, 2000), p.xvi

⁶¹ In 2012, I attended a three-day AHRC SKIP Ethnography Design workshop on different ethnographic methods, including the positioning of the researcher and the practices of field studies through participation and observation. <http://fada.kingston.ac.uk/research/design-research/ahrc-skills-development-award-skip/>.

Interview Methods

Firstly, I used interviews as a main method to gather previously unrecorded histories of burqa makers and wearers and through this to document different forms of the burqa within the Emirates. As a starting point, I made a list of all the regions in the UAE that I intended to research and also included Bahrain and Qatar as comparators. To find my interviewees I visited official institutions and organisations, heritage centres and social development centres in the Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar. These were invaluable in putting me in contact with women who had been burqa makers and who, in turn, put me in contact with other relevant people. In total, I was able to secure interviews with twenty-five Emirati women and five women from Bahrain. This primary research method focused on the experience and memories of women burqa makers and women who once wore or still wear the burqa today. The burqa makers I interviewed were predominately in their late 60s and 70s and early 80s, with a couple in their mid 50s. I needed to learn from these women about some of the lost social customs associated with the burqa, both inside and outside the home. (See Appendix 1, Interviews, pp.206-237)

I also interviewed four men: two artists and two social researchers as they had personal stories regarding the burqa. I was curious to find out their views about women burqa wearers and what they thought of the aesthetics of the burqa and the social aspects associated with it. In addition, I interviewed two London-based women who themselves came from countries that had face covering practices of their own. This enabled me to make comparisons between the Emirati burqa and other forms of face coverings. (See Appendix 1, Interviews, pp.206-237)

Interviews were conducted informally; I started by introducing myself and talking about my research, where I was studying and where I came from. I did not stick to a rigid 'question and answer' format, as this would have restricted the women's answers and the flow of the conversation. Instead, using a semi-structured method, I worked my questions into the conversation and, as a result, the women were generally able to relax. During these interviews, the interviewees openly talked about their lives and families. After the interviews, some women presented me with their old burqas, a highly personal gift since the item would have been associated with many personal memories. Others gave me burqa-making tools and others their farm produce! Notably, these women insisted on telling me how much they had appreciated the time I had spent listening to their stories

and appreciated my interest in and concern for the disappearing practices of the burqa. Most of the interviews were conducted in private homes. For those women whom I interviewed in governmental departments, I had to provide an official university letter by way of introduction.

Where possible I documented these interviews with video, photography and audio recordings to maintain the ethical credibility of the material. Some burqa wearers and makers refused to be photographed and only allowed voice recordings to be made while others only allowed me to take photographs of their hands while they were cutting and making the burqas.⁶²

Interviews in the Gulf States were conducted in Arabic. I have translated them into English, and I present these in the appendix as interviewees' personal stories. This is in keeping with traditional storytelling and anecdotes that have been passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth in a culture where the majority of the population were illiterate before the 1930s. As Nada Shabout notes in *Modern Arab Art*, Arabs were mainly a nomadic people who had no use or need for the written word. They were well known to the ancients for their oral tradition that served as the primary vehicle of communication and a repository for information.⁶³

In order to understand the production and distribution of burqa fabrics, I also located and visited two manufacturers in Mumbai, India through names and addresses printed on the packaging of burqa fabrics. Both were very welcoming and helped me enormously. I was able to not only interview the owners but was guided through the complex processes of the production of the burqa fabric. In Dubai, I interviewed a dealer who used to import burqa fabrics; his grandfather having started the business in the 1920s. This interview enabled me to gain further insights into supply and demand trends in the UAE and changes in terms of the popularity of certain brands. Some had, in fact, disappeared and were no longer available. (See Appendix 1, Interviews)

⁶² I obtained permission to photograph and/or video record specific activities as well as gaining permission to use this material for the purposes of my research and each participant signed a consent document. In some instances I interviewed illiterate women, originally from nomadic tribes, who were unable to fill in forms and instead gave verbal permission.

⁶³ Nada M. Shabout, *Modern Arab Art*, (United States of America: University Press of Florida, 2007), p.61.

My primary research through these interviews helped me to establish a context and understanding of the craft of burqa making and rituals associated with burqa wearing practices in the UAE, both in the past and the present day. They also enabled close empirical observation of the complex processes entailed in the production of the burqa from the preparing of the burqa fabric and it's marketing through to the production of different burqa forms. These understandings provided a basis for my subsequent art works. Unexpectedly, the interviews also initiated the beginning of an archive of burqa packaging through the examples given by the Indian manufacturers.

Participation Observation, Workshops and Questionnaires

The second ethnographic method I employed was 'participation observation' a field work observation long established in anthropology as a means of engaging with groups in order to understand their attitudes and gather further information.⁶⁴ As Joanne Eicher notes in an article entitled *The Anthropology of Dress* this is particularly important when dealing with the 'complex act of dress' where knowledge 'of the indigenous words and phrases that define actual items of dress and related practices, allows a more thorough understanding.'⁶⁵ As part of this approach I visited old souks and modern shopping malls and spoke to women in situ to find out where they preferred to purchase their burqas. I visited a craft centre in Sharjah in order to witness the process of burqa making in a different setting, curious to see how the centre kept traditional crafts alive by teaching students and visitors alike. I also experimented by wearing a burqa over a period of three days: How would I negotiate every day activities wearing the burqa? How would others react to me? Would anyone recognise me?

The third ethnographic method was exploratory workshops and exhibition audience questionnaires that explored participants' attitudes toward the burqa as discussed in chapters four and five. I ran workshops in the UAE at the Fine Arts Department of Sharjah University and in the UK at Kingston University's Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture. I also prepared visitor questionnaires for two exhibitions held in Sharjah Art Museum in 2013 and the Edge of Arabia in London in 2014. In both cases I asked for feedback from attendees about their knowledge of the burqa and their perceived responses to the burqa before and after seeing my work, and carried out interviews with attendees in London.

⁶⁴ Colin Robson, *Real World Research* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

⁶⁵ Joanne Eicher, *The Anthropology of Dress* (Maney Publishing Costume Society of America, 2000), pp.323-327. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/162782>, (Accessed March 2016), p.60.

(See Appendices, 2 and 3, pp.237-249)

As part of the testing of received knowledge about the burqa I also used quantitative methods⁶⁶ in the form of experiments to ascertain the properties of the different brands of indigo saturated textile used in making the Emirati burqa and how these correlated with my interviewees' perceptions of the quality of the burqa fabric, and to test the fabric's suitability as a possible painting surface for my work. Samples of burqa textiles and dyes were also sent to both Sharjah University and the Sharjah American University for analysis, as I was particularly interested in why they were used by Emirati women for cosmetic and medical purposes. These experiments and the resulting qualitative data are discussed in chapters two and three.

Archives and Visual Documentation

Archival research methods were used extensively in the UAE and Britain primarily to uncover unpublished manuscript, photographs, film material and artefacts that helped me to establish the history of burqa wearing practices in the Arabian peninsular and in the area now known as the UAE. I contacted national archives in Abu Dhabi in the UAE as well as individuals directly and through this was able to collect a plethora of written documentation, images, films and personal collections. I also looked at the British Museum collections of Omani burqas, the Victoria and Albert Museum's collections of photographs and drawings of face covering and veils, historical photographic and painted images.⁶⁷

In addition to the above photographic and data archives, I have relied upon my own field study interviews, photographs and videos to produce the first comprehensive mapping of how the burqa has changed over time, including in terms of its production process. This has entailed travel to numerous libraries and collections in London and the UAE. In UAE, these include the Sharjah University Library; Sharjah Library; The National Library of Abu Dhabi; Heritage Institution, Sharjah; Abu Dhabi, Dubai TV; the Art Institution in Sharjah, and private collections. In the UK my major sources were The British Library; The Victoria

⁶⁶ Colin Robson, *Real World Research: a Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.289

⁶⁷ From the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority I also managed to obtain a copy of historical documentary films about the Emirates (*The Emirates between Past and Present*, 1985) (*Pearl Diving, 1978 on the Emirates*).

& Albert Museum; The British Museum, SOAS, London University's Institute of Classical Studies Library / Joint library Hellenic & Roman Societies and the library of The Institute of International Visual Arts (INIVA).

Contemporary Art Practice Context

To critically reflect upon my own practice and the art works produced during this PhD, I have positioned my work in relation to the work of selected contemporary artists who engage with images of the burqa, traditional craft methods or materials to make their art, or those who employ imagery or methods associated with face-coverings and inscription. Discussed in chapters four and five, the majority have links with the Middle East or North Africa through birth, family or place of residence. I also interviewed several of the artists (see Appendix 1, Interviews).

Aims of the Thesis

Comprising of practice based, historical, theoretical and empirically led research the aims of this practice-based thesis are four fold. First, to explore the history of the burqa in the United Arab Emirates: its historic roots in the Arabian peninsula, its role within Emirati society past and present, and the diverse ways in which it has and continues to be experienced, perceived and understood as a symbolic, material and embodied object by burqa wearers and burqa makers. Second, to document and record the different types of Emirati burqa by focusing on the processes of its material production in both the past and the present, including accounts of the experiences of women burqa makers and wearers, and to establish a visual archive of the varying Emirati burqa forms. Third, to present a body of experimental artwork that is informed by, responds to, and materialises the complexities of the burqa as a physical, handcrafted and embodied sensory object imbued with symbolic, physical and personal meanings. Fourthly, the aim of this thesis is to provide a critical context for my art work in relation to selected contemporary artists' work that variously engage with the subject matter of women's face coverings or veiling, re-enactment and memory, and/or explore the cross overs between the processes and materials of craft and art making. At the core of this thesis is women's practice: the practices of women burqa makers, the diverse female practices of burqa wearing and my practice as a woman artist from the UAE.

Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis has engaged with and critically reflected upon the burqa's little known history as a material object that was once part of the everyday social life and rituals of Emirati women. Various perceived as a form of embodied adornment, of protection, a marker of local, regional and national identity, the burqa also carries the traces and imprints of a rich history of female craft practices and wearing practices. As such the thesis contributes to several fields of knowledge including the study of craft, dress, social practices and rituals that will have significance for the broad field of material culture studies as well for Middle Eastern and Arabic studies and the specialist areas of Emirati history and culture.

Within the field of fine art, the thesis offers a variety of methods of engaging with and animating the past through the use of the material qualities of an embodied object to convey knowledge about disappearing social and cultural practices and overlooked memories that are part of our history. Through the creation of new work that engages with the specific sensorial world of the Emirati burqa as an intimate object once made and worn by women, the thesis gives this little studied subject a new life in the present and transforms it from an inanimate, dead object to a living object with its own history and new contemporary meanings.

Outline of Thesis Chapters

This thesis consists of five chapters, an introduction, conclusion and appendix. The first chapter provides a context for the Emirati burqa through an introduction to the wider historical and social contexts of face coverings, an analysis of the history of the burqa face covering in the Arabian peninsula with a specific focus on the written and visual accounts of mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth-century British travellers in Arabia, and establishes the history of the burqa in the region now known as the United Arab Emirates.

Chapter two focuses on the craft of Emirati burqa making as a material and embodied object informed by interviews with burqa makers and textile producers. It records the processes involved in the production of the burqa textile through photographs, documents the different range of burqa manufacturing brands and packaging, and analyses the construction of the burqa and how it is worn in the UAE. This chapter also presents the outcome of experiments that test the burqa textile's properties and the

perceived qualities of this textile in relationship to the indigo dye content. It also introduces the rituals associated with the burqa for both burqa makers and burqa wearers.

Based on extensive interviews in the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar and a variety of historical sources, including photographs, and magazines, Chapter three centres on the diverse forms of the Emirati burqa and identifies the different types of Emirati burqa through reference to their specific characteristics and usage according to the rites of passage associated with age, status and regional identities. Using the visual device of a map, the locations of specific burqa designs within the Emirates are detailed. Through specific examples, I also demonstrate how the Emirati burqa differs from those worn in the neighbouring Gulf States of Bahrain, Qatar and Oman and Saudi Arabia. Drawing upon the material culture methods of Daniel Miller and Aida Kanafani's concerns with embodied experience, this chapter then focuses on burqa wearing practices and associated uses of the burqa textile in the UAE. My focus here is on the experiences of women who wore the burqa, their accounts of what it felt like to wear a burqa, and how these embodied social practices were part of their everyday lives and contributed to their specific identity as Emirati women.

Chapter four focuses on my fine art practice and details the research processes that informed the work, and the conceptual and intellectual shifts that occurred during my PhD research from my initial viewing of the burqa as a form of mask to the exploration of the materiality of the burqa as an aesthetic and intimate object with associated embodied histories and rituals. Through experiments with traditional craft materials, inscription methods and workshop initiatives, I present, analyse and reflect upon my practice-based research and the new visual language developed to convey the intimacy and ritualistic aspects associated with the Emirati burqa, informed by knowledge and experience of womens' practices of burqa wearing and burqa making.

As part of a wider context for my fine art practice, in this chapter I reflect upon my art works in relation to selected artworks by other contemporary artists who employ the image of the burqa, craft materials or methods of inscription. Focusing on the connections and disconnections between these artists' works and my own, I critically

reflect upon the distinctive approach and methods that I have employed to engage with the craft processes, materials, embodied memory, rituals and symbolic meanings associated with the burqa. My particular focus throughout is on the intimate relationship between the woman wearer and her burqa. I also analyses the role that workshops played in the developing my understanding of the burqa and its meanings for different audiences in the Britain and the United Arab Emirates.

Drawing primarily upon folklore stories and the personal accounts of Emirati women uncovered during this research, and concepts of the performativity of embodied material culture, Chapter five focuses upon my practice in the form of performative acts realised through video and photography and installations that engage with the Emirati burqa. The focus of this work is on materialising the imagined felt and lived experiences of Emirati women through film, photography and installation that centre on the wearing or making of the burqa and associated rituals. My engagement here is with performing the material culture of the burqa as a response to its disappearing practices and previously little recorded history.

The conclusion briefly summarises the main outcomes of the thesis, highlights areas for further research, and identifies my contribution to knowledge.

The appendices consist of further documentation: Appendix 1 contains transcriptions of all the interviews conducted as part of this research arranged in alphabetical order by interviewee. Appendix 2 documents audience feedback from the 2012 Sharjah exhibition. This includes the original Arabic with my English translations. Appendix 3 documents audience feedback from the 2014 London exhibition. Appendix 4 consists of interviewee consent forms and the questions that were used for the semi-structured interviews. Appendix 5 Documentation of Practice details all of the works shown in the London exhibition 'An Intimate Object', November 2014. It also comments upon the function of the works within the overall exhibition installation.

As indicated previously, the majority of my primary written sources is in Arabic and the English transliterations and translations are my own unless indicated otherwise. The majority of my interviews were also conducted in Arabic. I have tried to give the meanings

of the spoken and written word in English but in some cases there is no direct translation. This pertains particularly to the parts, shapes and names of burqas, and the everyday Emirati colloquial expressions or sayings that have not previously appeared in written form. In these cases, I have included the Arabic words and I have phonetically transcribed these into English, providing further explanation where needed. The footnotes include definitions of words, explanations of cities and countries, and the meanings of Arabic objects. Some references are in Persian; in such cases, an Iranian who speaks Arabic has helped with the translations.

In some cases, particularly in relation to reproductions of artists' works and historical photographs, there is a lack of information available about the sources: some works are undated or have no reference to size or medium. Some books in Arabic and English also do not include an editor, publisher and/or date.

Chapter One: In Search of the Emirati Burqa: A Historical Perspective

Introduction

In *The Secret Story of the Burqa from the 19th Century*, published in Arabic in 2007, Fatimah Saheel states that the burqa has long been part of women's traditional costume in the region, it characterised a community and was seen to express Emirati women's national identity.⁶⁸ Yet, as Saheel's title indicates, the origin of the burqa face covering in the Arabia Peninsula is largely undocumented and difficult to trace. The first written accounts and images of the burqa in the region are by western writers and photographers dating from the mid-nineteenth century. Traces of the burqa's prior existence are known through folk tales and stories passed down through generations as oral accounts,⁶⁹ however, as Souad Athman notes in relation to the UAE, it is not until after the introduction of book publishing in the Emirates in 1978 that an interest in the Emirati burqa and its history is evident.⁷⁰

The aims of this chapter are to provide a context for the Emirati burqa through an introduction to the wider historical and social contexts of face coverings, and the history of the burqa face covering in the Arabian Peninsula. Through the analysis of primary texts and images produced by western writers and photographers who travelled or lived within the peninsula from the nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century, and recent historical writing, I seek to uncover the traces of the distinctive burqa form in the region that is now known as the United Arab Emirates.

Before focusing on the burqa in the Arabian Peninsula it is important to stress that the practices of face covering are ancient ones that are not exclusive to the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula or the Muslim world, as numerous scholars have shown.⁷¹ They

⁶⁸ Fatimah Saheel, *Sir Alburqa, Qussys mn Algarn 19th* [The Secret Story of the Burqa from the 19th Century], (Abu Dhabi: Al Dhafra Press, 2007), p.100.

⁶⁹ For further detail on folklore in the UAE see Mohammed Morsy Abdullah, *The United Arab Emirates: a Modern History*, (1978); Faleh Handal, *Almafsal fi Tarikh Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [The Detailed Writing in the History of the United Arab Emirates], (1983); Sayyid Harreiz, *Folklore and Folklife in the United Arab Emirates*, (2001).

⁷⁰ Souad Athman, (1998) 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrah Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aimarat [Changes in Women's Traditional Dress, Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society]', in Al Gohary, M. (ed.) *Dirasat fi Elm Alf folklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore], (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1998), p.302.

⁷¹ Key texts on face-covering practices include the following: Syed Mutawalli AL Darsh, *Hijab or*

originated from ancient Indo-European cultures such as the Hittites, Greeks, Romans and Persians and Assyrians. According to sociologist Haifa Al-Unjri in *Aziah: Tha'qafah wa Tarikh* [Fashion: Culture and History], for example, in 1500 BC the Assyrians passed laws preventing high-class Assyrian women from appearing in public places without covering their faces, as referenced in Assyrian scripts. They also imposed penalties on female slaves and servants caught wearing the face cover in order to prevent slaves from imitating women from the noble classes.⁷²

As various writers have shown, the different types of face coverings carry different meanings, according to various cultures at different points in history; these are associated depending upon family status, position in society and tribe. In Egypt, for example, during the Mamluk era of the thirteenth century, a woman's face covering was a piece of fabric which covered her head, face and shoulders. Only rich women could afford the fabric and so it was a status symbol.⁷³ It is similar to the woman's face cover worn in the Ottoman era, called the burqa (Yashmak), which is a piece of cloth ranging in length from 20cm to 40 cm and could reach to her knees or feet. A sewn edge on the upper part had a strip of silk surrounding the head to position the burqa under the eyes, and it was almost devoid of any decoration.⁷⁴ (Fig.1)



Fig.1 Pierre de Gigord, 'the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey', Photograph, 1852-1950, (<http://search.getty.edu/gri/records/griobject?objectid=5079291427>) (Accessed: 10 November, 2015)

Niqab, (2003); Azizah Al-ibri, *Women and Islam*, (1982); Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (2000); Marni Reva Kessler, *Sheer Presence: The Veil in Manet's Paris* (2006) and Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab Dress: a Short History: From the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times* (2000).

⁷² Haifa Al-Unjri, *Aziah: Tha'qafah wa Tarikh* [Fashion: Culture and History] (Kuwait: Al-Falah, 2011), pp.32-33. See also Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, 'Face Veils', *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Volume 5, 2010. <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/BEWDF-v5/EDch5079.xml?q=Face%20veils&isfuzzy=no#highlightAnchor>, (Accessed: 26 September 2015)

⁷³ Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (New York: Berg, 2000), p.104

⁷⁴ Amal Masri, *Aziah Alnisa fi Alahd Alothmani* [Women's Fashion in Ottoman Era], (Egypt: Dar Arabic horizons, 1999), pp.71-72.

The practice of face covering is also not exclusive to women. Men also cover their faces for reasons of tradition, to protect from the environment, to show power, to frighten off strangers and as a disguise. Fatema Mernissi, writer and sociologist, in *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* provides numerous examples of such practices ranging from the use of male face coverings as symbols of power in ancient Greece and Rome,⁷⁵ to the use of blue face veils during the day and night by the Tuareg tribe in North Africa.⁷⁶ (Fig. 2) El Guindi also recounts the example of the Berber men of North Africa using face coverings to protect against the sand and wind, and the unwanted gazes of women who found a man particularly handsome.⁷⁷



Fig.2 Unknown, 'Tuareg Nobility', early 20th century, 23 cm×14.5cm, (*The Worldwide History of Dress*, 2007), p.572

The Burqa in the Arabian Peninsula

The literal meaning of burqa in Arabic (*burqu'*) is 'content is covered' and consequently, the term has various meanings in the Arabian Peninsula beyond its prevalent association with women's face coverings. Notably, there are various animal burqas. One of the oldest and most well known in various parts of the world is the falcon burqa, placed over the eyes of the bird to limit its field of vision or to force it to sleep.⁷⁸ (Fig. 3) Similarly, the camel burqa, for example, exists in modern day Yemen, where it is used for working camels walking around large sesame seed grinders to extract the purest sesame seed oil. The burqa is used to obscure the camel's vision to prevent them from escaping or

⁷⁵ Fatema Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (London: Saqi, 2011), p.30.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.9.

⁷⁷ Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (New York: Berg, 1999), pp.120-154.

⁷⁸ Mohammed Al-Razi, *Mukhtar Al-Sahah: Arabic Lexicon* (Cairo: Dar Alhadeth, 2000), p.145.

becoming distracted,⁷⁹ (Fig. 4) as opposed to the Emirati women's burqa, which protects the face and enhances the eyes.



Fig.3 Ronald Codrai, 'Resting Falcons', 1953, Photograph, 20cm×20cm, (*Abu Dhabi: an Arabian Album*, 1992), p.150



Fig.4 Unknown, 'Camel and Sesame Seed Grinder in Yemen', 2007, photograph, (<http://www.14october.com/news.aspx?newsno=129651>) (Accessed: July, 2014)

The term *burqu* is also used to describe the highly decorated piece of cloth that is hung in front of the 'Kabba door' in Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the most holy shrine in Islam (Fig. 5). It is framed in wood, made of black silk with a green silk lining, and decorated with gold threads, carrying an inscription from the Quran.⁸⁰ As William C. Young argues Richard Burton, who I discuss later in this chapter, was perhaps the first western observer to realize 'that the Ka'ba was "dressed" as if it were a bride',⁸¹ in the annual ritual where

⁷⁹ Ali Aweidah, 'Sesame Squeezes Resist the Advance of Technology' Available at: <http://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/news38426.html> (Accessed: July, 2014).

⁸⁰ Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (New York: Berg, 2000), p.95
Rajab Ibrahim Abdel Jawad, *Almojam Ala'rbi Laasma Almellabs* [Arabic Lexicon of Clothes' Names] (Cairo: Dar-Afaq, 2001), p.57

⁸¹ William C. Young, 'The Ka'ba, gender, and the rites of pilgrimage' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25 (2), (1993. Available at:

the door of the Kabba was covered 'with the "married woman's veil" (*burqu'*)'.⁸² As I discuss later in chapter three, this has relevance to the rites of passage associated with the female burqa.

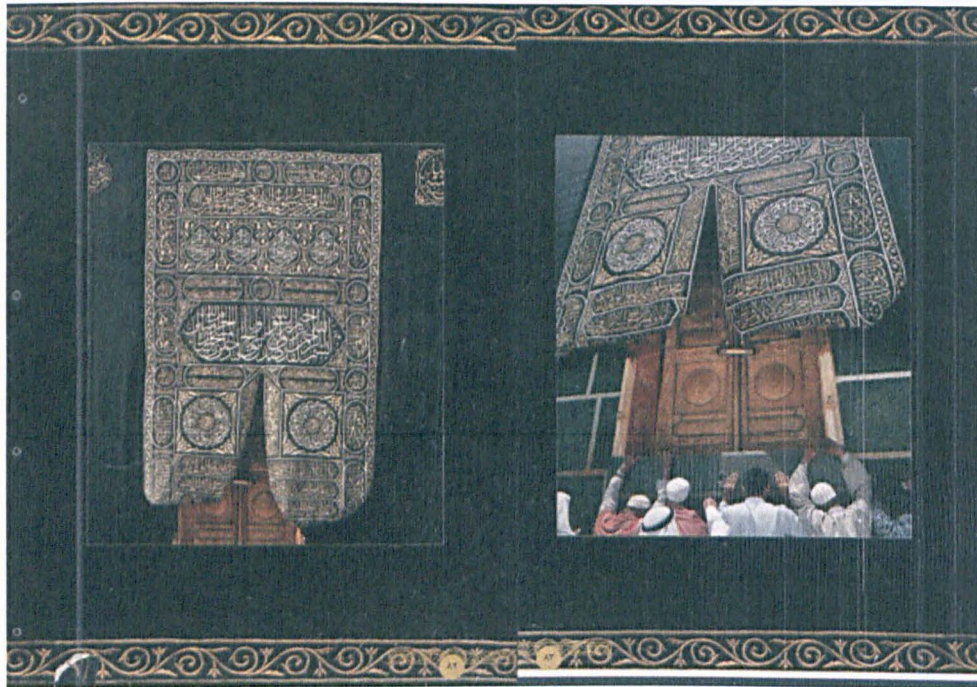


Fig.5 Abdullah Kurdish, 'Kabba door', 1998, Photograph, 25cm×40cm, (*Al Kaaba, Al Haramain Architecture's History*, 1998), pp.82-83

In terms of Arab dress, as El Guindi notes, this can be broadly 'distinguished in material terms on the basis of two usages: dress items that cover the head and hair... or wrap/cover over the body...and those that are explicitly and exclusively used to cover the face, partially or completely (such as *burqu'*, *qina'*, or *lithma*)'.⁸³ Further *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, as El Guindi observes, 'identifies over a hundred terms for dress parts, many of which are used for 'veiling', however she notes that 'few terms refer to items used as face covers only. These are *qina'*, *burqu'*, *niqab'*, *lithma'*'.⁸⁴ As discussed in the introduction, the *niqab'* is a veil worn by Muslim women that covers most or all of the face, having a narrow opening or mesh covering for the eyes.⁸⁵ The *qina'* is made out of a length of cloth that is draped over the head and allowed to hang down over the face use by women and men,⁸⁶ (Fig.6) and the *lithma'* is a half veil that covers the nose and lower part of the face.

http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.kingston.ac.uk/stable/164667?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents. pp. 285-300, (Accessed 20.03.2016)

⁸² Ibid. p.292.

⁸³ Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (New York: Berg, 2000), p.97.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.7.

⁸⁵ Nadia Al Qazi, *A'raas Alturath* [Heritage Brides], (Damascus: Dar Al Faker, 2008), p.97.

⁸⁶ Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, 'Face Veils', *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Volume

This was worn by both sexes among the Bedouin to protect the face from dust, heat and cold. It also had the function of masking the identity of a person and could be used to avoid blood-vengeance in raids.⁸⁷



Fig.6 Etienne Dehau, 'Women's Veil', Photograph, 20cm×15cm, (*Bedouin and Nomads: People Arabian Desert*, 2007), p.99

There are diverse opinions on when and why the burqa as a form of female face covering was first introduced into the Arabian Gulf. One account of the burqa's history is provided by the writer and Persian scholar Abbas Anjum-Ruz. In *Sayr-i tārīkhī-i burqa' az bāstān tā bihimruz: burqa' pūshān-i Khalīj-i Fārs va daryā-yi 'Umān / 'Abbās Anjum Rūz* [Those who Wear the Burqa in the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea] (1992), Anjum-Ruz argues that the burqa came originally from the Arabian Peninsula and was taken to Persia (present day Iran) to the coastal areas of Bushehr, Bandar Lengeh, Qeshm - during the Arab migrations prior to Shapur II's reign in the fourth century AD (309-370 AD).⁸⁸ (Fig. 7) In particular, he identifies this covering as an adornment and veil for women who lived in the south of the Persian peninsula, on the islands of the Arabian/Persian Gulf and the Omani coast. Here, in Hormuz and on the coast of Baluchistan, this form was called the *burkah* and *batulah* (burqa). Further, Anjum-Ruz argues that the burqa was not familiar to the Persians and

5, 2010. Available at: <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/BEWDF-v5/EDch5079.xml?q=Face%20veils&isfuzzy=no#highlightAnchor>, (Accessed: 26 September 2015)

⁸⁷ John Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.131.

⁸⁸ Shapur II, also known as Shapur II the Great, was the tenth king of the Sasanian (Persian) Empire.

their culture, and women who lived in other parts of Persia did not wear it.⁸⁹ Anum-Ruz, as far as I have been able to discover is the only scholar to argue that the burqa face covering comes first from the Arabian Peninsula to Persia. Instead, the majority of ethnographic studies of Emirati folklore and dress agree that the Emirati-type burqa came from the Baluchi who originated from the south coast of the Persian (Iran).⁹⁰



Fig.7 Karima Alshomely, 'Drawing shows Baluchi Region', 2014

Scholars concur that the burqa was introduced (or in the case of Anum-Raz re-introduced) into the Arabian Peninsula in the early eighteenth century by the Baluchi who mainly inhabited Baluchistan, an area between Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan,⁹¹ and spoke their own language (a mixture of Persian, Afghan, and numerous Pakistani and Indian dialects).⁹² We know that the Baluchi were in Arabia from the 16th and 17th centuries as the Portuguese used them as guards in the Arabian Gulf. Saad Al Hamidi, in *Baluchistan* discusses the significant migrations of the Baluchi including those to the southern Persian

⁸⁹ Abbas Anjum Ruz, *Sayr-i tārīkhī-i burqa' az bāstān tā bihimruz: burqa' pūshān-i Khalīj-i Fārs va daryā-yi 'Umān / 'Abbās Anjum Rūz* [Those who Wear the Burqa in the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea] (Tehran: Primo, 1992), pp.19-20.

⁹⁰ Vogelsang-Eastwood discusses face coverings in south Iran as follows: 'Many Shiite women in the Bandar region, for example, wear bright red, rectangular masks of the battulah construction, locally known as a burqa, decorated with various patterns. A red version signifies a Bandari woman, whereas Baluch women living in the Bandar region wear an orange burqa. In addition, specific designs relate to various towns such as Bandar Abbas, Bandar Langi, Minab, and so on. Many Sunni women in the Bandar region wear either black battulahs, which are usually squarish and long, or gold masklike forms. In contrast to the red, rectangular shapes worn by local Shiite women, the Sunni battulah is made out of black cotton or velvet'. Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, 'Face Veils', *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Volume 5, 2010. Available at: <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/BEWDF-v5/EDch5079.xml?q=Face%20veils&isfuzzy=no#highlightAnchor>, (Accessed: 26 September 2015)

⁹¹ Saad Al Hamidi, *Baluchistan* (Riyadh: King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, 2010), pp.20-23.

⁹² Ibid. 124-125.

cities. He cites that the British (who then controlled the southern Persian area) sent the Baluchi to Oman in 1727 to help the Sultan of Oman fight against the Al Qasim tribe, now based in the UAE. Crossing the Persian/Arabian Gulf,⁹³ the Baluchi settled first in Oman and gradually moved into the surrounding Gulf areas,⁹⁴ including the UAE.⁹⁵

According to Najlah Al Azzi, Baluchi women brought with them new traditions including the wearing of the burqa face covering. Baluchi women worked for local families as domestic servants and married local slaves who worked for wealthy Omani families in their palaces. Al Azzi argues that the Omani women from these palaces adopted the burqa but with more elaborate and decorative embroidery to underline their higher social status. While Baluchi women and Omani female slaves could only afford basic fabrics, their burqas were initially made of wool. Later in the mid twentieth century with increasing modernisation a golden shiny cotton fabric became fashionable among lower class women, giving the feeling of possessing a higher social status due to the shiny nature of the burqa that mimicked gold.⁹⁶

Some visual evidence of the Omani burqa at the turn of the twentieth century exists in the form of photographs. The earliest, dated 1898, and titled 'Arab Woman, Muscat' is by Emile Allemann who was part of the French Navy.⁹⁷ (Fig.8) This appears to depict the every day coarse wool burqa. However, several photographs produced as postcards by A. R. Fernandez just a few years later, in 1901 show the highly decorative Omani burqa.⁹⁸ These include the images titled "*Arab Woman" Muscat* (Fig.9) and 'Baluch Woman, Muscat' (Fig. 10). The latter apparently shows a Baluchi woman wearing a highly decorative burqa of quality alongside her magnificent jewellery.

⁹³ Ahmed Yaqoub Al Maazmi, *Albaluch wa Bladhem fi Daleel Alkhaleej: 1515-1908* [The Baluch and their Country in the Gulf Gazetteer: 1515-1908], (Beirut: Arab Diffusion, 2012), pp.77-79.

⁹⁴ Abeer Abu Saud, *Qatari Women Past and Present* (England: Longman House, 1984), p.58.

⁹⁵ Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo in the Arab World* (Richmond: Curzon, 1997), p.141.

⁹⁶ Najlah Al Azzi, *The Batulah - It's Origins and Developments*, in *Al Ma'thurat Al Sha'biyyah* (Folk Heritage), (Qatar: Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, 1995), (20), pp.24-25.

⁹⁷ Emile Allemann, 'Mascate' in *Le Tour du Monde*, Tome VII, nouvelle serie, 7e liv, 16 fevrier 1901. Reference to this volume and the reproductions of its twenty photographs is Available at: http://www.omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d20_Oman_old_photos.html (Accessed February 2016).

⁹⁸ No further details on Fernandez exist. The postcards are reproduced on: (http://www.omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d239_Omani_Masks.html) (Accessed February 2016).



Fig.8 Emile Allemann 'Arab Woman, Muscat', 1898, Photograph
(http://www.omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d20_Oman_old_photos.html)(Accessed February 2016)

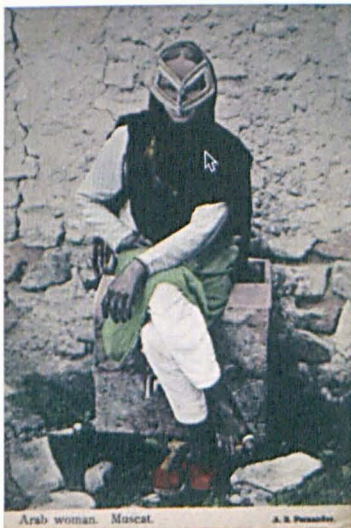


Fig.9 A. R. Fernandez, 'Arab Woman Muscat', Photograph, 1901, (http://www.omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d239_Omani_Masks.html) (Accessed February 2016)



Fig.10 A. R. Fernandez, 'Baluch Woman Muscat', Photograph, 1901,
(http://www.omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d239_Omani_Masks.html) (Accessed February 2016)

This image seems to contradict Al Azzi's argument that Baluchi women generally wore a basic burqa, although it is difficult to know whether this is a Baluchi woman rather than an Omani women posing. Nonetheless, taken together, the photographs of Allemann and Fernandez confirm Al Azzi's argument that there were two types of burqa: a refined and highly decorative embroidered form and the simpler wool burqa. (Fig. 11)



Fig.11 Unknown, 'Baluchi burqa', unknown 1965, (<http://www.khondagh.blogspot.com/>), (Accessed: September 2014)

The British Museum collection of burqas from the Arabian Peninsula, established in 2010, has two Omani burqas of relevance here.⁹⁹ The first dating from the late nineteenth century is referred to as the 'Burqa Oman' (museum number: 2010,6003.7) and the second is the 1920s 'Burqa Zanzibar'¹⁰⁰ (museum number: 2012,6030.61).¹⁰¹ (Figs.12& 13) These two examples are further evidence of the burqa in this region and are close in form to those depicted in the photograph of Baluchi women from Muscat by Fernandez (Fig. 10).

⁹⁹ The British Museum collection of burqas from this region currently contains some inaccuracies. Several of the burqas referred to as Omani are in fact from the Emirates and Qatar: (museum numbers: 2011,6009.43; 2001,6009.44; 2011,6003.30; 2011,6003.31; 2011,6003.32; 2012,6030.109). The British Museum is alert to these errors and I will work with the museum to rectify these after thesis submission.

¹⁰⁰ Zanzibar was under the control of the Sultanate of Oman from 1806 to 1963, hence the name. For further detail see Hussein Ali Falij, 'Zanzibar Dirasat Tarikh Alwujud Alomani fi East Al'iifrigi 1806-1856' [Studies of Zanzibar History while Omani Presence in East Africa 1806-1856] in *Academic Scientific Journal* (64) 2010, pp.59-84.

¹⁰¹ 'Burqa Oman' was donated by Carl Phillips in 2010; 'Burqa Zanzibar' was donated by Leila Ingrams in 2012.

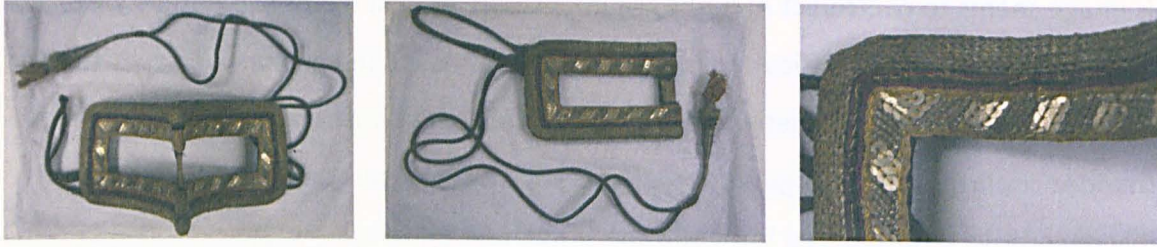


Fig.12 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa; Oman', British Museum Collection, late 19th century, Photograph, 2014



Fig.13 Karima Alshomely, burqa; Zanzibar, British Museum Collection, 1920s, Photograph, 2014

By contrast, in Arab folklore a popular story that has been passed down from generation to generation recounts how the burqa came to be first worn in Saudi Arabia before the practice spread across all the Gulf States. According to Azizah Al Hammadi, a burqa maker, the story allegedly dates back to at least the late eighteenth century. The story goes that the father of a girl from the *Mutayr* Bedouin tribe of Saudi Arabia wanted her daughter to marry outside of the tribe. The daughter did not want to marry the man her father had selected but the daughter could not go against her father's wishes. One day, the mother of the proposed husband came to visit the girl's family. The girl decided to play a trick by covering her face with a piece of black fabric that had two slits for the eyes and then acted like a mad woman in order to change her mother-in-law-to-be's mind about the marriage and she was, indeed, successful. When her father discovered what his daughter had done, he made her wear the burqa for as long as her mother and her sisters lived.¹⁰²

This folk tale suggests that the enforced wearing of the burqa was a form of punishment for the girl's breaking of the family honour code in refusing to marry a selected husband and thus affecting the family's reputation and potentially the father's status within the tribe. Perhaps, such a story relates to the relationship between wearing the burqa and

¹⁰² Azizah Al Hammadi, *Snahah Alburqas [Making Alburqas]*, (United Arab Emirates: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011).

family honour particularly in a patriarchal society where females were the property of the male, father or husband, and the story acts as a warning to females not to disobey. Chatty discusses the relationship between the female and the family in her account of the Omani burqa in the twentieth century as follows: 'the mask along with the black hair covering is a statement of the sexual modesty of the woman. Also tied up in this interpretation is the matter of personal dignity and the honour which decorous, generous, and stoic behaviour bestows on family. An unmasked woman is unthinkable'.¹⁰³

Western Travel Accounts and Visual Records

The first accounts that record the burqa's existence in the Arabian Peninsula are by western writers often referred to as Orientalists. According to Edward Said, the Palestinian writer and intellectual:

Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial style...Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident".¹⁰⁴

Said's use of the term Orientalism has caused much debate because of its sharp division between the colonisers and the colonized and the accompanying inference that all westerners held similar monolithic attitudes towards the Orient.¹⁰⁵ For the purposes of this research I am using the term Orientalist to refer to the diverse group of western government officials from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries during the colonisation of the Arab Gulf countries. Their books and reports were descriptive writings and anthropological studies that included some reference to local dress. The majority of the Orientalists in the Gulf States were male however, some women accompanied their husbands, and, as I discuss below, the female Orientalist Mabel Bent is unusual in recording her responses to the burqa in Oman.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Dawn Chatty, 'The Burqa Face Cover: an Aspect of Dress in Southeastern Arabia', in Lindisfarne-Tapper, N. & Ingham, B. (eds.) *Language of Dress in the Middle East* (London: Curzon Press, 1997), p.142.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (United States: Vantage Books, 1978), pp.2-3.

¹⁰⁵ For debates on Said's Orientalism see James Canton, *From Cairo to Baghdad Traveller: British Travellers in Arabia* (2011); Georg August Wallim, *Travels in Arabia: 1845 and 1848* (1979); Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (2004); John M. Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (1995); Mary Roberts, *The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (2008).

¹⁰⁶ Mabel Bent, *The Travel Chronicles of Mrs. J. Theodore Bent, Volume III: Southern Arabia and Persia* (Great Britain: Blenheim Colour Ltd, 2010), p.11. Examples of eighteenth and nineteenth

The people who lived in the Arabian Peninsula during the nineteenth century were nomadic¹⁰⁷ and as foreign male travellers, or indeed female travellers, it would not have been possible to get close to women to observe the practices of burqa making or wearing, nor to understand their cultural meaning.

One of the earliest written accounts of the burqa in the Arabian Peninsula is by Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890), the English geographer, explorer, scholar, ethnologist, and diplomat, in his three-volume *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* published in 1855-56. Although not the first non-Muslim European to make the Haji to Mecca, his 1853 pilgrimage is the most famous and the best documented of the time.¹⁰⁸ Notably, as Burton states in his introductory chapter, 'In the autumn of 1852...I offered my services to the Royal Geographical Society of London, for the purpose of removing that opprobrium to modern adventure, the huge white blot which in our maps still notes the Eastern and the Central regions of Arabia.'¹⁰⁹ Burton records his trip from the Red Sea port of Suez in Egypt to Al Madinah and then overland by camel caravan to the Holy City of Mecca in Saudi Arabia (Fig.14).

century female Orientalists in the Middle East include Esabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904); Lady Anne Blunt (1837-1917); Lady Mary Wortley (1689-1762) and Gertrude Bell (1868-1926). Their writings make no reference to the burqa.

¹⁰⁷ Fatimah Al Saayegh, *Alimarat mn Alqabila el Aldulah* [United Arab Emirates from the Tribe to the State] (Al Ain: Dar Alkatab, 2000), p.21.

¹⁰⁸ John Lewis Burckhardt, a Swiss published his account of his visit to Mecca in 1829. Burckhardt makes no reference to women's face coverings in Saudi Arabia, but does note the use of face veils in Egypt. 'Travels in Arabia; comprehending an account of those territories in Hedjaz which the Mohammedans regard as sacred', (London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street, 1829).

¹⁰⁹ Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah & Meccah*. First edn.V.1 (London: Spottiswoode & Co, 1855), p.1

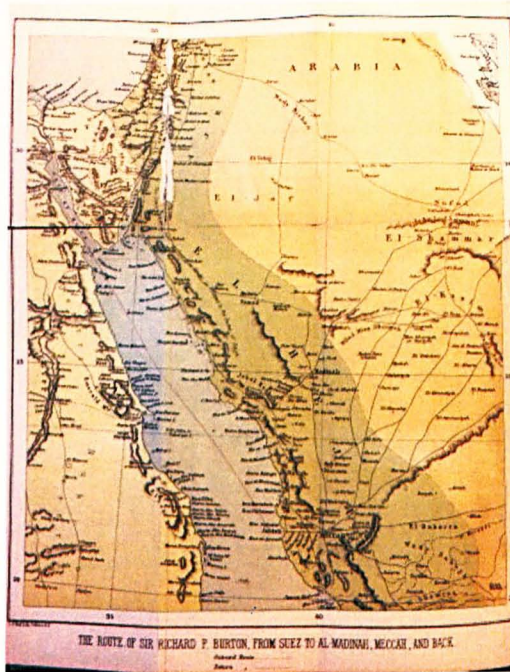


Fig.14 C.F.kell, 'The Route of Sir Richard Francis Burton, from Suez to Al-Madinah, Meccah, and Back', Lithographic, 1855, (*Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al- Madinah and Meccah*, 1893, 3rd edn.v.1) Frontispiece

Burton's account of the burqa is in the third volume published in 1856. It contains a lithographic colour print (by J. Brandard) depicting Burton dressed in a pilgrimage's costume standing next to a woman in a white garment covering her entire body and a face mask. In the accompanying text Burton describes the female dress of pilgrimage as he leaves Al-Madinah bound for Mecca (Fig.15).

The wife and daughter of a Turkish pilgrim of our party assumed the Ihram at the same time as ourselves. They appeared dressed in white garments; and they had exchanged the Lisam, that coquettish fold of muslin which veils with out concealing the lower part of the face, for a hideous mask, made of split, dried, and plaited palm-leaves, with two "bull's-eyes" for light.¹¹⁰

It is difficult to know from Burton's account if this style of face covering was widely worn by other female pilgrims or only those from Turkey or indeed only this family. As Vogelsang Eastwood notes, the pilgrimage custom has since been that women need not cover their faces and, if they choose to, the covering should not touch their skin.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, produced initially for an English speaking audience keen to know about the

¹¹⁰ Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah & Meccah*. First edn.V.2, (London: Spottiswoode & Co, 1856), p.141.

¹¹¹ Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, *Snapshot: Islamic Pilgrimage Dress (Ihram)*. The Berg Fashion Library, Available at: <<http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/BEWDF-v5/EDch5073.xml>>. (Accessed 10 October 2015).

exotic east, the image of this face covering has been, and still is, used frequently in books and magazines both in European and Arabic languages.



Fig.15 J. Brandard, 'The Pilgrim's Costume', 1855, Lithographic, 10.2cm×15.5cm, (*Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, 1856, 3, First edn.v.3) p.139

A later Orientalist account of the Arabian burqa is by James Theodore Bent (1852-1897), the English archaeologist and explorer based on his visit to Bahrain in 1889. Entitled *Southern Arabia*, it was first published in 1900, three years after his death by his wife Mrs. J. Theodore Bent (d.1929) from a compilation of his notes and her own diaries. In this co-authored book, one chapter is devoted to their one-month visit to the Island of 'Bahrain' and 'Muscat' in the Arabian Gulf from the end of January to the end of February 1889.¹¹² (Fig.16) Both regions were under the informal control of Britain.

¹¹²Mabel Bent, *The Travel Chronicles of Mrs.J.Theodore Bent, Volume III: Southern Arabia and Persia*, (Great Britain: Blenheim Colour Ltd, 2010), pp.8-11.



Fig.16 Geog Starfords, 'Map of Arabia Showing the Routes of Mr. J. Theodore Bent', 1900, 8cm×14cm, (*Southern Arabia*, 1900) Frontispiece

The Bent's briefly discuss the Bahraini burqa referring to it as the 'buttra' and observe the minutia of its fastening and its enhancement of the women's eyes as follows:

The *buttra* 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. 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 that 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.¹¹³

The account also records women wearing the burqa in Muscat in Oman as follows:

The women with their mask-veils called *buttra*, not unlike the masks worn with a domino, pleased us immensely, so that we sought to possess a specimen. They brought us several, which, however, did not quite satisfy us, and afterwards we learnt that an enterprising German firm had made a lot of these *buttra* for sale amongst the Maskat women; but the shape being not exactly orthodox, the women will not buy them, so the owners of these unsale-able articles are anxious to sell

¹¹³ Theodore Bent; Mabel Bent (1900), *Southern Arabia*, (London: Smith, Eldre & Co., 1900), pp.16-17.

them cheap to any unsuspecting traveller who may be passing through.¹¹⁴

The first description, in Bahrain, of the burqa is a curious mix of detailed observations on the construction of the face covering, its materials and colours, and the reference to the bridle that, while maybe descriptive of the burqa shape, carries overtones of the control and taming of an animal. In a similar way, the observations of the shape and size of the Bahraini burqa recognized its dual function of concealment and seeing; of hiding the women's features yet highlighting the beauty of the eyes, while the references to negresses introduce an exotic and erotic element that presumably would have appealed to their predominately western audience.

The second description, in Muscat, is also revealing because it shows that not only was there a significant difference in type of burqa in this region, but that there was already a market for the readymade burqa that the German individual had tried to capitalize on. The Bent's show discernment in refusing the Muscat burqa, as they want the same type that they saw in Bahrain.

Exceptionally, the original diaries of Mabel Bent, wife of Theodore Bent, still exist and we can compare her personal observations of the same trip whilst in Muscat, in her following much shorter account:

The women wear a sort of bridle of gold-coloured braids on their faces: most becoming if you happen to be a nigger. 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.¹¹⁵

Strikingly, the language is more direct and, conflating some of the detail recorded in the Bahrain visit, the diary entry emphasises the Bent's enjoyment of not being disturbed by the local inhabitants. However, the most important element for my study is Mabel Bent's accompanying drawings of the burqa that have not previously been referenced or discussed by other researchers (Fig.17). The original diary entry shows that Mabel produced these two small drawings in Muscat in Oman. What is remarkable is the accurate representation of the burqa on a woman's face showing two different views of

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.66.

¹¹⁵ Mabel Bent, Diary Manuscript, 1889, unpaginated, held at The Joint Library of the Hellenic and Roman Societies, University of London, Senate House.

how it sits. The shape relates closely to what later becomes known as the Emirati burqa. Such detailed drawings are important as rare historical evidence of the presence of this type of modern looking burqa in the Arabian Peninsula in the late 1880s and of its changing regional forms. As the archive entry on the diaries observe 'Mabel's diaries are more anecdotal, being concerned with the logistics of travel, the difficulties and mishaps occurring during the couple's journeys, and her impressions and opinions of the people and places that she encounters', whereas 'Theodore's notebooks and diaries mainly record information about the geography and history of the places, and details of archaeological work, inscriptions and languages.'¹¹⁶

A further striking feature of this manuscript, recently published in 2010 as *The Travel Chronicles of Mrs. J. Theodore Bent*,¹¹⁷ is that whereas the Bent's joint volume first published in 1900 includes photographs of the landscape by Mabel Bent, and drawn maps and watercolours by Theodore Bent, her diaries show that she also recorded detail through her own drawings.¹¹⁸

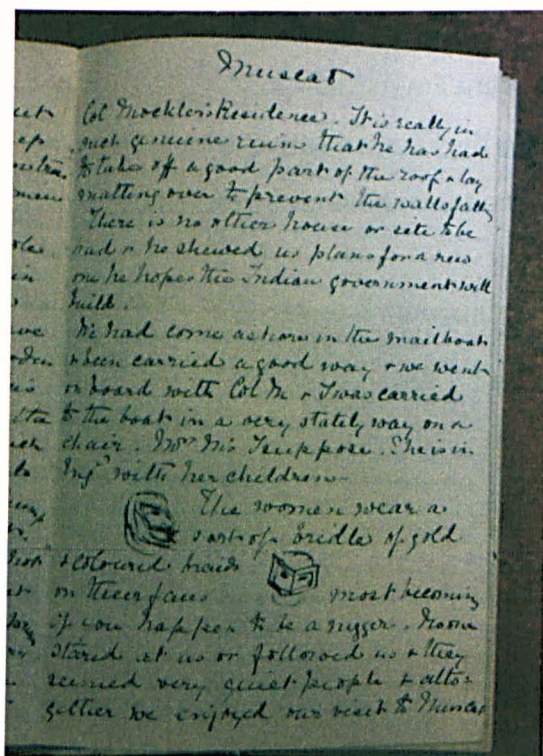


Fig.17 Mabel Bent, Diary, 'Muscat Entry', 1889 (unnumbered, unpagged), The Joint Library of the Hellenic and Roman Societies, University of London

¹¹⁶ University of London Research Library, Archives Catalogues:

<http://archives.uirls.lon.ac.uk/detail.aspx>

¹¹⁷ Mabel Bent, *The Travel Chronicles of Mrs. J. Theodore Bent, Volume III: Southern Arabia and Persia*, (Great Britain: Blenheim Colour Ltd, 2010)

¹¹⁸ The diaries of Mabel Bent contain frequent reference to the difficulties of producing photographs and the processes that she used. See, for example, *The Travel Chronicles*, 2010, p.141

Within ten years of the publication of the Bent's volume, there is further evidence of the Muscat burqa shown in the production of postcards photographed by A.R. Fernandez. This proves there was a market for local images for western travellers.¹¹⁹

A subsequent account of the burqa, also employing images, is by Harold Richard Patrick Dickson (1881-1959), a British Political Agent in Basra, Iraq, from 1920 until 1940. In *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sa'udi Arabia*, first published in 1949, Dickson records a 1940 visit to the region and draws comparisons between the different forms of the burqa that he has observed. He writes:

Burqa (locally pronounced Burga)--The black jezz (coarse silk) mask with slits for the eyes worn by all Bedouin women south of Kuwait and in Najd proper. It hangs down over the mouth and neck, and is kept in place by three cords, two round the head and one round the neck. A well-made burqa is very becoming and shows the eyes off to a great advantage.¹²⁰

Of particular interest are his accompanying illustrations that detail the construction of both the batulah and the burqa. The batulah form, with the use of sticks, indicates that this form of face covering is a predecessor of the current Emirati burqa. (Fig. 18) Dickson's labeling of the face covering is intriguing. Presumably they accord with the local terms he observed were in usage at the time whereas today the terms have changed. What he calls the batulah is known in the region today as the burqa.

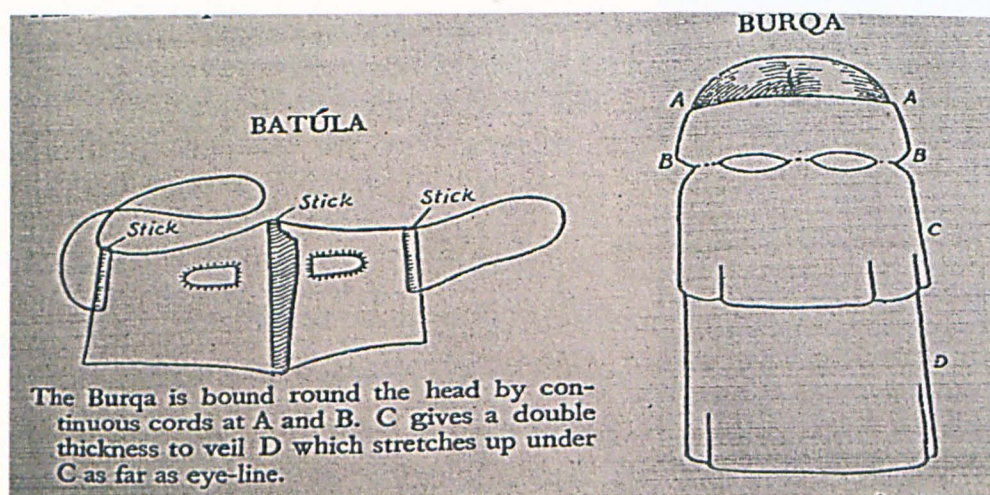


Fig.18 Harold Richard Patrick Dickson, 'Illustrates the face cover', 1940, (*The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sa'udi Arabia*, 1940) p.155

¹¹⁹ http://www.omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d239_Omani_Masks.html (Accessed: 1 March 2016)

¹²⁰ Harold Richard Patrick Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sa'udi Arabia*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1865), 2nd ed., pp.154-155.

Dickson's volume also includes photographs that show women wearing the Saudi Arabian burqa. The black and white photograph of 1940 shows most of the subject's body covered apart from the arms that show the bracelet and ring on each arm. Her fabric face covering is similar in form to the niqab used nowadays.¹²¹ (Fig.19) It is evident that she is posing for the photograph and she is showing her bare forearms, something forbidden in public in contemporary Saudi Arabia.



Fig.19 Harold Richard Patrick Dickson, 'Amsha', 1940, Photograph, 10cm×18cm, (*The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sa'udi Arabia*, 1940), p. 145

As the above writings and images show, in keeping with their times, the authors have used a quasi-ethnographic method to document what they perceived as of interest in parts of the Arabian peninsula during their travels. In terms of my study, what is striking is that there is so little interest in this item of dress and no interest shown in the lives of the women who are their subjects. Apart from the written references to modesty combined with the allure of the enhanced eyes, there is little interest in the traditions surrounding burqa wearing nor understanding or knowledge of its production or associated meanings. While both Mabel Bent and Dickson are interested in recording the precise construction of the burqa forms they show no interest in the individual women that wear them. The closest understanding that we gain from all of the above texts in this respect is that the burqa epitomises female modesty and pride and enhances the wearer's beauty.¹²²

¹²¹ Harold Richard Patrick Dickson photographs on the Middle East are held in St Antony's College, Oxford University.

¹²² Dawn Chatty, 'The Burqa Face Cover: An Aspect of Dress in Southeastern Arabia', in *Languages of Dress in the Middle East* (London: Curzon Press, 1997), p 88.

Nonetheless, these historical travellers' accounts and photographs of women's local dress are evidence of the burqa's existence in the Arabian Peninsula in the mid nineteenth century and of its varying, regional forms in Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The second significant body of historical material that provides in-depth evidence of the burqa's different forms in the region is a group of photographs dating from the 1950s and early 1960s at the point that the Trucial States were still under British rule and just prior to the period of intense modernization based upon oil revenue. In the majority of cases these photographs were taken by westerns working and living in the region or by visiting journalists.¹²³

The first groups of photographs are by Ronald Codrai (1924-2000) who had served in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War and was posted to Cairo in 1946. After travelling widely in the Arabian Peninsula he joined an international oil consortium and moved to what was then known as the Trucial States, now the UAE, where he lived and worked between 1948 and 1955. Unusually, Codrai's images focused on the people of the area and their lifestyles and are therefore a rare and unique visual documentation of a culture and way of life that has now completely disappeared. These included photographs of women of different ages, all wearing the burqa.¹²⁴ As I discuss further in chapter 3, each different burqa shape is significant and Codrai's photographs record some of these differences. Notably, all three of his photographs reproduced below show Emirati women outside the house; counteracting the idea of women being secluded in the home. The black and white photograph of 1951 shows women as traders in the souk or market in Dubai (Fig. 20). The women are shown wearing the full sized burqa enabling them to communicate freely in public with the male figure sitting between them. Their form of burqa contrasts with that of the highly decorative and therefore more expensive burqa of the educated woman worn in the same city and identified as a teacher of the Koran (Fig.

¹²³ Georgira Howell, *Gertrude Bell: Queen of the Desert Shaper of Nations*, (2007); Dame Freya Stark, *The Southern Gate of Arabia a Journey in the Hadhramaut*, (1936); H. V. F. Winstone, *Lady Anne Blunt: A Biography*, (2005).

¹²⁴ Ronald Codrai, *The Seven Shaikhdoms*, (London: Stacey, 1990). p.11-12. Codrai has published various volumes of photographs from this period including the following: *The Seven Shaikhdoms* (1990); *The Seven Shaikhdoms: Life in the Trucial States Before the Federation of the United Arab Emirates*, (1990); *Abu Dhabi: an Arabian Album*, (1992); *Travels to Oman: an Arabian Album* (1994); *One second in the Arab world: Fifty Years of Photographic Memoirs* (1996).

21). Further distinctions in the burqa form are evident in the photograph of the two women from Liwa, the region south of Abu Dhabi that extends toward the border with Saudi Arabia (Fig. 22).



Fig.20 Ronald Codrai, 'Women in Souk', 1951, Photograph, 15cm×11cm, (*Dubai: an Arabian album*, 1992), p.98



Fig.21 Ronald Codrai, 'A Teacher of Koran Class for Young Lady', 1953, Photograph, 26.5cm×20cm, (*Dubai: an Arabian album*, 1992), p.155

Fig.22 Ronald Codrai, 'Women from Liwa', 1953, Photograph 13cm×18cm, (*Faces of the Emirates: an Arabian Album - a Collection of Mid-20th Century Photographs*, 2001), p.75

Photographs by the Japanese photojournalist Yoshio Kawashima date from November 1962 when he made a week long visit to Dubai with his writer colleague Hiroshi Kato, for the *Sankei Shimbun* newspaper (Figs.23 & 24). Kawashima's photographs depict Emirati women in a Dubai market, all wearing the burqa together with the shayla (hair covering) and some wearing the 'abaya' as they are outside of the home. The burqas are large and of differing forms covering most of the face. The women are shown communicating with each other with their merchandise displayed on the ground. Although these photographs were taken in 1962 when the area was still a British protectorate, it was still generally a nomadic society where women would travel to sell their wares.



Fig.23 Yoshio Kawashima and Sankei Shimbun, 'Fish Market near the Old Souk: Women Selling the Catch of the Day While Looking after Children', 1962 16cm×12cm, Photograph, (*Dubai 1962, 2010*), p.59



Fig.24 Yoshio Kawashima and Sankei Shimbun, 'Women Taking an Active Part in Commercial Activities', 1962, 20cm×14cm, Photograph, (*Dubai 1962, 2010*), p.60

The differences between the Emirati burqa and the Saudi Arabian by the mid-twentieth century are particularly marked if we compare the above photographs with those of the British-born American photographer and writer Eleanor Nicholson who lived in Saudi Arabia for thirty years from 1950. In a photograph taken in 1950 Nicholson gives a close-up of two Saudi Arabian women and a small girl (Fig.25). Both women wear the black abaya and burqa; one is showing part of her hair and other woman's hair is totally

covered. Their burqas are large, reaching past their chins, with only the adverted eyes revealed. The shapes of these burqas have no similarity to that of the Emirates and are closer in style to the Bedouin burqa. The fabric is thick, rigid, and rough with a wide decorated forehead part. Unlike the Emirati burqa, they do not have the 'sword' part over the nose. Writing much later in 1983, Nicholson describes the Saudi Arabian burqa wearer as follows: 'She peers at me through the slits of her mask, closing one eye as though looking through a microscope, or focusing vision impaired by a veil...The mask covering her face also conceals her feelings.'¹²⁵



Fig.25 Eleanor Nicholson, 'Women from Saudi Arabia', 1950, Photograph, 12cm×8cm, (*In the Footsteps of the Camel: A Portrait of the Bedouins of Eastern Saudi Arabia in Mid-Century*, 1983), p.103

Another set of photographs from the mid twentieth century also shows that the Emirati-type burqa is different from the two types of Qatari burqas. In *The Danish Expedition to Qatar* (2009), the Danish ethnography team, who began to work in Qatar in the 1950s, show women from two areas of Qatar. In the north Qatari women wore burqas without the 'sword' part while women from south Qatar wear burqas with the 'sword' part. It is photographic evidences accords with Najlah Al Azzi's observations that there are two types of Qatari batulah (burqa): the Bedouin burqa (Fig. 26) and the city burqa (Figs. 27, 28& 29). The Bedouin burqa is long, reaching to the bottom of the neck with no 'sword' part and has very small eyeholes; some were decorated with gold. The city burqa, on the other hand, is rectangular in shape and only extends as far as the upper lip and has a

¹²⁵ Eleanor Nicholson, *In the Footsteps of the Camel: A Portrait of the Bedouins of Eastern Saudi Arabia in Mid-Century* (London: Stacey International, 1983), pp.59-101.

'sword' part.¹²⁶ The two forms of Qatari burqa are similar to Dickson's mid-nineteenth century illustrations of these burqas. (Fig. 18)



Fig.26 Jette Bang and Klaus Ferdinand, untitled, 1959, 15cm×20cm, Photograph, (The Danish Expedition to Qatar, 2009), p.120



Fig.27 Unknown, 'Women in Traditional Costumes', 1945, Ministry of Culture, Art and Heritage, Qatar

Fig.28 Jette Bang and Klaus Ferdinand, 'Batulah', 1959, 25cm×20cm, Photograph, (The Danish Expedition to Qatar, 2009), p.26

Fig.29 Karima Alshomely, Sample of Qatar City Burqa, Photograph, 2014

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown the word 'burqa' in Arabic means simply covering and it has various functions as a protection from elements, safeguard for animals and a sacred

¹²⁶ Najlah Al Azzi, *The Batulah, its Origins and Development*, Al Ma'thurat Al Sha'biyyah (Folk Heritage) (Qatar: Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, 1995), v.20, p.24.

covering in Mecca as well as a face covering. The practice of face covering for both men and women existed in ancient civilizations, pre-Islam and pre-Christian, and took different forms at different times and in different regions, most frequently denoting economic, social status and local identity. Within this wider context, I have sought to trace the history of the burqa form worn by women within the Arab peninsular. Although there is substantial historical evidence that the Baluchi migrated to Oman and brought the burqa with them from at least the early eighteenth century there are difficulties establishing a dependable history of the burqa in the Arabian Peninsula as historical sources, images and accounts are few.

The first written accounts and visual evidence of the burqa in these regions are by western travellers and date from the mid-19th century onwards and through these I have established that the Emirati-type burqa form certainly existed in the late 1880s in Bahrain and Oman from the drawings of Mable Bent and commercial postcards produced from the turn of the century, and in the area south of Kuwait from Harold Dickson's later drawings. As shown, accounts by Western travellers in the Arabian Peninsula have emphasised the exotic or concealing features of the burqa without understanding its wider cultural significance or its materiality as an object of adornment for the wearer. Unlike the head or full-face veil that, as Shirazi argues, 'Its symbolic significance is being constantly defined and redefined, often to the point of ambiguity',¹²⁷ the burqa face covering has received little attention.

From the analysis of these historical texts and images it is evident that there was little interest in the purpose of the burqa, no reference to the craft of burqa making or an in-depth study of the different types of burqas that were once worn in the region that became the UAE in 1971. In the following chapter I wish to rectify these gaps in our knowledge by focusing on the craft of burqa making through the accounts of Emirati women burqa makers.

¹²⁷ Faegheh Shirazi, *The Veil Unveil: the Hijab in Modern Culture* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2001), p.9.

Chapter Two: Making the Emirati Burqa: its Materials and Production

Introduction

Dress is many things to many people. It is a badge identifying a person as belonging to a certain community, class, and economic strata. Its meaning can change over time and it can convey a multitude of messages. The present association of the face and head covering, however, cannot be simply associated with the Islamist movement as appears to be the case in the popular press.¹²⁸

This chapter focuses on burqa making in the United Arab Emirates in order to show the complexity of this craft and the changing processes of its production that have occurred in the twentieth century. One of the primary aims of this PhD is to understand and document the fast-vanishing craft of traditional burqa making and to establish the diverse forms of the burqa in the Emirates. The research presented in this chapter is based upon fieldwork in different regions of the UAE. A total of twenty Emirati women, predominately in their late 60s, 70s and early 80s with a few in their mid 50s, were interviewed about both making and wearing the burqa.¹²⁹ As Reem El Mutwelli, a researcher in Islamic art and architecture and author of *Sultani*, argues in relation to the UAE, every generation post 1950 is important because each reflects the acceleration of social and economic changes that have taken place as a result of the discovery of oil. In addition, the associated migration of different nationalities to the Emirates has had a significant impact on the craft of burqa making. Once a domestic craft that was the occupation of Emirati women and enabled them to earn independently of their husbands, it is now almost entirely the occupation of Indian males.

The women I interviewed, especially those now in their seventies and eighties, are the generation that has lived through major cultural and economic changes. They have endured hard lives, witnessed the establishment of a new country and social changes with the advent of the oil era and a new global outlook. In general, these women are more used to traditional dress and are keen to maintain it, including the burqa. Women in

¹²⁸ Dawn Chatty, 'The Burqa Face Cover: An Aspect of Dress in Southeastern Arabia', in Lindisfarne-Tapper, N. and Ingham, B. (eds.) *Language of Dress in the Middle East*. (London: Curzon Press, 1997), p.145.

¹²⁹ Appendix 1. Interviews, 2013-2014. pp.206-237.

their mid-50s are more accepting of contemporary life and, although they generally like to retain their traditional dress, they also follow fashion.¹³⁰

Based upon interviews, an empirical study of the burqa in the UAE, and the few written sources that exist, this chapter focuses on material processes of making the burqa and is divided into two parts. The first details the steps in the production of the burqa textile, the use of indigo dye, and the marketing of the burqa textile. As part of this investigation into the qualities of the burqa fabric, I also present the outcomes of my experiments to test the quality of different burqa textile brands and present an inventory of the key different forms of Emirati burqa compiled during this research. This has included the building of a digital and physical archive of UAE burqa packaging comprising of thirty-one different samples from 1903 to the present day. In the second part, I outline and document the stages of the construction of the Emirati burqa, the changing materials used in its making, and the changing practices of burqa makers based upon interviews and recent historical accounts.

Part One: Materials used in the Manufacturing of the Burqa

In 2012, I met a British woman living in the Emirates. We talked about her first encounter with the Emirati burqa, which was in the UK. She recounted that while shopping in a John Lewis department store she saw a woman wearing a gold mask over her face. 'I was amazed how she could easily move her head with a heavy metal mask over her face', she said.

I was curious to understand and discover the mystery of this mask, so I started to follow her from one section to another, waiting for a chance to talk to her directly. When I saw her resting on a chair, I approached and asked her how she could move so easily with this metal mask on. The woman started laughing and then took my hand and let me touch her mask by moving my hand over its surface so I could feel the material. She told me the mask was called a burqa and that it was made from cotton with a shiny golden layer of silk.¹³¹

As this story indicates, although the burqa is still worn in the twenty-first century little is known about it: where it is from, what it is made of, or why it is worn.

¹³⁰ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani, Tradition Renewed* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), pp.7-15.

¹³¹ Meeting at Sharjah College of Fine Arts, August 2012.

Fatima Al Mughanni, amongst other Emirati writers, states that the Emirati burqa is usually made of a special kind of thick textile called *Shellah*, which is similar in structure to cardboard. It is naturally a bright maroon colour but it tends to darken or blacken over time. There are two types of fabric used. One is luxurious, made of what is called *Sherbet (Hussein)* which is very expensive, and the other is an everyday fabric *Sahsooty* or *Hachachey*.¹³² Souad Athman, an anthropologist, further notes that the colour of the Emirati burqa is, in general, dark and shiny. In the past, most burqas tended to be madder red, whereas nowadays they are more commonly golden-green.¹³³

Textile manufacturers have produced a range of colours of burqa fabric and there are varying accounts of the social significance of this in the UAE.¹³⁴ According to Shamah Said, who was a burqa maker I interviewed from Umm Al Quwain (UAE), the colour of burqa fabric varies depending on the age of the woman. Concurring with Athman, she says that older women prefer madder red burqas which are the most expensive, affordable only to women of high status, whereas girls and young women from lower social classes prefer the golden-green burqas because they are cheaper. Thus, the colour (as well as the size) of the burqa instantly reflects differences in status and age.¹³⁵

However, the different types of burqa fabric also have different names depending on which area of the UAE it is sold in. Aisha Yusuf, a burqa maker and designer from Kalba in Sharjah (UAE), states that women use a textile called *Zaergh Waergh*, which is either red or green, whereas Metha Said, a burqa maker from the Emirate of Ras Al Kamiah (UAE), recounts that there were two high-quality fabrics: one red, called *Sherbeti*, and one green, called *cambric*; the green fabric, *Qshashat*, was apparently of very low quality.¹³⁶ The social researcher Abdelaziz Al-Muslem states in *'Fashion and Cosmetics in the UAE'* (2011) that the glossy type of burqa textile comes in three different colours in the Emirates, a

¹³² Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Women's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.32.

¹³³ Souad Athman, 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrah Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aimarat' '[Changes in Women's Traditional Dress, Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society]', in Al Gohary, M. (ed.) *Dirasat fi Elm Alfolklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore], (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1998), p.389.

¹³⁴ Appendix 1, Interviews. Parvez Al Khatri, India, 19.08.2014.pp.210-212.

¹³⁵ Appendix 1, Interviews. Shamah Said, Emirates, 15.09.2013.p. 226-227.

¹³⁶ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Yusuf, Emirates, 26.08.2012.pp.235-236; Metha Said, Emirates, 22.08.2013, pp.220-221.

hierarchy based on cost and quality. The red is high quality and expensive, used by wealthy women and was apparently the only colour that existed until the beginning of the 1950s. Older women still wear this today. Yellow was of lesser quality in comparison with the red and was used by less wealthy women while the green was the lowest quality textile, used by all other women.¹³⁷ According to the woman I interviewed, this hierarchy changed in the 1970s. The green fabric became more expensive in the 1970s due to improvements in its quality by the production factories.¹³⁸ This upgrading of quality was apparently in response to the fact that manufacturers had observed that Emirati women preferred the colour green and it was more popular with elderly women as it made them look younger.¹³⁹

Production of the Burqa Fabric

Differing accounts also exist of where the Burqa fabric is produced. According to the writer Fatimah Al-Sari the burqa textile is imported from Mumbai in India or from Isfahan and other parts of Iran.¹⁴⁰ However, the majority of women I interviewed, as well as the dealers who have been importing the burqa textile for more than fifty years, insist that the burqa textile was, and is, made only in India.¹⁴¹

To fully understand how the burqa fabric is produced and marketed today I travelled to Mumbai in August 2014 at the invitation of the two major Indian manufacturers of the fabric (Fig. 1). Both family-run businesses had started to produce burqa fabric at the end of the nineteenth century so between them the two interviewees have a considerable amount of experience and many family narratives.¹⁴² (Figs. 2 & 3) I discovered that both manufacturers used the same fabric to produce the burqa. Mr Parvez, the owner of the Nimex factory, told me that the type of textile used is cambric cotton which is made in India and that the factory uses several different types of this fabric (Fig. 4).

¹³⁷ Abdelaziz Al Muslem, *Aziah wa Alzeenah fi Alimarat* [Fashion and Cosmetics in the UAE], (Abu Dhabi: UAE Heritage, 1999), p.33

¹³⁸ Appendix 1, Interviews. Um Said, Emirates, 01.10.2013, pp.232-233.

¹³⁹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Parvez Al Khatri, India, 19.08.2014, pp.210-212.

¹⁴⁰ Fatimah Alsiri, *Alziah Altaqlediuah le Alnisa fi Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Traditional Garment for Women in UAE], (Ras Al khaimah: Al Nakheel Society for Art and Heritage, 1999), p.75.

¹⁴¹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Ahmed Mohammed Taher, Emirates, 26.08.2012, p.229.

¹⁴² Appendix 1, Interviews. Parvez Al Khatri, India, 19.08.2014, pp.210-212; Yaser Khatri Iqbal, India, 18.08.2014, pp.216-217.



Fig.1 Karima Alshomely, 'Interview with Mr Parvez', Owner of 'The Nimex Factory', Mumbai, India, Photograph, 2014



Fig.2 Unknown, 'Ibrahim Bawa Al-Sabbagh' (1882-1947)



Fig.3 Unknown, 'Abdulkader Ibrahim Al-Sabbagh' (1920-2001)



Fig.4 Karima Alshomely, 'Bleached Cambric Fabric used for Burqa Textile', Photograph, 2014

The first stage of the burqa textile production process involves the white cotton cloth being dyed black (Fig. 5). As Mr Parvez explained, this process is repeated about twelve times using indigo dye (Fig. 6) before the last stage that dyes the cloth green. Allegedly, only he knows the exact recipe for each dye.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Appendix 1, Interviews. Parvez Al Khatri, India, 19.08.2014, pp.210-212.



Fig.5 Karima Alshomely, 'Dye Bath', Photograph, 2014

Fig.6 Karima Alshomely, 'Cambric Cloth Drying after being Dyed', Photograph, 2014

The second manufacturer interviewed was Mr Yasser, owner of K. H. B. Exports. He explained how the gloss or burnishing is applied to the fabric. In the past, a large wooden hammer was used. This was 40cms long, 20cms in circumference and weighed more than 15kg (Fig.7). The fabric was placed on a tree trunk and hit with the hammer until the cloth's surface shone (Figs. 8 & 9). This was a slow process and could take a whole day to get through two metres of fabric.



Fig.7 Karima Alshomely, 'Wood Hammer', Photograph, 2014



Fig.8 Karima Alshomely, 'Putting Burqa Textile onto a Tree Trunk in Preparation for Hammering', Photograph, 2014



Fig.9 Karima Alshomely, 'Hitting the Burqa Textile to make it Shine', Photograph, 2014

Mr Yasser recounted that in 1954 his father introduced a new machine into the manufacturing process so that the burqa textile could be polished more quickly and easily (Figs. 10 & 11). This machine clamps the cloth between two huge metal cylinders after the dyeing process. The method helps to straighten the cloth and the process is repeated several times until the cloth reaches the required degree of sheen. This method, as Mr Yasser explained, requires a certain length of cloth of two metres as it is easier to control this length under the press. The final dye batch includes the metallic colour.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Appendix 1, Interviews. Yaser Khatri Iqbal, India, 18.08.2014, pp.216-217.

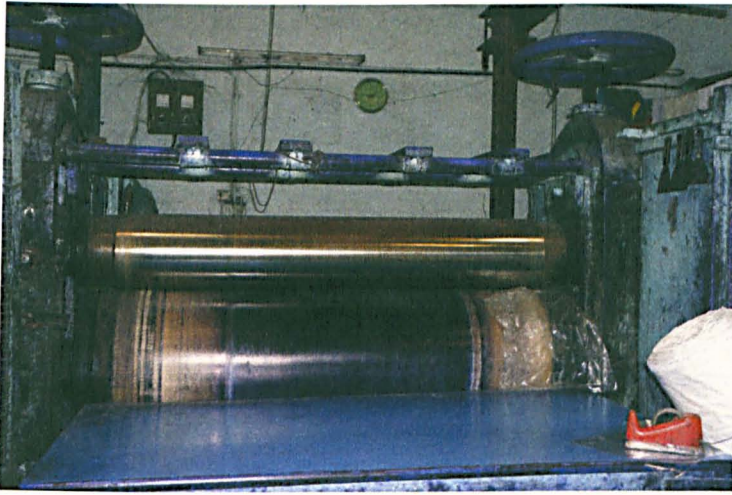


Fig.10 Karima Alshomely, 'Press Machine', Photograph, 2014



Fig.11 Karima Alshomely, 'Press Machine', Photograph, 2014

Both Mumbai factories now use these machines. First the rollers are cleaned and polished to remove any accumulated sediment that may scratch the fabric or impact on the result (Fig. 12). Both manufacturers use the same cambric fabric and fold the finished cloth into a small rectangle to protect the surface from scratches and humidity otherwise, the shine of the cloth would oxidise and the glossiness would be reduced (Figs. 13 & 14).

Apparently, it is not possible to roll this fabric as it is stiff, like cardboard, and the surface would simply crack.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Appendix 1, Interviews. Yaser Khatri Iqbal, India, 18.08.2014, pp.216-217; Parvez Al Khatri, India 19.08.2014, pp.210-212.



Fig.12 Karima Alshomely, 'Worker Removes Sediment from Cylinder', Photograph, 2014



Fig.13 Karima Alshomely, 'Folding Burqa Textile', Photograph, 2014



Fig.14 Karima Alshomely, 'Red and Gold Green Burqa Textile Folding', Photograph, 2013

Both manufacturers' accounts confirmed that Indian factories started to produce burqa fabrics at the end of the nineteenth century. Until 1960, they produced only the red fabric, at which point they added the gold-green colour. Thus, while Abdelaziz's publication

Fashion and Cosmetics in the UAE claims that there was also a yellow burqa fabric;¹⁴⁶ both of the Indian manufacturers interviewed refuted this. It is possible that Abdelaziz saw an old burqa made of green fabric that had simply changed colour due to being exposed to a highly humid environment.¹⁴⁷

Both factories visited used industrial indigo dye as allegedly organic dye does not produce the desired result. They both imported this dye from Germany until the price became too high in the 1960s at which point they began to source it locally, from within India.¹⁴⁸ The process of dying is potentially hazardous. The indigo dye is not prepared until the day of production as it becomes toxic if not used within a matter of hours. Timing is also important for the production of the textile as it only takes place from the beginning of October until the end of May each year. These months see no rainfall in Mumbai making the atmosphere dry and thus shortening the time it takes to dry the cloth after dying. This makes the process more commercially viable.¹⁴⁹

In terms of distribution, both factory owners stated that they used to export the textile to many countries, such as Iran and most of the Gulf States, but now it is generally only exported to Dubai, which acts as a central distribution point for the region.¹⁵⁰ The burqa textile is not used in India, itself, but Mr Yasser, nevertheless, recalled some thieves stealing large quantities of the textile from a customs warehouse. The thieves tried to sell the textile to merchants in India; however, nobody wanted to buy it because Indians do not use this kind of fabric, so there was simply no market or demand for it. Unable to sell it, the thieves eventually brought the burqa textile back to the customs warehouse.¹⁵¹ The price of the burqa textile has changed considerably over the years. Both manufacturers agreed that in the 1950s the price of the textile was cheaper due to the enormous production volumes as most women in the Gulf States wore the burqa at that time. Mr Parvez recounted that:

During the 70s, 80s and 90s and until 2005 the production/requirement was approximately 300 to 400 pieces of two yards [of cloth] every day,

¹⁴⁶ Abdelaziz Al Muslem, *Aziah wa Alzeenah fi Alimarar* [Fashion and Cosmetics in the UAE], (Abu Dhabi: UAE Heritage, 1999), p. 35.

¹⁴⁷ Appendix 1, Interviews. Yaser Khatri Iqbal, India, 18.08.2014, pp.216-217; Parvez Al Khatri, India, 19.08.2014, pp.210-212.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. pp.216-217; pp.210-212.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. pp.216-217; pp.210-212.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. pp.216-217; pp.210-212.

¹⁵¹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Yaser Khatri Iqbal, India, 18.08.2014, p.216-217.

but not during June, July and August, when no production occurred because of rain. Presently, we are making about 120 pieces of two yards every day. Only during June, July and August there is no production.¹⁵²

Further reasons given for the dramatic increase in the price of burqa textiles were the rising costs of raw materials, and, interestingly, climate change affecting the composition of the cotton and therefore a larger percentage of cloth rejection. Overhead costs have also risen as have labour costs due to the rising costs of living. In addition, it appears that the customer is much more discerning nowadays and will reject the slightest of imperfections therefore also driving up the price.¹⁵³

Burqa Packaging and Brand Names

After production, the fabric measures 2m x 1m folded and protected by paper packaging (Fig. 15). A special kind of tissue paper is used for this purpose for several reasons. Firstly, the paper must be light, soft and easy to fold to protect the textile from the humid atmosphere, which affects its sheen. Secondly, the paper packaging must not scratch the surface of the textile when it is wrapped. One of the manufacturers uses only paper packaging, whereas the other wraps the textile in paper and then puts it inside a decorative cardboard box and also encloses information about the quality of the textile, written in Arabic.¹⁵⁴ (Figs. 16 & 17)



Fig.15 Karima Alshomely, 'Packaging Paper', Photograph, 2014

¹⁵² Appendix 1, Email communication with Factory owner, Parvez Al Khatri, India, 23.02.2015.

¹⁵⁴ Appendix 1, Interviews. Yaser Khatri Iqbal, India, 18.08.2014, pp.216-217; Parvez Al Khatri, India, 19.08.2014, pp.210-212.



Fig.16 Karima Alshomely, 'Decorated Cardboard Boxes', Photograph, 2014



Fig.17 Karima Alshomely, 'Text Explaining the Quality of Burqa Textile', Photograph, 2014

The illustrations and text on the packaging indicate the brand of burqa textile in the same way as would any other branded product. The ultimate quality of the textile depends upon the fabric and type of dye used to produce it, and this is reflected in the price to the consumer.¹⁵⁵ (Figs. 18 & 19) However, each year manufacturers change the illustrations as a marketing tool but, essentially, they continue to produce the same brand if there is significant demand. They also generally change the name of each brand annually to keep the product alive, even though they are selling to the same burqa dealers.



Fig.18 Karima Alshomely, 'Abo Thlat-Najmat (Three Stars)', Photograph, 2013



Fig.19 Karima Alshomely, 'Abo-Aarnip (Rabbit)', Photograph, 2013

The names of the brands of the burqa textiles mostly refer to very feminine images and ideas, such as 'Gulf Girl', 'Miss World', 'Flower' and 'Horse Queen'. The popular 'Mama

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. pp.215-216; pp.210-212.

Fatimah' is reportedly named after a manufacturer's mother as a tribute to her.¹⁵⁶

According to Aisha Yusuf - who used to make burqas in the UAE - the graphics that appear on the packaging are meaningless, nothing more than a marketing ploy to maximise profit. The shop owner Ahmed Mohammed Taher of Taher Trading in Dubai, who has imported burqa fabrics from India for more than thirty years, confirmed this when I visited him, saying the burqa fabrics have not changed, only their names.¹⁵⁷

Perceptions of Quality

To understand how burqa makers perceived the difference in the quality of fabrics that they used, I interviewed sixteen women from different areas in the UAE between 2012-2014. I asked each interviewee where they had bought their fabrics, the price, and how they identified the quality. These women emphatically believed they could determine 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.¹⁵⁸ They also looked for the thinnest, non-fraying cloth which made sewing easier, and fabric that would keep its colour and not turn black after extensive wear. The fabric also, importantly, needed to absorb sweat to keep its lustre.¹⁵⁹ Surprisingly, no interviewee expressed concern about the potential toxic nature of the indigo dye used.

I conducted an experiment to test whether the commonly understood qualities related to the burqa textile were true; namely, the more indigo dye that comes from a fabric, the poorer the quality. These tests helped me to discover disparities between the perceived quality of the fabric and the actual quality. My hypothesis was that I would be able to discern if the traditional empirical methods used by burqa makers to assess indigo content in a burqa textile were reliable. If the results do not support the contention, then this would mean that the excess of indigo dye is not a reliable benchmark for distinguishing between high and low quality burqa textiles.

To discover the quality of each burqa textile I immersed eight pieces of differently branded burqa fabric in water and visually analysed the amount of indigo that coloured

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. pp.216-217; pp.210-212.

¹⁵⁷ Appendix 1, Interviews. Taher, Ahmed Mohammed, Emirates, 26.08.2012,p.229; Yusuf, Aisha, Emirates, 26.08.2012, pp.235-236.

¹⁵⁸ Appendix 1, Interviews, Aisha Abdullah Khamis Barashid Naqbi, Emirates, 28.08.2012, pp.223-224.

¹⁵⁹ Appendix 1, Interviews, Um Ali, Emirates, 30.08.2012, pp.229-231.

the water. I then used the individual indigo-coloured waters as a paint to be able to compare the density of colour. I also intended to use the results of this experiment to help me decide which type of burqa textile I might use as a basis for my own artwork. The experiment was carried out on 17 October 2013 at a studio in Sharjah, UAE as follows:

- Eight samples of different burqa textiles, all named brands commonly known to burqa makers, were laid out. All were the same size and each one was given a unique identifying number (Fig. 20).
- Glass jars with lids were filled with the same amount of water using a graduated measuring cylinder for precision (Fig. 21).
- Each textile sample was placed in a jar, ensuring that they were fully submerged in the water, and given a corresponding number. The covered jars were then left for twenty-four hours (Figs. 22& 23).
- The pieces of textile were removed from the jars.
- Production of an A4 size burqa watercolour using each of the eight indigo dyed waters (Figs. 24 & 25).



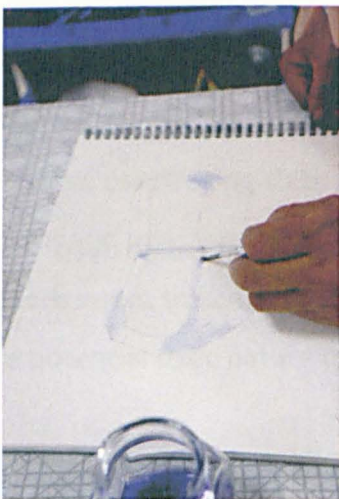
Fig.20 Karima Alshomely, 'Pieces/Samples of 8 Burqa Textiles', Photograph, 2013

Fig.21 Karima Alshomely, 'Filling Jars by Water', Photograph, 2013





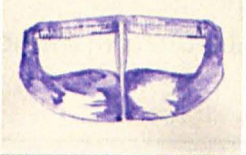

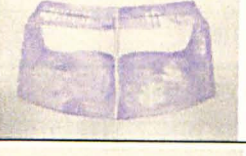



Fig.22 Karima Alshomely, 'Immersing Fabric in Water', Photograph, 2013

Fig.23 Karima Alshomely, 'Fabric Left for 24 Hours', Photograph, 2013



Figs.24 & 25 Karima Alshomely, 'Indigo-Coloured Waters as Paint', Photograph, 2013

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, the results of the experiment did not correspond with the women interviewees' perceptions about indigo dye and how they distinguished between high and low quality burqa textiles. As the table below shows, I documented my findings, labelling each named fabric with the corresponding drawing that I made with its residue water. The 'Mama Fatimah' brand, for example, considered to be of high quality, actually contained a large amount of indigo dye residue, whereas the 'Telephone' textile, which was considered a low quality brand, had very little residue. Thus, in spite of burqa makers' perceptions of the quality of the burqa fabric being based on the least transfer of indigo dye, this could not be verified. Based upon this experiment, I selected the Mama Fatimah fabric for my artworks as discussed in chapter 4.

Name of the burqa textile according to the illustrations on its packaging	Paintings from the water tinted/coloured by the immersion of the textile
Rabbit, 1980	
Palm tree, 2013	
Three Stars, 1979	
Nimex, 1985	
Sun, 1903	
Aristocrat, 1932	
Telephone, 1955	
Mama Fatimah, 2001	

An Archive of Burqa Packaging

During my research I realised that I was beginning to collect an archive of burqa fabric packaging of considerable historical value and I recognised the need to make an inventory for future use by researchers. In hindsight, the archive was initiated in 2002 when I first bought burqa fabric wrapped in delicate papers in a souk in the UAE. I became aware of the value of these packagings later through interviews and in 2013 when I was given

examples by a burqa maker and wearer. In 2014, I obtained some rare antique samples when I visited the two manufacturers in India. I became particularly interested in the burqa package as, rather than disposable packaging, it is important for both preserving the burqa and, as discussed in chapter four, it is frequently used for medicinal purposes.

Below is an inventory of the burqa packaging I have collected to date. This represents 31 samples of original burqa packaging with the earliest dating back to 1903. This inventory shows how burqa fabric packaging has changed over the twentieth century with some no longer in existence. I am proposing to donate this collection to the Emirati Heritage Institution in Abu Dhabi in the near future.

No	Brand name	Date of production	Notes
1	Sun	1903	
2	Aristocrat	1932	
3	Telephone	1955	
4	<i>Abo Abryg</i> (Teapot)	1960-1970	
5	<i>Abo Shahhof</i> (Boat)	1960-1970	
6	<i>Malikah Alkhel</i> (Horses Queen)	1965	
7	<i>Abo Korah</i> (ball)	1970-1980	
8	<i>Abo Thawoos</i> (Peacock)	1970-1980	
9	Abo Sarookh (Missile)	1970-1980	This is one of the best quality fabric
10	<i>Bint Al Balad</i> (Country Girl)	1972	
11	<i>Abo Tayerah</i> (Aeroplane)	1974	
12	<i>Medkhan</i> (Incense Burner)	1974	
13	Flower	1975	
14	<i>Bint Alkhaleej</i> (Gulf Girl)	1975	
15	Precious	1978	
16	<i>Abo Thlat-Najmat</i> (Three Stars)	1979	
17	<i>Abo-Aarnip</i> (Rabbit)	1980	
18	<i>Almas</i> (Diamond)	1985	
19	Wedding Burqa	1985	
20	Emirates Burqa	1985	
21	Nimex	1985-1986	
22	Al Zahra	1990	

23	<i>Abo-Sabiy Najmat</i> (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	<i>Malikat Alkhaleej</i> (Gulf Queen)	2002	
29	<i>Abo Safeen</i> (Two Swords)	2007	
30	Palm Tree	2013	
31	Three nine	2014	

Part Two: The Craft of Burqa Making

To fully understand the craft of Emirati burqa making it is first necessary to outline the individual parts of the burqa. At first glance it seems as if it is made of one piece of fabric but, in fact, it has many different parts and material components.¹⁶⁰ Irrespective of regional differences of shape or the use of readily available materials, the Emirati burqa is always made up of distinct parts as follows. The forehead part (Fig. 26) is a rectangular piece of fabric that covers the eyebrows and forehead. It is usually 1.5 cm wide for younger women and 3-5 cm for more mature women. The running stitch used slightly pulls the fabric to create gathering.¹⁶¹ The forehead part may also be decorated with gold coins dangling from gold stars attached to the top of the forehead piece (Fig. 27). This type of decorated burqa is worn by brides and wealthy women on special occasions such as Eid and henna nights,¹⁶² with the number of stars and coins varying according to length of the forehead piece.¹⁶³ According to Souad Athman's case study of the Emirati burqa, in some areas in the UAE it is believed that the burqa should not, in fact, be decorated with

¹⁶⁰ Fatimah Alsiri, *Alziah Altaqlediuah le Alnisa fi Alimarat Ala'rabiah* Almthdah [Traditional Garments for Women in the UAE], (Ras Al khaimah: Al Nakheel Society for Art and Heritage, 1999), v.6, p.78.

¹⁶¹ Azizah Al Hammadi, *Snahah Alburqas* [Making Alburqas], (United Arab Emirates: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.7.

¹⁶² Mahmood Bader, *Floklore Alzawje: Bahar, Hazzar wa Badyah li Al nas fi Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Married Folklore : Sea, Urban and Bedouin People in the United Arab Emirates]. (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Heritage Club, 2004), (70), pp.14-25.

¹⁶³ Ammar Al Senjray, *Alziy Alemirati Alghedem Hader fi Alsha'ar Ghyab fi Alhyat* [Old Emirati Costume, Present in Poetry, Absent in Reality], Al Dhafrah, (Dubai: Al Ghurair press, 2009), v.31, pp.54-59.

stars or gold except if a woman has fallen under the spell of magic or if she is ordered by the 'jinni' to adorn herself in this way.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, this type of burqa was popular until 1955 when gold was still affordable. Typically, these more expensive burqas did not belong to an individual but rather were shared between family members.¹⁶⁵

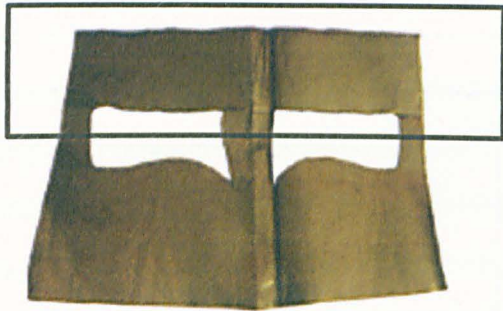


Fig.26 Karima Alshomely, 'Forehead Part', Photograph, 2013



Fig.27 Fouzia Hamza, 'Decorative burqa', 25cm×25cm, (*Folk Culture*, 2012), p.240

A small piece of wood is placed on both edges of the forehead part to strengthen the edge (Fig. 28). This used to come from the lower part of the date palm and was folded and stitched onto the fabric. According to my interviewees, date palm stalks were used

¹⁶⁴ Souad Athman, 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrah Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aimarat [Changes in Women's Traditional Dress, Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society]', in Al Gohary, M. (ed.) *Dirasat fi Elm Alf folklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore], (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1998), p.400.

¹⁶⁵ Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimirate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.32; Mohammed Abdullah, *Aziah wa Zeenah Almrah Alemiratiuah* [Costume and Adornment of Emirati Woman], (Abu Dhabi: Al-Dhafra Group Press, 2007), *Al-Dhafra*, v.47, p.33.

until 1975,¹⁶⁶ and were then replaced with matchsticks,¹⁶⁷ which saved a great deal of time and effort.¹⁶⁸ (Fig. 29)



Fig.28 Karima Alshomely, 'Date Palm Stalk', Photograph, 2013



Fig.29 Karima Alshomely, 'Matchsticks Placed on both Edges of the Forehead Part of the Burqa', Photograph, 2013

The *Al-Saif* or sword is the straight line that divides the burqa into two equal parts and helps to form the position and structural balance vertically over the nose (Fig. 30). In the past the divider was made of wood from date palm branches. It was cut with a knife to match the exact length of the burqa and the thickness was customised to meet the specification of each customer. One end was made into a triangular shape (Fig. 31). This original wooden structure was later replaced by medical wooden spatulas after the first hospitals opened in 1956 and women started to use these readymade forms as the 'sword'.¹⁶⁹ Ice-lolly sticks, which were thinner, were also later used.¹⁷⁰ (Fig. 32) At the end of the twentieth century, with an influx of Indian male workers who took over the

¹⁶⁶ Appendix. Interviews. Aisha Yusuf, Emirates, 26.08.2012, pp.235-236.

¹⁶⁷ Abdelaziz Al Muslem, local historian and social researcher, states that matches were introduced in 1940-1950 when local traders started to import consumer commodities from India. Conversation with author, 10th February 2014.

¹⁶⁸ According to Mrs. Aisha Yusuf, who cuts and makes burqas herself, she did not use matches at the beginning because matches were expensive; she used the stalks from a date palm instead because they were readily available and free. When her standard of living increased, she was able to pay for matchsticks and started using them in 1975. Appendix 1, Interviews, pp.235-236.

¹⁶⁹ Shamsh Hamad Dhaheri, *Abu Dhabi: Dirasat li Tarikh Mojtmah (1820-1971)* [Abu Dhabi: Studies of Social History (1820-1971)], (Abu Dhabi: National Centre for Documentation and Research, 2014), p. 145.

¹⁷⁰ Appendix 1. Interviews. Aisha Yusuf, Emirates, 26.08.2012, pp.235-236.

making of the burqa, kebab sticks were used for the 'sword' part.¹⁷¹ (Fig. 33) Burqa wearers apparently preferred these thinner sticks because they made the burqa look more elegant. Mature women allegedly typically prefer the 'sword' long (15cm x 2cm) while younger women preferred it shorter (10cm x 1cm) (Fig. 34). The 'sword' also helps to raise the burqa and allows the woman to breathe more easily.¹⁷² A running stitch is used to attach the fabric to the wood.

The 'sword' part of the burqa apparently needs a large nose to sit well. There is a popular Arabic saying about the 'sword' part, from the nineteenth century, that is as follows:

لين تبرقعت الفطسة قم اطلعن يا طوال الخشوم

'A woman who has a 'flat nose' and wears the burqa, a woman who has slim nose should leave the room immediately'.¹⁷³ This colloquial saying refers to how the burqa sits well, without moving, on a flat nose and gives the best looking burqa, whereas on a woman who has a slim nose, the burqa will constantly be falling off her nose, requiring a considerable amount of regular adjustment to make it look perfect.¹⁷⁴

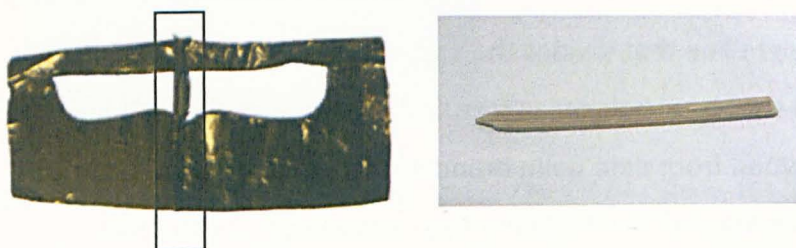


Fig.30 Karima Alshomely, 'Sword Part', Photograph, 2013

Fig.31 Karima Alshomely, 'Date Palm Branches', Photograph, 2013



Fig.32 Karima Alshomely, 'Medical Wooden Spatulas and Ice Lolly Sticks', Photograph, 2013

Fig.33 Karima Alshomely, 'Kebab Sticks', Photograph, 2013

¹⁷¹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Moza Saif, Emirates, 19.09.2013, p.227-228.

¹⁷² Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.72.

¹⁷³ Appendix 1, Interviews. Um Said, Emirates, 01.10.2013, pp.232-233.

¹⁷⁴ Zbyah Khamis, 'Al Aziah AlQataruah Alnisauh fi Al Mady [Qatari Women Garment in Past]', in Al Hamdan, A. (ed.) *Zeenah wa Aziah Almrah Alqatari* [Adornment and Costume Qatari Woman's], (Qatar: Folk Heritage Centre, 1997), p.36.



Fig.34 Ronald Codrai, 'Woman in Souq', 1950, 15cm×18cm, (*Dubai: an Arabian Album*, 1992), p.30

The 'butterfly' part is the excess fabric next to the 'sword' (Fig .35). It is considered to be an integral part of the burqa's eye slot. This part has a different name in each Emirate. Fatimah, a burqa maker from Sharjah, explained that in Sharjah it is called a 'Butterfly'; Um Said stated that in Dubai it is called a 'Mirror', and Nisa from Kalba said that this part is called '*Mestera*', meaning 'cover'. When the burqa is tied, this part drapes over the nose.¹⁷⁵

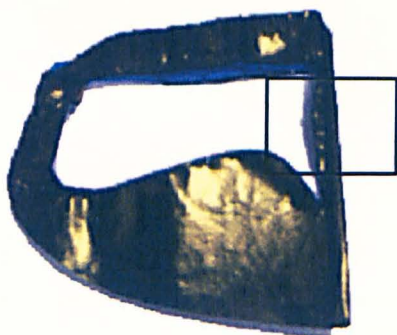


Fig.35 Karima Alshomely, 'Butterfly Part', Photograph, 2013

Another significant burqa part is the eye slots (Fig. 36). This is the showcase feature that highlights the woman's eyes. The size and style of this part depends on personal preference and fashion. Over time, there have been changes in design so when one compares a burqa from the early twentieth century with one produced now it appears

¹⁷⁵ Appendix 1, Interviews. Fatimah Said Mohammed, Emirates, 17.09.2013, p.219-220; Um Said, Emirates, 01.10.2013, pp.232-233; Nisa Ahmed, Emirates, 02.08.2014, pp.209-210.

that quite a dramatic change has taken place.¹⁷⁶ The 1950 photograph of two Emirati women shows how the small burqa eyes slots just enable their eyes to be visible. (Fig. 37) In general, the burqa eyeholes have become wider over the twentieth century thus revealing more than they conceal, transforming the burqa into a kind of masquerade mask.¹⁷⁷ (Fig. 38) The stitch used for this part of the burqa is the 'over stitch'.¹⁷⁸

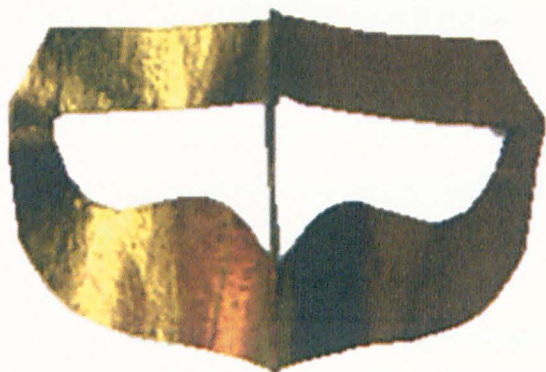


Fig.36 Karima Alshomely, 'Eye Slots', Photograph, 2013

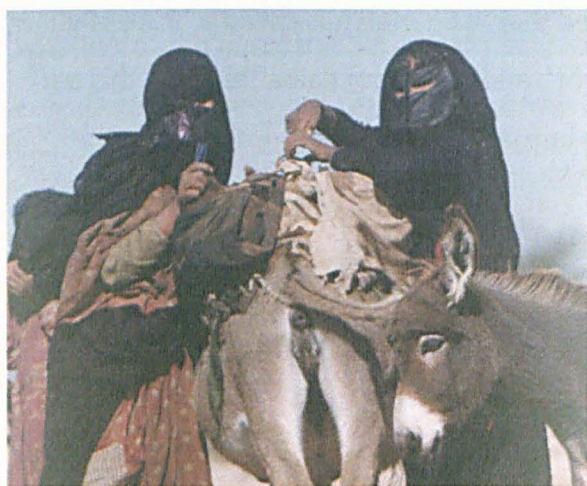


Fig.37 Ronald Codrai, 'Women from Liwa Burqa', photograph, 1950, 20cm×20cm (*Faces of the Emirates: an Arabian Album: a Collection of Mid-twentieth Century Photographs*, 2001), p.151

¹⁷⁶ Azizah Al Hammadi, *Snahah Alburqas* [Making Alburqas], (Abu Dhabi: Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.7.

¹⁷⁷ Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarat Alarabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), pp.74-79.

¹⁷⁸ Kathleen Barac, *A-Z of Sewing* (Country Bumpkin S. Aust, 2008), p.89.

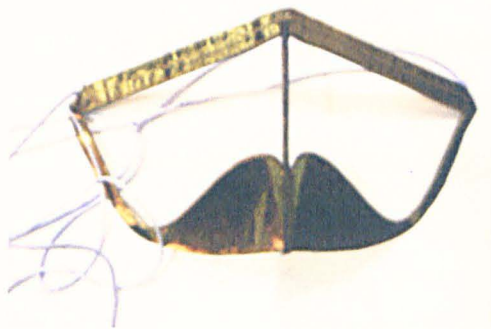


Fig.38 Karima Alshomely, 'Wide Eyes Slots of Burqa', Photograph, 2013

Al Kharah refers to the bottom corners of the eye slots that are attached to the 'sword', with the curved shape giving an aesthetically pleasing quality to the burqa (Fig. 39). This is the part that reveals to others where the woman is from, the Emirati burqa being significantly different from that worn in the rest of the Gulf region.¹⁷⁹ The Qatari burqa, for example, does not have this *Al Kharah* part (Fig. 40).

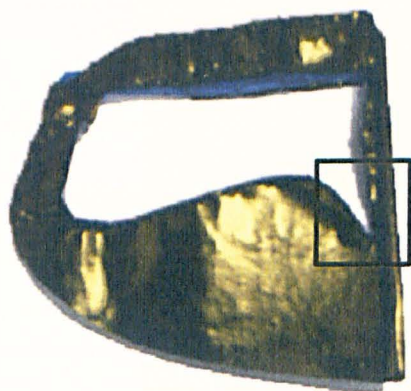


Fig.39 karima Alshomely, 'Al Kharah part', photograph, 2013

Fig.40 Salma Al Naimi, 'Burqa', 15cm×10cm, (Ghrzah fi Almady Bha'th an Mallaabs Almarah Qatari [Stitch in the Last, Research in the Qatari Women's Clothing], 2013), p.40

The 'cheek' parts that cover the woman's cheeks touch her cheeks directly and are made of two symmetrical parts joined at the 'sword' (Fig. 41). Again, this part differs depending on the age of the woman, with older women preferring more fabric. In the early twentieth century, the 'cheek' was longer and wider, the length being an indication of the woman's age: the longer the cheek, the older the woman (Fig. 42). Nowadays, some older women like to wear the style of the younger women's burqas because, not surprisingly, it makes them feel younger.¹⁸⁰ For the social researcher Najlah Al Azzi, the contemporary

¹⁷⁹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Mohammed Rushid, Emirates, 14.10.2013, pp.225.

¹⁸⁰ Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates]. (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), pp.33.

burqa cheek part has become smaller over the years and looks like a man's moustache, deforming the woman's face rather than making her look beautiful.¹⁸¹ (Fig. 43)

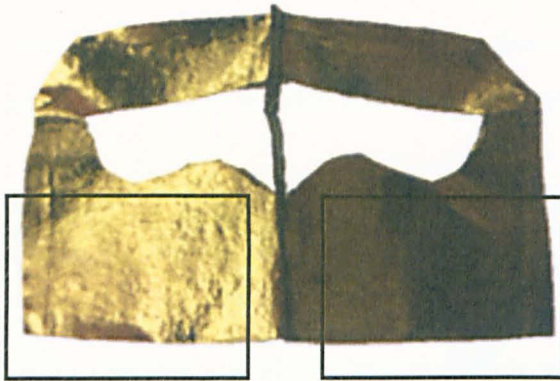


Fig.41 Karima Alshomely, 'Cheek Parts', Photograph, 2013



Fig.42 Gerard Klijn, 'Women from Abu Dhabi', Photograph, 15cm×10cm, (*Arabian Days*, 1977), p.13

Fig.43 Unknown, Untitled, Photograph, (*Turath Magazine*, v.2, 2013), p.2

Burqa 'cords' (*Al Shubug*) (Fig. 44) are used to fasten the burqa around the head. They are tied at the back of the head by an elegant running noose knot, which is easily adjustable. Each pair of cords is either sewn or passed through a set of gold rings.¹⁸² Women of the sheiks and wealthy families used real gold fastenings until 1975. Today, they prefer to use

¹⁸¹ Najlah Al Azzi, *The Batulah, its Origins and Development*, Al Ma'thurat Al Sha'biyyah (Folk Heritage) (Qatar: Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, 1995), v.20, pp.20-25.

¹⁸² Souad Athman, 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrah Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aimarat '[Changes in Women's Traditional Dress, Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society]', in Al Gohary, M. (ed.) *Dirasat fi Elm Alfolklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore], (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1998), p.397.

more modest cords and the symbolic nature of status has almost disappeared.¹⁸³ The cords are of two different lengths. The longest is on the right side and is 75cm long, while the shorter one on the left side is only 15cm long.¹⁸⁴ In the past, a red coloured cotton yarn that absorbed sweat was used and when tied, remained more securely in place.¹⁸⁵ Older women still prefer to use these red cords but younger women now use different types of cords, such as gold, silver, and nylon, which come in many different colours and can be coordinated with different outfits. Since 2000, cords for wedding burqas have also frequently been made of crystals.¹⁸⁶



Fig.44 Karima Alshomely, 'Al Shubug (cords)', Photograph, 2013

The *Al Mishakhis* (rings) (Figs. 45 & 46) were once made of pure gold and attached on each side of the forehead part. Cords were passed through them and tied. However, as previously mentioned, these were only used by the women of the sheiks and very wealthy families. Linking the burqa to the *Al Mishakhis* takes time and effort; so now the ties have now become much easier to fasten with cord.¹⁸⁷ Nowadays women regard the burqa as a fashion accessory and it can be a highly decorative piece, like an ornate mask for special occasions.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Appendix 1, Interviews. Um Ali, Emirates, 30.08.2012, pp.229-231.

¹⁸⁴ Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Rituals in the United Arab Emirates* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.65.

¹⁸⁵ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Yusuf, Emirates, 26.08.2012, pp.235-236.

¹⁸⁶ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Abdullah Khamis Barashid Naqbi, Emirates, 28.08.2012, pp.223-224.

¹⁸⁷ Azizah Al Hammadi, *Snahah Alburqas* [Making Alburqas], (Abu Dhabi: Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.5.

¹⁸⁸ Appendix 1, Interviews. Fatimah Said Mohammed, Emirates, 17.09.2013, pp.219-220.



Fig.45 & 46 Salma Al Nuami, 'Al Mishakhis (rings)', Photograph, 5cm×10cm; 15cm×20cm (Ghrzah fi Almady Bha'th an Mallaabs Almarah Qatari [*Stitch in the Last, Research in the Qatari Women's Clothing*], 2013), p.77

Burqa Making Practices

The craft of Emirati burqa making has also changed over time, reflecting economic and social shifts. Emirati women were once responsible for making their families' clothes,¹⁸⁹ and as Reem El Mutwalli notes, they either made their own burqas or asked relatives and neighbours to recommend someone who could. Indeed, in each area there would be one woman or more who specialised in making burqas. Upper class women would commission these women to make their burqas. The entire production process, from making to selling, was carried out within the individuals' private homes.¹⁹⁰ Sewing was a skill most girls typically learned during childhood and many women were therefore able to earn an income from it to support their families.

Burqa-making practices vary between women. Often, women would work together in groups for this purpose and organise themselves in such a way that everyone was responsible for a particular step in the process. Some women just made burqas for themselves and their daughters.¹⁹¹ Instruction on how to make a burqa would have come from a relative or neighbour or another woman within the community; it was traditionally a handed down craft. Most mothers of the women burqa makers I interviewed were not able to make burqas themselves. If a girl (8 to 11-years-old) wanted to learn how to make

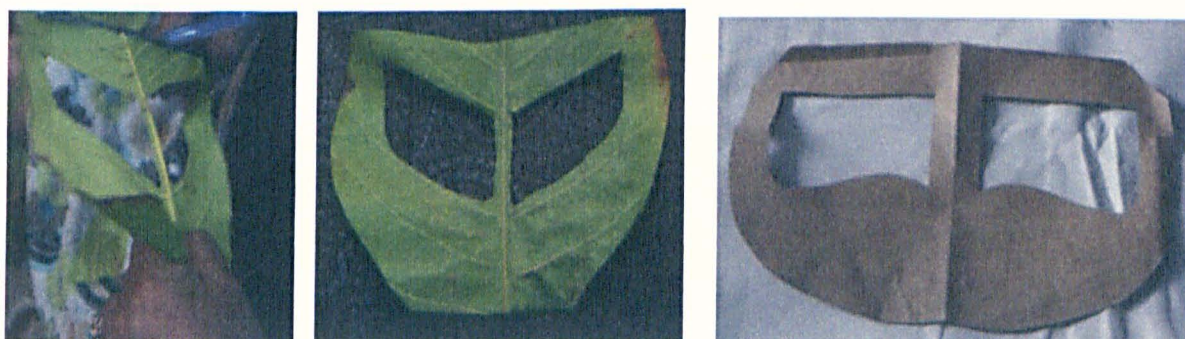
¹⁸⁹ Nasser Al Aboudi, *Alaziah Alsha'oubh fi Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Men's Popular Fashion in the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman], (Qatar: Folk Heritage Centre 1987) p.103.

¹⁹⁰ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani, Tradition Renewed* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.282.

¹⁹¹ Azizah Al Hammadi, *Snahah Alburqas* [Making Alburqas], (Abu Dhabi: Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.5.

a burqa, she would have to undergo rigorous training and practice in order to become proficient.¹⁹²

According to interviewees, the burqa textile imported from India was very expensive, so women did not use this fabric while they were training; cheaper materials were used for this purpose. Aisha, from Khar-Fakan (UAE), states that at the start of their training girls would be given leaves from the sea almond tree (*terminalia catappa*) and were required to cut the leaves into burqa shapes. This would have to be done by hand and they were not allowed to mark out the shape first (Figs. 47 & 48). This particular task would have taught the young girls how to use scissors and accurately cut burqa shapes. Mariam, a burqa maker also from Khar-Fakan, recalls that brown paper cement sacks replaced the sea almond tree leaves when the UAE began to build houses made of brick and cement in the mid-twentieth century¹⁹³ (Fig. 49)



Figs.47 & 48 Karima Alshomely, 'Cut Burqa Shape from Sea Almond Tree Leaf (*Terminalia Catappa*)', Photograph, 2014

Fig.49 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa made from Cement Sack', Photograph, 2014

Another interviewee, Aisha Yusuf, recounts that when schools opened in the UAE in 1962, female burqa makers started to train the girls using paper from the girls' exercise books.

¹⁹⁴ She used this method herself as she wanted to learn the cutting out process as quickly as possible.¹⁹⁵ (Figs. 50 & 51) Am Said, from Dubai, said that when newspapers were

¹⁹² Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Abdullah Khamis Barashid Naqbi, Emirates, 28.08.2012, pp.223-224.

¹⁹³ Appendix 1, Interviews. Mariam Ahmed Abdullah, Emirates, 17.06.2014, pp.208-209; Mohammed Alidaroos, *Alimarat bayn Almady wa Alhader* [Emirates Between Past and Present], (Dubai: Modern Press, 2001), p.140.

¹⁹⁴ Abtasam Al Khalid and Moza Al Sawidi, *Tarikh Altaleyim fi Alimarat kalal (1900-1993)* [Education History in Emirates During (1900-1993)], (Ajman: Culture and Media Department, 1993), p.59.

¹⁹⁵ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Yusuf, Emirates, 26.08.2012, pp.235-237.

introduced into the UAE in the 1960s,¹⁹⁶ burqa makers started to use these too as a teaching tool as they quickly became a common item in every household and were easy to come by.¹⁹⁷ (Fig. 52)

When trainee girls had become proficient in cutting out the burqa shapes from leaves, brown paper, exercise books or newspaper, their teachers allowed them to start practising using offcuts from the burqa textile itself. The girls would have had to practise for many hours to master the art of handling the fabric. The burqa makers would then help them to market their burqas through their own networks as a way of encouraging them. Women from the local area would have also been invited to come and have a look at the products and choose the ones they liked the most.¹⁹⁸ Another way that women learned how to make burqas was by attending informal women's gatherings that were supported by some burqa makers.¹⁹⁹ Over tea, women would have the opportunity to listen to and observe the burqa makers; later, in the privacy of their own homes, they would try putting into practise what they had learned.²⁰⁰



Figs.50 & 51 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa Pattern made from Exercise Book', Photograph, 2014



Fig.52 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa Pattern made from Newspaper', Photograph, 2014

¹⁹⁶ Sameer Khalil Salamah, *Sahafah Alimarat Qafzah Noeyah Zamin Qayasi* [Journalism in the Emirates Leap Forward], (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Heritage Club, 2005), pp.38-47.

¹⁹⁷ Appendix 1, Interviews. Um Said, Emirates, 01.10.2013, pp.232-233.

¹⁹⁸ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Abdullah Khamis Barashid Naqbi, Emirates, 28.08.2012, p.

¹⁹⁹ Azizah Al Hammadi, *Snahah Alburqas* [Making Alburqas], (Abu Dhabi: Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.10.

²⁰⁰ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Mohammed Rushid, Emirates, 14.10.2013, p.225.

My findings from interviewing burqa makers were that the majority did not need to take measurements in order to cut the burqa fabric. Each woman was so skilled that just by glancing at a woman's face she knew the correct size of her burqa.²⁰¹ There were no specific patterns to be followed: each burqa was cut according to the particular face shape and, for repeat customers, their previous purchases were used as a pattern.²⁰² An experienced burqa maker would be able to finish three to four burqas an hour, increasing the money she was able to make; a novice could take up to an hour to make one burqa, as can a woman making it for herself or a member of her family, especially if it is for a special family occasion.²⁰³

According to interviewees, the order in which the burqa is made is always the same. First a rectangle of fabric is selected. The size will depend on the individual but will normally be about 16cm x 8cm.²⁰⁴ (Fig. 53) This is taken from a larger piece, 2m x 1m. Forty rectangles can typically be cut from this larger piece of fabric unless it is used to make larger burqas (normally for more mature women), in which case it will only produce thirty rectangles.²⁰⁵ The fabric is folded in half and a 2cm hem is formed all around and sewn, allowing the 'sword' to be placed in the middle of the fabric. The holes for the eyes are created by small, sharp scissors and must be symmetrical (Fig. 54). The hole size will depend on the age of the woman; mature women have narrower holes and younger women wider ones. Wax or soap (Fig. 55) is then applied to the edges of the eyeholes on the reverse (non-shiny side) of the fabric, enabling the needle to pass through the fabric more easily. The edges are rolled before sewing (Fig. 56). The needle must be very short and fine so that the over stitching is small and tidy (Fig. 57). This requires dry and steady hands. The total look of the burqa depends upon this crucial stage because if the hands are moist or wet, the moisture can cause the indigo dye to seep out of the fabric and the edges will become buckled.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Yusuf, Emirates, 26.08.2012, pp.235-236.

²⁰² Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani Tradition Renewed*, (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.285.

²⁰³ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Abdullah Khamis, Emirates, 14.10.2013, p.223-224; Moza Saif, Emirates, 19.09.2013, p.227-228.

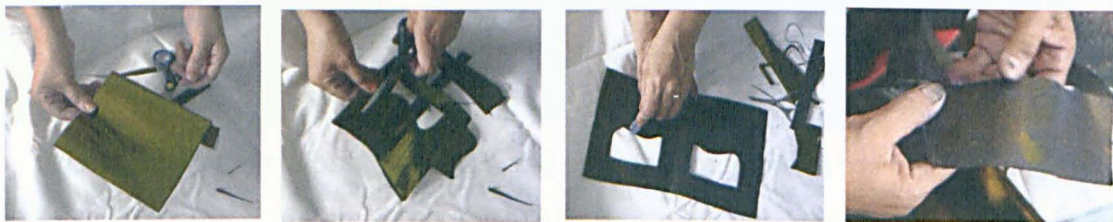
²⁰⁴ Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.72.

²⁰⁵ Appendix 1, Interviews. Tarifah Kamis Al Shehhi, Emirates, 21.08.2013, p.213-214.

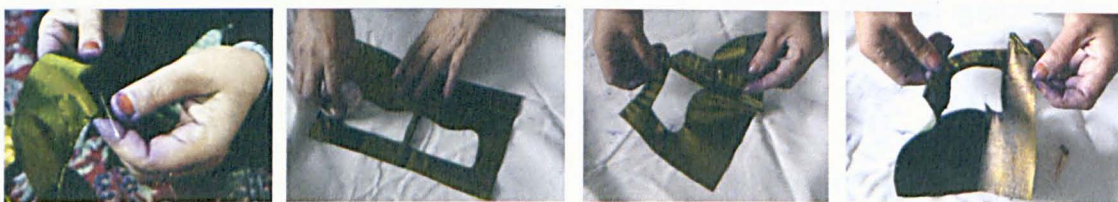
²⁰⁶ Reem El Mutwelli, *Sultani Tradition Renewed*, (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.286.

Shells are used to smooth out the stitches (Fig. 58) so that they lie flat. Then the 'forehead' edge is folded and sewn, using running stitch, after which the 'forehead' is tightened with the end threads to create small matching drapes to accord with the wearer's forehead size (Fig. 59). Two small triangles are created at the end of each side of the 'forehead' by folding the fabric diagonally (Fig. 60). On each side of the forehead of the burqa (the triangular section) matchsticks are placed along the diagonal and sewn in (Fig. 61). A piece of cotton fabric is used as a lining to aid sweat absorption and to help maintain the shininess of the burqa (Fig. 62). The lining also helps protect the face from the dye and the rough surface of the main burqa fabric.²⁰⁷ The 'sword' is then placed through the middle section by using medical spatulas (Figs. 63, 64 & 65) and cords are then attached on both sides of the forehead (Figs. 66 & 67).

The last stage is always the creation of the lower part of the 'cheek' (Fig. 68). The shape and size will again depend on the woman's individual requirements (Fig. 69). Some of the burqa wearers that I interviewed explained that they used to buy their burqas without the pre-cut 'cheek' part, preferring to do this themselves at home. Often women would buy more than one burqa at a time and complete this part as 'special occasions' arose and when the burqa was needed to go with a specific outfit.²⁰⁸



Figs.53-56 Karima Alshomely, 'Standard Size Burqa', 15cm × 8cm, 'Cutting Eyes Holes', 'Applying Wax', 'Rolling Edges of Eye Holes', Photograph, 2014



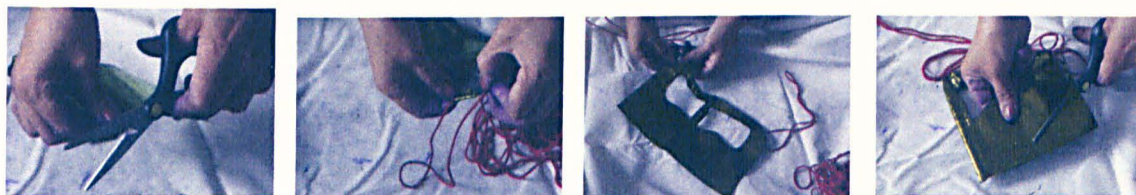
Figs.57-60 Karima Alshomely, 'Sewing Rolled Edges', 'Smoothing out Stitches', 'Small Drapes on Forehead', 'Sewing Edges', Photograph, 2014

²⁰⁷ Najlah Al Azzi, *The Batulah, its Origins and Development*, Al Ma'thurat Al Sha'biyyah (Folk Heritage) (Qatar: Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, 1995), v.20, p.20.

²⁰⁸ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Abdullah Khamis, Emirates, 14.10.2013, pp.223-224.



Figs.61-64 Karima Alshomely, 'Putting Matchsticks on Triangular Edges of Forehead', 'Cotton Fabric Lining', 'Cutting the Wooden Spatula', 'Inserting Spatula into Sword Part', Photograph, 2014



Figs.65-68 Karima Alshomely, 'Cutting Excess', 'Cord Measurement', 'Stitching Cords on both sides of the Forehead', 'Cutting Burqa Cheeks', Photograph, 2014

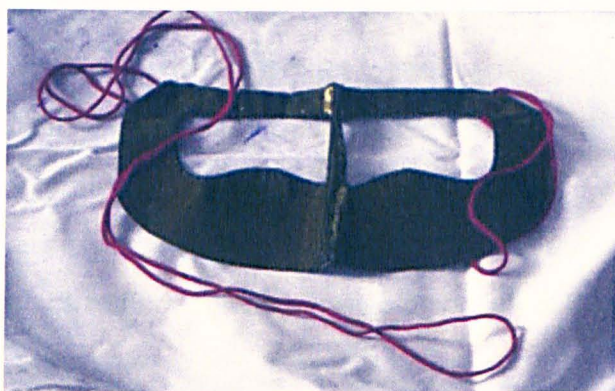


Fig.69 Karima Alshomely, 'Finished Burqa', Photograph, 2014

As the above images demonstrate, to fully understand the processes involved in the making of the burqa I undertook to make a burqa using the traditional method of cutting and sewing by hand. Engaging with this woman's craft, a domestic activity solely done at home, in strict privacy, and either taught or learnt with others or by oneself, from observation, I concluded that it was time consuming and repetitive activity.

The two significant changes that made the process of burqa making much faster were the introduction into the UAE of the hand operated sewing machine in 1960 and the 'Burqa Machine', both imported from India.²⁰⁹ Burqa maker Mariam Mohammed from Khor-

²⁰⁹ Nasser Al Aboudi, *Alaziah Alsha'oubh fi Alimarat Ala'rabiya Almthdah* [Men's Popular Fashion in the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman], (Qatar: Folk Heritage Centre, 1987), p.104.

Fakkan (UAE) recalls that 1988 saw the arrival of the new specialised burqa machine.²¹⁰ (Fig. 70) This produced small, embossed straight lines that looked like the drapes on the 'forehead' part of the burqa. Both this and the sewing machine made the burqa look of a higher quality and more professionally finished and there were suddenly many new designs available.²¹¹ This facilitated a significant increase in production with considerably less effort and time and it was also much easier to make alterations.

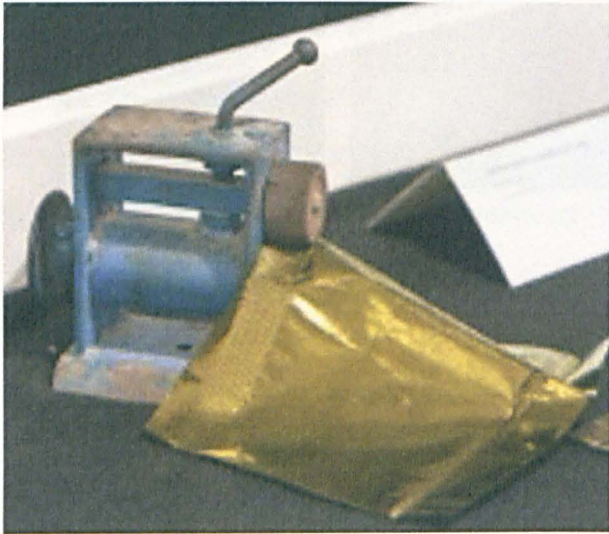


Fig.70, Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa Machine', Photograph, 2014

Women's Burqa Making Rituals

One fascinating area of burqa making that emerged through my interviews was the domestic ritual related to the craft of burqa making. Although the cutting stages and the order they were completed in remained constant, each woman had her own rituals surrounding her craft.²¹² Aisha Mohammed, from Defta (UAE), said, for example, that she preferred to make her burqas when she was alone, knowing that she was so good at making them that other women often felt jealousy towards her.²¹³ Um Ali, from Fujairah, allocated a specific room in her home for the purpose of making burqas. While she was making them, she wore a special black garment and always had a black towel on her lap so that the indigo dye would not stain her clothes. She preferred to start cutting out after sunset when her children were asleep as she could get through a large amount of work

²¹⁰Appendix 1, Interviews. Mariam Ahmed Abdullah, Emirates, 17.06.2014, pp.208-209.

²¹¹Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani Tradition Renewed*, (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.290.

²¹²Appendix 1, Interviews. Women Burqa Makers.

²¹³Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Mohammed Rushid, Emirates, 14.10.2013, p.225

this way without being disturbed. She explained that when she had finished, she used cologne to remove the indigo dye from her hands.²¹⁴

Another burqa maker, Aisha, from Khor-Fakkan, explained that the burqa was a vital source of income for her and her family. She worked with two neighbours to maximise their efforts. They sat together on the roof of her house, for hours, producing large numbers of burqas. Each of the women was responsible for a different stage of the burqa-making 'production line'. Later, they pooled their money to buy a burqa machine, which made their work much easier and even more prolific. They marketed their burqas by sending women out to the neighbourhoods to sell them door-to-door. The women were paid a commission and received a percentage of everything they sold; they were sometimes also given burqas as payment.²¹⁵

As Souad Athman notes, burqa making was also an important social activity. Every so often women would meet in the mornings or late afternoons under a tree inside the inner courtyard of one of their houses where experienced burqa makers would teach their craft to other less experienced or novice makers. They would try to complete as many burqas as possible whilst chatting with each other. This meeting place was considered a great place to find out what was going on in the local community.²¹⁶

Through my interviews it also became evident that the storage of burqas is just as important and ritualistic as their making. It is essential to keep the burqa fabric and the burqas dry so they do not become tarnished and also necessary to keep them out of the reach of small children. For storage it became customary to use biscuit or sweet tins and, as I discuss in chapter 3, some of these tins are more than fifty years old and are precious items with sentimental value. One woman preferred a palm leaf basket, another kept her burqas between leaves of a book to maintain their flatness, while another used tissue paper and put them under her mattress.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Appendix 1, Interviews. Um Ali, Emirates, 30.08.2012, pp.229-231.

²¹⁵ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Abdullah Khamis, Emirates, 14.10.2013, pp.223-224.

²¹⁶ Souad Athman, 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrah Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aimarat [Changes in Women's Traditional Dress, Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society]', in Al Gohary, M. (ed.) *Dirasat fi Elm Alfolklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore], (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1998), p.412.

²¹⁷ Appendix 1, Interviews. Fatimah Said Mohammed, Emirates, 17.09.2013, p.219-220; Amina Ali Salem, Emirates, 01.10.2013, p.228.

However, burqa making has become a dying craft for Emirati women. Social and economic changes within the country have brought free education and, therefore, better work opportunities, and hence Emirati burqa makers' children and grandchildren were becoming educated and did not want to continue in this messy, low paid work.²¹⁸ During the 1990s the production of burqas was taken over by non-Emiratis and is now typically carried out by Indian migrants operating out of shops rather than the domestic space of the home.²¹⁹ These Indian producers have made their own changes, for example, by using masking tape for the lining as it is much better at protecting the skin from the fabric dye and also helps to preserve the colour of the main fabric. It does not readily absorb sweat but this is not generally perceived as a primary concern for women burqa wearers.²²⁰ The relatively new use of kebab sticks for the 'sword' part of the burqa and the introduction of coloured cords have created more styling possibilities.²²¹ These entrepreneurial Indians market their ready-made and bespoke burqa-making services by approaching visitors in hospitals, knocking on doors and going around particular neighbourhoods.²²²

In 1975, the Women's Union of the Emirates observed that the burqa was rarely seen anymore and, more importantly, that traditional burqa-making skills were dying out. For this reason, they specifically employed women who had knowledge and experience of making burqas and asked them to provide training courses for girls and young women. The Union also helps to market the burqas both nationally and internationally. The Ministry of Social Affairs also contributed to this initiative by providing centres in each Emirate where women could gather and engage in a variety of traditional crafts such as weaving, basketry, burqa making, sewing, cooking and perfume making. Women can now be seen at heritage festivals and tourist villages selling the products they have made, ensuring these important crafts survive.²²³

²¹⁸ Ibid. p.413.

²¹⁹ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani, Tradition Renewed* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.291.

²²⁰ Appendix 1, Interviews. Mariam Ahmed Abdullah, Emirates, 17.06.2014, p208-209.

²²¹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Moza Saif, Emirates, 19.09.2013, p.227-228.

²²² Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani Tradition Renewed*, (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.291.

²²³ Ibid. p.290.

Conclusions

As this chapter has shown, the burqa is a complex constructed object and the craft of burqa making, handed down through generations of women, was also a vital part of many Emirati women's social and economic lives. Through a detailed discussion of the changing production methods of the burqa fabric in India, the construction of the burqa, and its methods of making, it becomes evident that much effort and skill was devoted to this object specifically made by women for women. Rather than perceiving the burqa as a static object of traditional dress, it is clear through the oral histories of burqa makers and wearers that the burqa has changed constantly in response to new ready-made materials and technologies, and in response to its wearers. Further, the practices of burqa making extend beyond the object itself and include consideration of the different brands, their marketing and changing packaging. This is the first study to bring these elements together, to test the qualities of the burqa fabric, to identify the training processes involved in burqa making, and to produce an archive of original packaging dating back to 1903. Building on these findings, the next chapter explores in-depth the different forms of the Emirati burqa, the practices of burqa wearing, and the rituals associated with the burqa and the wider uses of the burqa textile and packaging.

Chapter Three: The Diverse Forms of the Burqa: Uses, Significance and Meaning in Emirati Culture

Introduction

Although the Emirati burqa has a basic unifying form, its differing shapes, sizes and embellishments enable the knowledgeable onlooker to distinguish the wearer's origin and social status.¹ As part of this research I have collected and archived thirty different types of Emirati Burqa. Through this process I have been able to piece together the different names of each burqa and their differing functions using a variety of sources including interviews, historical photographs from the national archive in Abu Dhabi, material gleaned from diverse books and magazines, and empirical observation. During interviews, for example, I asked some of the women to cut out the shape of the burqa that they wore or made prior to the 1950s, or to describe the shape of the burqa and what it was called. As part of this time consuming process of uncovering and documenting the differing Emirati burqa forms, I also produced a set of drawings that illustrate the burqas and categorise them according to their social role and/or geographic region. Combining ethnographic and artistic methods of observation and recording has enabled a further understanding of the diversity of the Emirati burqa and represents a significant contribution to our understanding of how Emirati women experienced and used these burqas in differing social contexts.

This chapter has two parts. In the first, I identify the different types of Emirati burqa through reference to their specific characteristics and usage according to the rites of passage associated with age, status and regional identities. This includes discussion of the intertwined concept of female modesty in the Muslim culture of the UAE. Through specific examples, I also show how the Emirati burqa differs from those worn in the neighbouring Gulf States of Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

In the second part, drawing upon the material culture methods of Daniel Miller and Aida Kanafani's concerns with embodied experience, I focus on burqa wearing practices and associated uses of the burqa textile in the UAE and introduce an auto-ethnographic

¹Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani Tradition Renewed*, (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.281.

perspective. My focus here is on the experiences of women who wore the burqa, their accounts of what it felt like to wear a burqa, and how these embodied social practices were part of their everyday lives and contributed to their specific identity as Emirati women.

Part One: The Diverse Forms of the Emirati Burqa

Based upon my research there are three main approaches to categorising the uses and social meanings embodied in the Emirati burqa. The first is in relation to the female's age and status, the second is in relation to particular rites of passage, annual celebrations or social events, and the third is according to regional identity. These categories necessarily interconnect and overlap as I discuss below. They are also all intersected and interconnected, as I discuss, with the specific understandings of female modesty within the Muslim culture of the UAE, and the accompanying identity of being an Emirati woman.

To show the challenges of this research and to make my methods clear, I want to begin with the example of the '*Bo Majeylha*' burqa that is no longer worn in the UAE. The name of the burqa denotes that the eyes slots are small and the cheeks parts are large.² As various accounts and photographs show it was once one of the most common burqa forms in the UAE. Based on these historical traces, I have drawn the burqa and represented the way in which it would have been worn (Figs. 1 & 2). The '*Bo Majeylha*' burqa hides most of the face, as my drawings and a photograph from 1960 show (Fig. 3), leaving sufficient space through which to see. The sociologist Fatimah Al Mughanni states that older women wore this style of burqa because they wanted to cover their wrinkled faces.³ This is confirmed by Nisa Ahmed from Kalba in Sharjah (UAE), who recounts: 'I used to wear a smaller one but as I got older I lost a few teeth and needed to cover my mouth more'.⁴ Women also wore this type of burqa during the holy month of Ramadan as burqa maker Um Ali recalls:

During Ramadan I received special orders from women who wanted to cover their faces with big burqas in order to show their respect to God. They felt that this showed greater decency and the fact that they are

² Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarat Alarabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.36.

³ Ibid. p.33.

⁴ Appendix 1. Interviews, Nisa Ahmed, Emirates, 02.08.2014, pp.209-210.

asking for forgiveness from God. In winter women also asked me for larger burqas because they needed to protect their faces from the harsh, windier conditions.⁵

A girl aged nine to ten would also have worn this style of burqa as a rare 1959 photograph shows (Fig. 4). Usually, it would have performed several roles of protecting her skin from the sun, shielding her from men outside her family, and conveying her modesty. The girl would not have changed it until she got married, at which point she would have exchanged it for a '*Moqtaf*' burqa, discussed below. However, as noted, this once popular and multi-purpose '*Bo Majeylha*' burqa is no longer worn.⁶ None of my interviewees wore this type of burqa anymore and one maker burqa from Al Ain city (UAE), stated that although she used to wear this burqa 'now I wear a smaller one, as I need to feel young again! Since 1990 this type of burqa doesn't exist anymore. There is no demand so I stopped making this type of burqa'.⁷ As this example shows, this burqa has only recently disappeared and while it is still within living memory it is important for my research to record it.

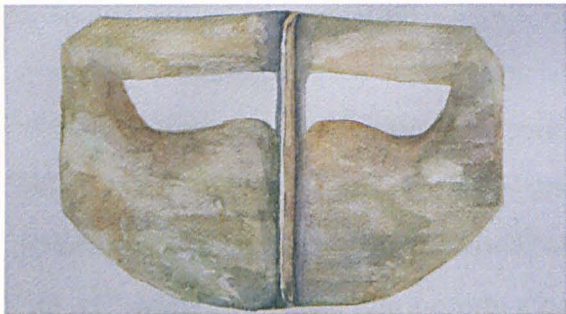


Fig.1 Karima Alshomely, '*Bo Majeylha* Burqa', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

Fig.2 Karima Alshomely, '*Bo Majeylha* Burqa', ink, 15cm×20cm, 2014

⁵ Appendix 1. Interviews, Um Ali, Emirates, 30.08.2012, pp.229-231.

⁶ Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarah Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.36.

⁷ Appendix 1. Interviews, Group of women, Emirates, 23.03.2014, p.215-216



Fig.3 Fatimah Al Mughanni, '*Bo Majeylha burqa*', 2009 photograph, 8cm × 6cm. (*Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], 2009), p.37

Fig.4 Jette Bang; Klaus Ferdinand, '*Girl Wearing Batulah*', 1959, photograph, 2cm × 15cm, (*The Danish Expedition to Qatar*, 2009), p.48

By contrast, the '*Moqtaf*' burqa denotes that the burqa has small 'cheeks' so that the lower lip and cheek of the wearer is exposed. Worn by women just after they had married, from approximately fifteen to forty years of age, women continue to wear this form until they become middle aged and it is still worn in 2015.⁸ (Figs. 5 & 6)

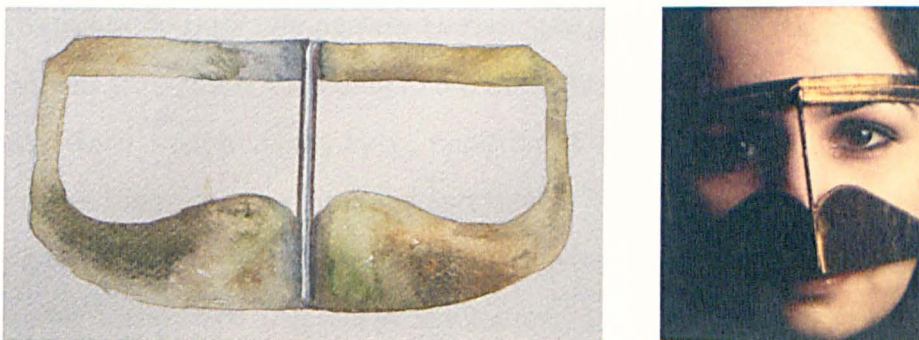


Fig.5 Karima Alshomely, '*Moqtaf Burqa*', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

Fig.6 Fatimah Alshomely, '*Moqtaf Burqa*', 2011, Photograph

The '*Moqtaf*' burqa is close in form to the '*Myani*' burqa where the eyes slot and cheeks parts are equal (Figs. 7 & 8). Also usually associated with middle-aged women, the

⁸ Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.36.

'Myani' burqa exposes the lower lip. This is the most common form of burqa in the UAE today and is also prevalent in the gulf region among women from Bahrain and Qatar.⁹

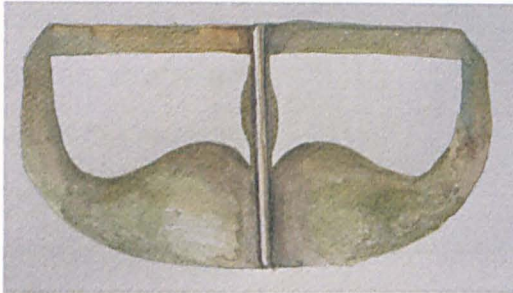


Fig.7 Karima Alshomely, 'Myani Burqa', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

Fig.8 Karima Alshomely, 'Myani Burqa', Photograph, 2010

By contrast with the above every day burqas, the second major category is the decorative burqa for special occasions. Here the *Myani* burqa provides the basic shape with the addition of twelve gold coins dangling from twenty-one gold stars attached to the top of the forehead part. Referred to as the '*Al-Raeacy*' burqa (Fig. 9), according to Al Mughanni, women wore this on special occasions such as weddings and Eid, the key Muslim festival marking the end of the fasting of Ramadan. In the past only women from rich families could afford this burqa. It was used often and was shared between members of poorer families.¹⁰

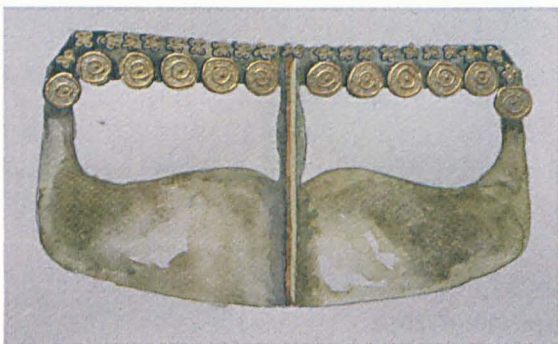


Fig.9 Karima Alshomely, 'Al-Raeacy Burqa', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

The '*Bo-Nojoom*' burqa, meaning 'stars', is similarly used for special occasions and denotes the family's wealth and status (Fig. 10). It is usually adorned with nineteen golden

⁹Ibrahim Salah and Salma Quraishi, *Almellaabs Altaqlediuah fi Alimarar Ala'rabiya* Almthdah [Costume Dress in United Arab Emirates], (Ajman: Technical Press, 2011), p.59.

¹⁰Ammar Al Senjray, *Alziy Alemirati Alghedem Hader fi Alsha'ar Ghyab fi Alhyat* [Old Emirati Costume, Present in Poetry, Absent in Reality], (Dubai: Al Ghurair Press, 2009) Al Dhafrah, v.31, p.59.

stars on the forehead part, nine on each side and one in the centre of the forehead at the top of the 'sword' part. (The number of stars does not carry any significant meaning as they can and do vary depending on the length of the forehead burqa part).¹¹ Once made of pure gold, the stars are now more commonly made of an imitation gold. In the past women wore this style of burqa at weddings and at Eid, but now it is only seen at the heritage villages and at festivals showcasing traditional Emirati costumes to the young and to tourists.¹²

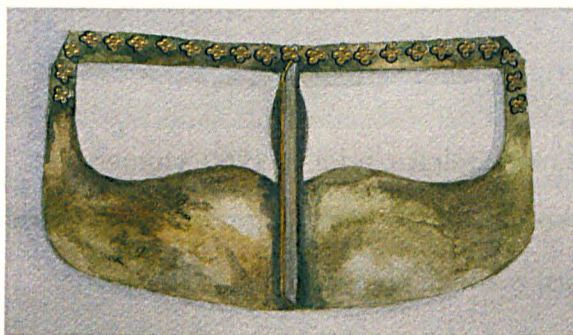


Fig.10 Karima Alshomely, 'Bo-Nojoom Burqa', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

The third way of categorising the burqa is by region. As an embedded custom and tradition that was once an integral part of Emirati society, burqa shapes can identify a woman's region and tribe.¹³ Some regional burqas are named according to the shape or form of the burqa, some by the position of the burqa on the face, while other forms are named after cities. According to the burqa maker Um Said, the 'Bo-Lafah' (curved burqa) was worn predominantly by women from Dubai. The outer edges of the cheeks are a curved shape and the forehead part is wide (Fig. 11). Um Said recounting that the 'Bo-Lafah' shape has changed significantly and it is only the name that retains its link with its earlier form.¹⁴ See (Fig. 21) in chapter one, p.53.

¹¹ Ibid.p.59.

¹² Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarat Alarabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.36.

¹³ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani Tradition Renewed*, (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.281.

¹⁴ Appendix 1. Interviews, Um Said, Emirates, 01.10.2013, pp.232-233.

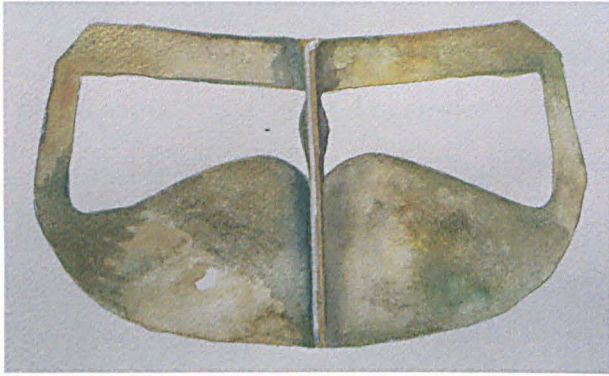


Fig.11 Karima Alshomely, '*Bo-Lafah Burqa*', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

Based on burqa makers accounts, in Ras Al-Khaimah Emirate, prior to 1960, women also wore the burqa called '*Al-Mishakhis*' (meaning rings) (Fig. 12). Both edges of the forehead part of the '*Al-Mishakhis*' have '*Mishakhis*' (rings) made of gold attached to the burqa; the red cord dangles from the end rings so it can be tied around the woman's head. This type of burqa overtly shows the status of a woman's family. Nowadays, gold rings are no longer used to decorate the burqa with women from the region now preferring to use crystals, which are cheaper and more fashionable.¹⁵



Fig.12 Karima Alshomely, '*Al-Mishakhis Burqa*', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

The '*Minkoos*' burqa (Figs. 13, 14 & 15), worn by women from the east coast of the UAE, in areas such as Kalba, Dibba and Khor Fakkan, is named after the way a woman wears it. It does not settle directly on the forehead, but balances on the woman's nose, diagonally over the face as the bottom of the 'sword' part is made of small stitches in order for it to be tilted. Women who wear the '*Minkoos*' burqa are called '*Naksah*' al Burqa (the top of

¹⁵ Appendix 1. Interviews, Tarifah Kamis Al Shehhi, Emirates, 21.08.2013, p.212.

the burqa is inclined forwards).¹⁶ This burqa has not changed since the beginning of the twentieth century and remains very distinctive and is still worn today.¹⁷

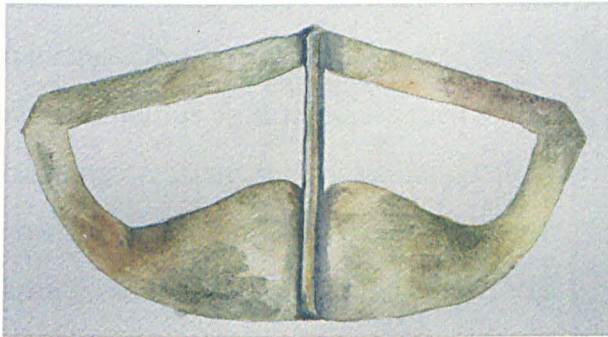


Fig.13 Karima Alshomely, 'Minkoos Burqa', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

Fig.14 Karima Alshomely, 'Minkoos Burqa profile', ink, 15cm×20cm, 2014



Fig.15 Karima Alshomely, 'Minkoos Burqa', Photograph, 2013

Other burqas are named after cities. According to Shaikha Al Jabri, a social researcher and author of *Accessories and Women's Fashion in the United Arab Emirates*, the *Al-Aynnawi* burqa means 'women who come from the city of Al-Ain' in Abu Dhabi (Fig. 16). The eyes and cheeks are exposed through the large cut out section and the very thin outer edge.¹⁸ Although there may seem to be no point of this burqa as it shows most of the facial features, a woman from Al-Ain insisted that she felt naked without this form of burqa.¹⁹ As Ibrahim Salah states in *Costume Dress in the United Arab Emirates*, as UAE society

¹⁶ Rym Ghazal, (31 May 2009) 'The Burqas' in 'The National, UAE', Available at <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/the-burqa>, (Accessed July 2012) p.12.

¹⁷ Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.36.

¹⁸ Shaikha Al Jabri, *Accessories and Women's Fashion in the United Arab Emirates* (Abu Dhabi: Ministry of culture, 2008), p.59.

¹⁹ Appendix 1. Interviews, Group of women, Emirates, 23.03.2014, p.214.

changed following the discovery of oil, new burqa names were introduced denoting new urban residential neighbourhoods such as the '*Sharjahwi*' (after Sharjah) (Fig. 17) and the '*Ajmani*' (after Ajman). Some older burqa names also came from areas such as '*Dwar-Zabeel*' and from Bedouin tribes like the '*Al-Awamer*'.²⁰

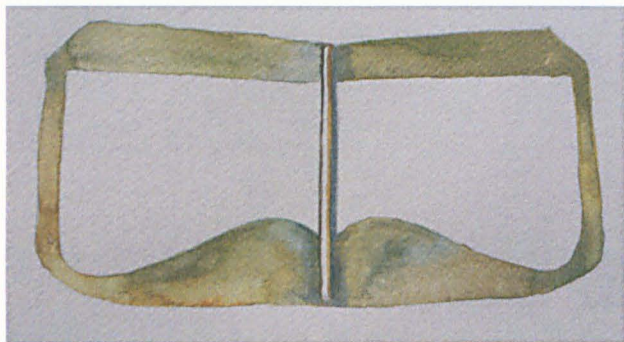


Fig.16 Karima Alshomely, '*Al-Aynnawi Burqa*', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

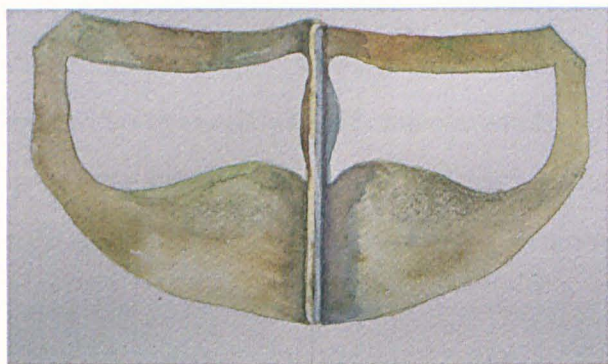


Fig.17 Karima Alshomely, '*Sharjahwi Burqa*', Watercolour, 30cm×20cm, 2014

In total, during this research I have studied approximately 400 burqas, and through piecing together burqa makers' accounts based on their descriptions, their burqa templates and requested drawings outlining the shape of the burqa, together with photographic evidence from the 1950s onwards (held primarily in Abu Dhabi National Archive), I have been able to identify thirty different burqa designs in the UAE, twelve of which are detailed here. My challenge was to create drawings of each different burqa type identified, as a detailed visual archive that records these disappearing material objects. As such, this represents the most complete overview of the Emirati burqa to date. This visual record builds upon and significantly extends the work of previous researchers who have focused upon one or two categories. As indicated in the above discussion, the writing of Fatimah Al Mughanni consider women's ages and the positioning of the burqa on the face; Reem El Mutwalli and Ammar Al Senjray focus on

²⁰Ibrahim Salah and Salma Quraishi, *Almellaabs Altaqlediuah fi Alimarat Ala'rabiah* Almthdah [Costume Dress in United Arab Emirates], (Ajman: Technical Press, 2011), p.59.

the once popular decorative burqas, the *Al-Raeacy* burqa and the *Bo-Nojoom* (stars), while Ibrahim Salah has concentrated on burqas associated with specific regions and tribes.²¹

To further develop my knowledge of different Emirati burqa types and their usage, I also made numerous visits to places such as souks where women typically gather, as well as attending occasions such as weddings and funerals where I asked women about their knowledge of different burqa forms. Based upon these discussions, together with the in-depth interviews, photographs of the burqa wearing women I interviewed, images drawn from publications and documentary film,²² and the old burqas donated by interviewees, I compiled a map of the UAE (Fig. 18) that represents the historical sites associated with specific burqa forms and the areas where the different burqas are still worn today. Having plotted this map of burqa types, the resulting visualisation makes it clear that the larger burqas can be seen solely in the desert areas where arguably women needed to protect their faces from harsh weather and may have been less exposed to modernising influences. The concentration of burqa wearing practices also aligns with the density of populations in the major Emirates cities overlooking the coast of Arabian Gulf.

²¹ Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (2012); Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani Tradition Renewed*, (2011); Ibrahim Salah and Salma Quraishi, *Almellaabs Altaqlediuah fi Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Costume Dress in United Arab Emirates], (2011); Ammar Al Senjray, *Alziy Alemirati Alghedem Hader fi Alsha'ar Ghyab fi Alhyat* [Old Emirati Costume, Present in Poetry, Absent in Reality], (2009)

²² Documentary films provided by the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority included 'The Emirates between Past and Present', 1985 and 'Pearl Diving on the Emirates', 1978.

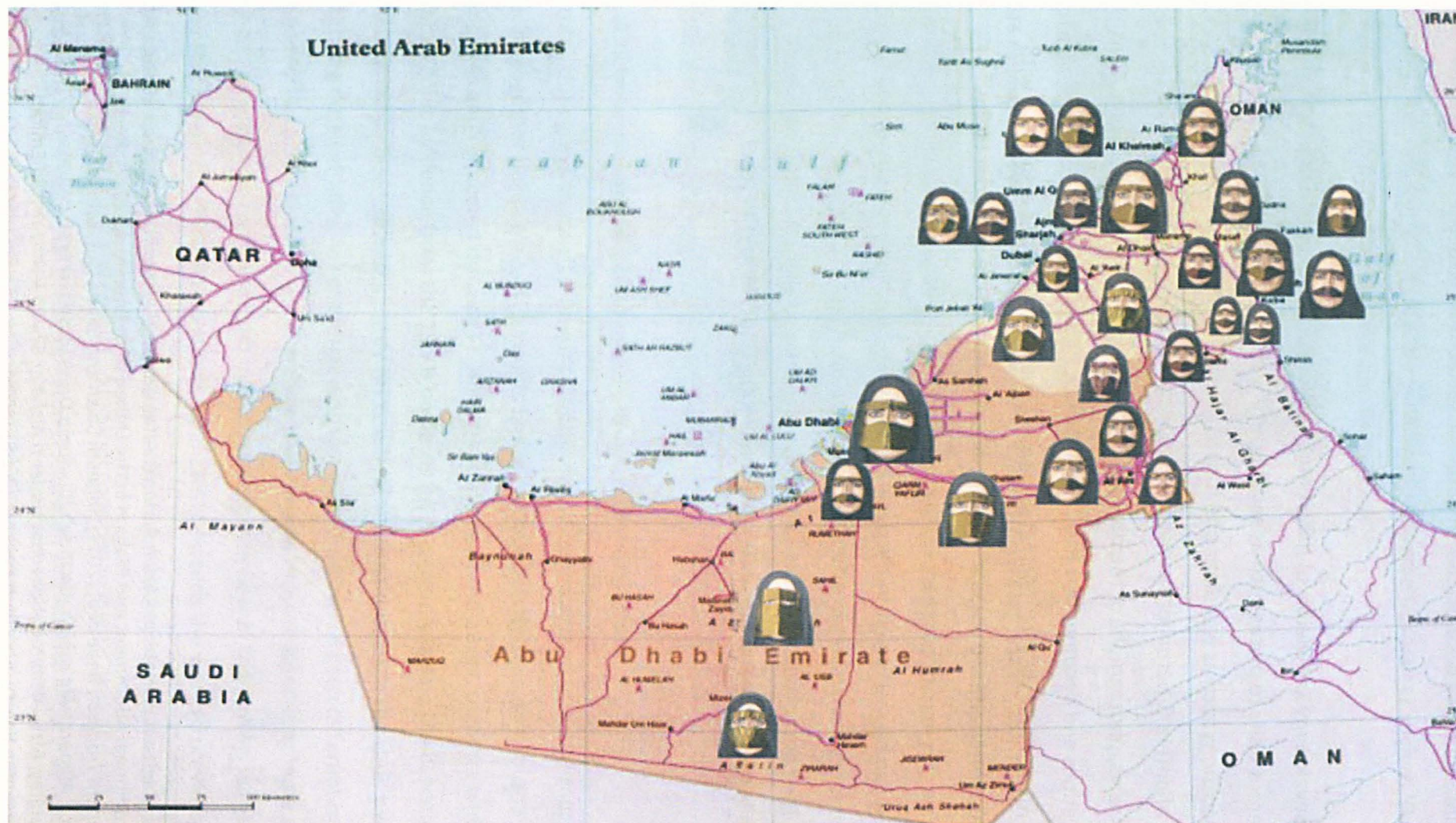


Fig. 18 Robin Bidwell, Map of Emirates overlaid with Burqa Form from 19th 20th Century, 18cm×15cm, (*Travellers in Arabia*, 1995, Front-page)

Overall, through the above research, and as the accompanying historical photograph dating from 1950 shows (Fig. 19), the practice of wearing large-sized burqas that covered most of the face changed dramatically after circa 1960, when oil revenue resulted in the transformation of Emirati society, economically and culturally. The burqa now reveals more than it conceals and has increasingly become a decorative object (Fig.20). It has also become an iconic symbol of the Emirates and is widely used on fabrics, ceramics, jewellery design and tourist objects. (Fig. 21)



Fig.19 Ronald Codrai, 'Emirati Woman', 1950, Photograph, (*Abu Dhabi: an Arabian Album*, 1992), p.45

Fig.20 karima Alshomely, 'Emirati woman wearing small sized burqa', Photograph, 2013



Fig.21 Karima Alshomely, 'Commercial Product', Photograph, 2013

Comparisons: Contemporary Burqas in Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia

The designer and historian Reem El Mutwalli notes in a chapter entitled 'Face Masks' of 2004 that the Emirati burqa differs from others in the region in terms of colour, the way

they sit on the face, and the textile they are made from.²³ As part of a comparative study to help assess the distinctiveness features or otherwise of the Emirati burqa in the late twentieth century, I visited the Gulf States of Bahrain and Qatar as two nearby countries that continue to wear the burqa to research their contemporary burqa forms.

As noted earlier in chapter one, the burqa in Bahrain and Qatar is called the *Batulah*, a word that comes from Persian and, before that, from Sanskrit, the classical language of India. As Abeer Abu Saad states:

The word *batula* itself does not mean anything in Arabic. In the Arabic dictionary *Mu'jam Al Munjid*, the only relevant root is "ba'ta'la" which means: to make something definite from other things. Here it could mean: define the eyes from the rest of the face.²⁴

Both the Bahraini and Qatari burqa have similar overall forms in that the eyeholes are almond shaped but neither of these has the 'Al-Kharah' part found in the Emirati burqa (Figs. 22 & 23).



Fig.22 Karima Alshomely, 'Bahraini burqa', Photograph, 2014

Fig.23 Salma Al Naimi, Burqa without Jewellery', Photograph, 4 cm×6cm (*Ghrzah fi Almady Bha'th an Mallaabs Almarah Qatari [Stitches in the Last, Research in the Qatari Women's Clothing]* 2013), p.76

Looking to other nearby countries in the Arabian Peninsula, different forms of the burqa are also still found in Saudi Arabia and the Oman. The highly decorated, ceremonial Bedouin burqa from Saudi is made from black cloth decorated with coloured threads and many silver coins (Fig. 24). Its length reaches the middle of the chest.²⁵ By contrast, the everyday Bedouin Saudi burqa is made from black rough fabric without any decorative detail. It also covers the whole face and reveal the eyes. (Fig. 25)

²³ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani Tradition Renewed*, (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.269.

²⁴ Abeer Abu Saud, *Qatari Women Past and Present* (England: Longman House, 1984), p.58.

²⁵ Patricia Anawalt, *The World Wide History of Dress* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), p.48.



Fig.24 Heather Colyer Ross, 'Hijazi Mask', 1970s, Photograph, (*The Art of Arabian Costume*, 1981), p.47



Fig.25 Jodi Cobb, 'Women of Saudi, Bedouin Woman', (National Geographic magazine, October 1987) (http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/countries/women-saudi-arabia-photos/#/saudi-arabia-veiled-woman_3140_600x450.jpg) (Accessed 23 April, 2016)

In contrast, the contemporary every day Omani burqa shape is like a warrior's mask (Figs. 26 & 27). The Omani burqa remains large in size and covers most of the woman's face. The form is also very different to the others with the 'sword' part protruding from the rest of the burqa and the stick making it rigid. The eyeholes are like the shape of fish eyes and the exceptionally wide 'forehead' extends above the head.²⁶

²⁶ Neil Richardson and Marcia Dorr, *The Craft Heritage of Oman* (Dubai: Motivate, 2003), p.344.



Fig. 26 Ruth Shaman, 'Omani burqa', Photograph, 12cm×12cm (*Bedouin and Nomads: People of the Arabian Desert*, 2007), p.110

Fig.27 Ruth Shaman, 'Omani burqa', Photograph, 10cm×8cm (*Bedouin and Nomads: People of the Arabian Desert*, 2007), p.94

The diversity of the different regional forms of the burqa in the second half of the twentieth century is further emphasized by Alan Keohane, a British photographer resident in Morocco since 1933, who recorded the Omani Bedouin burqa in the early 1990s. Published in 1994, his photographs show Omani women posing for the camera wearing the burqa from the two main tribes: the Al Wahbibis and Al Hariasis. (Figs. 28, 29 & 30). The black burqas cover part of the hair and show regional differences in shape and size although again, these forms are very different to the Emirati burqa. Depicted outside their homes wearing the abaya and burqa, each woman is showing their wealth and status through their abundant jewellery.

The fabric used in the Omani burqa is similar to the Emirati textile; green-gold and madder red are imported from India while the black cotton fabric saturated with indigo dye is locally made.²⁷ The threads and length of the cords are also distinct. The cords fall around the ankles and are finished off with small tassels.

²⁷ Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo in the Arab World* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997), p.220.

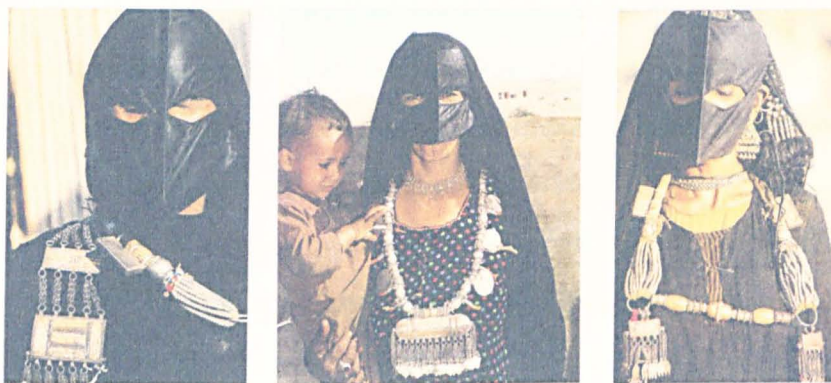


Fig.28 Alan Keohane, 'Omani Bedu', Photograph, 13cm×9cm, (*Bedouin: Nomads of the Desert*, 1994), p.144

Fig.29 Alan Keohane, 'Al Harasis Woman', Photograph, 17.5cm×12cm, (*Bedouin: Nomads of the Desert*, 1994), p.142

Fig.30 Alan Keohane, 'Al Wahibi Woman', Photograph, 11cm×8cm, (*Bedouin: Nomads of the Desert*, 1994), p. 143

A further distinguishing feature that indicates key regional differences is how the burqa sits on the face and the manner of tying the cords. Based on my interviews, those who tie the cords directly over their hair are allegedly from Arabian tribes and those who tie the cords over their headscarf are from non-Arabian tribes, such as the Baluchi and Persians (Figs. 31 & 32). Furthermore, as one of the Qatari women interviewed observed, Qatari women tie the cords directly over their head scarves regardless of whether or not they are from an Arab tribe, unlike Emirati women who were/are very particular about their ties showing which tribe they are from.²⁸



Fig.31 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa from Arab tribes', Photograph, 2014



Fig.32 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa from non-Arab tribes', Photograph, 2014

²⁸ Interview in Qatar Heritage and Identity Centre, Qatar, 2014.

From the above comparisons, it becomes apparent that the burqa in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century can simultaneously mark regional differences within a country and strongly denote national identities. These differences are particularly marked in the Arabian Peninsula with its long history of tribal structures as discussed below.

Part Two: Emirati Burqa Wearing Practices and Uses of the Burqa Textile

Most scholars are in agreement with Fatimah Al Mughanni's view that there were/are different customs and traditions surrounding the wearing of the burqa depending upon the practices of each particular tribe. In nomadic tribes, living in the desert until at least the mid-twentieth, for instance, girls would wear the large burqa from seven years old to protect their skin from the blazing sun.²⁹ It was also a sign that the girl had started to menstruate or that she was engaged to-be-married and thus a sign that men should not look at her. Such accounts emphasise the social role of the burqa as an embodied object that marks the female rite of passage from menstruation, marriage to old age. In Miller's terms, the wearing of the burqa can therefore be 'taken as indication of their future ability to perform social roles ... expected of them.'³⁰

What the majority of accounts of the Emirati burqa omit is what it feels like for the female to wear the burqa, what meanings it carries for them at different points in their lives and within different social circumstances, and how they experience their personal relationship with the burqa. As I have argued, the burqa is an intimate object. Worn directly on the flesh/skin of the face, it performs various functions within society but it also 'forces', to use Miller's words in relationship to the sari, 'a continued engagement and conversation with its wearer.'³¹ This dual aspect of the burqa (the personal and the social) is clear from within my own family's history.

I remember my mother telling me how she was forced to wear the burqa when she first started menstruating. Her aunt came with other female relatives to the house to try to show her how to wear the burqa, but she did not want to wear it. She ran outside, into

²⁹ Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarat Alarabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.30.

³⁰ Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p.27.

³¹ Ibid. p.27

the yard, and was chased by her female relatives. When they caught up with her, one woman held her hands down while her aunt tied the burqa around her head. At this moment, her father arrived home and was drawn by her screams. He found her being pinned to the ground by the group of women. Her father told them to leave and said that he would show her how to wear the burqa himself. Once the women had left, he told her to keep the burqa in her pocket and to take it out and put it on when she saw her aunt approaching; otherwise, she did not need to wear it.

What is of particular interest to me here are the co-existence of the social codes and the personal or subjective experiences at play. In this case, I presume, that out of respect for the elder female family members and the custom of marking a rite of passage, my grandfather asked my mother to wear the burqa when she met her aunt while simultaneously recognising that it was not necessary to force her to wear it.

A key aim of this research is to identify what women burqa wearers and burqa makers feel about the burqa, how they experience the burqa, when they wear it, and the meanings that this intimate object carries for them. In the following part of this chapter, I focus on my research discoveries drawn from interviews.

Why wear the burqa?

For the majority of the women that I interviewed, they shared an understanding that the burqa is, as one interviewee put it, 'a sign of modesty and a woman who is not wearing one loses her sense of modesty.'³² The question of modesty is a complex one within a predominately Muslim culture and raises the much-debated question about Islam and face covering.³³ Yet, as this interviewee continued, she stressed that 'The burqa is part of our tradition and culture and is not related to our religion.'³⁴ It is striking that the burqa makers I interviewed understood that wearing the burqa was not a religious practice required by the Quran or the Prophet Mohammed. This response was frequent. Some women explained that covering the face is not imposed on them by Islam and one cited

³² Appendix 1. Interviews, Aisha Abdullah Khamis Barashid Naqbi, Emirates, 28.08.2012, pp.223-224.

³³ Example of publications dealing with Islam and Veiling include: Fadwa Al Guindi, *Veil Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (2000); Dawn Chatty, *The Burqa Face Cover: An Aspect of Dress in Southeastern* (1997); Alessandro Ferrari and Sabrina Pastorelli, *The Burqa Affair Across Europe Between Public and Private Space* (2013), Reina Lewis, *Muslim Fashion* (2015).

³⁴ Appendix 1. Interviews, Aisha Abdullah Khamis Barashid Naqbi, Emirates, 28.08.2012, pp.223-224.

the fact that women had to remove their burqas when they circle around the Kaaba in Mecca as evidence of the burqa's non-religious function.³⁵ Instead, the majority of women interviewed saw burqa wearing as a sign of demonstrating their modesty as Emirati women.

What might modesty mean in this context? According to Kanafani, modesty for Emirati women is to 'feel secure' and to have 'a freedom of movement' which was once essential for Bedouin women: 'In the desert and mountains women worked outside, collecting wood or rearing goats, where they are more exposed to male presence'.³⁶ Historically, women also used to work on farms; alongside men and thus wearing the burqa gave them a sense of freedom.³⁷ Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood discusses this further stating that the face covering says something about the woman's personality (personal style, quality, care, character) and, where rich decoration or dowry coins are used, it also gives 'two different messages at the same time: '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'.³⁸ According to the ethnography researcher Mona Ezzat in *Jamaleyat Mellaabs Alturath li Nisa Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [The Aesthetics of Heritage Clothes for Women in the United Arab Emirates] the majority of Emirati women feel secure when wearing the burqa.³⁹

All burqa wearing Emirati women past and present never leave/left their homes without wearing their burqas. Shamah, a burqa making from Am Al-Quwain (UAE), recounts that as she had worn the burqa since she was a young girl, it was part of her daily habitual ritual and she felt naked without it. She felt that it is essential to wear the burqa as a sign of modesty.⁴⁰ Several interviewees also talked about the burqa in relation to the niqab. Some women preferred to wear the niqab (the black face covering that reveals the eyes)

³⁵ Appendix 1. Interviews, Um Ali, Emirates, 30.08.2012, p229-231.

³⁶ Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.67

³⁷ Hind Al Qasimi, *Al Thabit wa Al Motaqyer fi Thaqaqah Almrah fi Alimarat* [Fixed and Variable in Women Cultural in UAE], (Sharjah: Social Association, 1998), p.121.

³⁸ Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, (September 2010) 'Face Veils', *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Volume 5, 2010, Available at: <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bewdf/BEWDFv5/EDch5079.xml?q=Face%20veils&isfuzz=yes#highlightAnchor>, (Accessed: 26 September 2015)

³⁹ Mona Ezzat, *Jamaleyat Mellaabs Alturath li Nisa Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [The Aesthetics of Heritage Clothes for Women in the United Arab Emirates], (Cairo: World Books, 2011), p.148.

⁴⁰ Appendix 1. Interviews, Shamah Said, Emirates, 15.09.2013.p.226-227.

in public as they felt it was more respectable and they were concealed. Interestingly, one, Aisha Yusuf, stated that she would not wear the niqab, as it is associated for her with Muslim women from Pakistan and India.⁴¹ These comments revealed that Emirati women are aware of the choices they make and the distinctions they wished to make through their dress.

Protection from the elements is another reason frequently given for wearing the burqa as it protected a woman's delicate skin from the wind, sand and sun.⁴² However, as Unni Wikan states, before the middle of the twentieth century there were strict rules to be followed surrounding the wearing of the burqa. Women had to wear the burqa whenever they were in the presence of men outside the family. Some even wore it when they were inside their own home, in front of their husband and children, and even when talking with other women.⁴³ According to one of my interviewees, Um Hassan from Bahrain, there was a popular Arabic saying about woman who do not remove their burqas in front of male relatives:

الزوج يقول لزوجته:

يا بنت عمي افسخي البطولة (البرقع)

قالت: كيف افسخ البطولة (البرقع) و اخوك واقف بطوله

Translation: A husband says to his wife, 'Cousin, remove your burqa'. She replies, 'How can you want me to remove my burqa when your brother is standing behind you?'⁴⁴ In order to understand the saying one has to know that the husband and wife are cousins: hence the reference to 'cousin' rather than 'wife'. Because his brother is also his wife's cousin, the husband does not view him as a stranger or a man outside the family. He does not see it however from his wife's point of view and cannot, therefore, grasp why she might be reluctant to take off her burqa in front of him.

According to Fatimah Al Mughanni, in *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Traditional Adornment and Woman's Fashion in the United Arab Emirates] (2012), some women did not take off their burqas in front of their husbands

⁴¹ Appendix 1. Interviews, Aisha Yusuf, Emirates, 26.08.2012.pp.235-236.

⁴² Haifa Al Unjri, *Aziah: Tha'qafah wa Tarikh* [Fashion: Culture and History], (Kuwait: Al-Falah, 2011), p.33.

⁴³ Unni Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.94.

⁴⁴ Appendix 1. Interviews, Latifa Yusuf Yaqub, (Um Hassan), Bahrain, 08.07.2013, p.234.

until they have had three children; at that point, the woman would allow her husband to see her face for the first time.⁴⁵ Such strict burqa wearing practices in the UAE are within living memory. For example, Mr Khalid, manager of the Identity and Heritage Centre in Qatar, recounted his experience of not seeing his mother's face until he was forty years old. He always imagined what her facial features were like by looking at his uncle's face and often wondered if his mother looked like him, did his mother have the same nose? One day his mother became ill and he needed to take her to hospital for surgery. Obviously, she had to take off her burqa for the operation and that was the first time he saw his mother's face. He found it difficult to express how he felt at that moment; it was like she was a stranger to him and he wondered which one was really her true face: her masked one or her unmasked one.⁴⁶

Most burqa wearers agree however that there are some everyday occasions when a woman must take off her burqa. For example, during her ablutions she would have raised her burqa over her head so as to not let it touch the water, something that would have destroyed its lustre.⁴⁷ A woman also had to remove her burqa during prayers. As Kanafani explains:

They wrap themselves in the long prayer veil and after making sure that their mouth is wrapped with the veil they remove the mask. The latter is then folded and placed on the right side by them and at hand's reach. The woman uses part of her prayer veil to muffle her mouth. After the prayer is over, the women reach for the mask and place it loosely on the veil then pull the latter and tighten the mask strings around their heads. These gestures are performed discreetly and quickly and assure the face is not seen.⁴⁸

Women often also remove the burqa to take a siesta: something that would not have taken place in the bedroom but in the family's interior courtyard. She would have put her burqa over her forehead and covered her face with a light muslin veil so that if she heard anyone approaching, she could quickly put her burqa back on and not be seen.⁴⁹ Accounts

⁴⁵ Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.39.

⁴⁶ Appendix 1. Interviews, Khalid Al Mulla, Qatar, 06.10.2013, p.212-213.

⁴⁷ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani, Tradition Renewed* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.289.

⁴⁸ Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment Among Arabian Women* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.67.

⁴⁹ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani, Tradition Renewed* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and

by Badria Al Hosni, an oral history researcher from Fujairah in the UAE, also refer to public bathing and his memory of a tree close to the sea called the 'burqa tree'. Groups of women used to go to the sea to wash their clothes and bathe. They would take off their burqas and attach them to the branches because the water would damage the burqa's shine. The sunlight would have reflected onto the burqas making them shine in the distance and anyone would see this from afar. It also therefore acted as a signal to men not to approach as there were women swimming.⁵⁰

Social Rituals

To explore more fully what Wikan calls the subjective meaning of the burqa,⁵¹ it is useful to understand the social rituals of burqa practices. As Daniel Miller points out in his analysis of the sari, 'the sari turns a woman into a person who interacts with others and with the self through this constantly shifting material.'⁵² Although the burqa could not be strictly described as a shifting material, burqa wearing also requires certain every day codes of practice or learned etiquette. For example, when a woman eats, she lifts the bottom of the 'sword' part of the burqa with her left thumb and index finger and then puts her left thumb on the edge of her mouth, under her lower lip. Placing the food in her mouth using her right hand, she then quickly replaces her burqa again so she would not be seen chewing.⁵³ On this point, Patricia Holton writes about her experience in *Mother without a Mask* (2008) as follows:

I was fascinated by the way the women managed to lift their masks and pop the food into their mouths all in one gesture with one hand. The right hand. Using the left hand was ill-mannered, not the done thing. The right hand for eating, the left for washing after going to the toilet.⁵⁴

Before the middle of the twentieth century drinking coffee and eating dates with friends and family was a regular tradition. Even when drinking coffee a burqa-wearing woman would lift the right side of her burqa up with her right index finger, exposing only the corner of her mouth. Holding the coffee cup, she would twist her mouth sideways and

Heritage, 2011), p.287.

⁵⁰ Telephone conversation with Badria Al Hosni, July 2013.

⁵¹ Unni Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.94.

⁵² Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p.27.

⁵³ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani, Tradition Renewed* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.287.

⁵⁴ Patricia Holton, *Mother without a Mask* (2nd edition) (London: Motivate Publishing, 2008), p.24.

take a sip.⁵⁵ Such regular actions are not only learnt, they shape the burqa and the diagonal line that has formed on the burqa surface remains as evidence of the way women drank coffee (Fig. 33).



Fig.29 unknown, 'Emirati women', n.d., (Sultani, *Tradition Renewed*, 2011), p.342

As discussed in the introduction a key source in considering the embodied effects of wearing the burqa is the work of Kanafani, published in 1983. One of her focuses is on communication including the various ways that women greet each other while wearing the burqa, depending on where they live. Kanafani describes the greeting ritual as follows:

When women want to greet one another or depart they engage in reciprocal hand kissing. Reciprocal hand kissing (RHK) or kissing each other's right hand is a characteristic of access ritual of women along the coast and in the mountains of the UAE. RHK is done without lifting the mask. The sound of the peck is heard across the covered faces when the hand of one woman touches the mask over the mouth of the other...However, RHK is not the way to greet in all parts of the desert; for instance, in Abu Dhabi (al 'Ayn) area, women greet one another with the mask: close to one another, arms bent, hands placed on the shoulders or kept hanging down they touch masks at the stiff mid-section of the mask. The sound of the kiss is at times heard and at others not. To express complete joy at the encounter of a dear person not seen for a long time, some women in the UAE lift their masks to kiss the person directly on the cheeks. For a person that is seen

⁵⁵ Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment Among Arabian Women* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.70.

every week or so, women kiss on the face before the RHK but both women keep their masks on.⁵⁶

As this account suggests, the burqa is a sensory object for its wearers that may carry sound and the trace of a kiss. It is also a personal object imbued with the smell and imprint of its owner as I discuss further below.

Kanafani further argues that the burqa tends to indirectly foster communication. To interact with a masked woman one must adjust to a series of gestures and facial expressions and one must also become attuned to interpreting the emotions of the wearer from the eyes and from subtle changes in the muscles of the face seen beneath the burqa.⁵⁷ Writing in 2011, Reem El Mutwalli further elaborates by arguing that since social interaction with a masked woman requires more attention than normal, the burqa can be perceived to foster communication rather than inhibit it. At the same time, faced with a masked woman, El Mutwalli argues, attention is drawn not only to the eyes for information but also to the rest of the face; indeed, it can be said that there is a certain fascination towards anything forbidden.⁵⁸ Whether it is the forbidden that is foregrounded or not, the burqa has long been used as a crucial part of a woman's everyday adornment, as Athman, observes, and was seen to enhance her individual beauty.⁵⁹ Wikan further argues that the style of the burqa is exquisitely fitted to cater to all such beautifying needs, its curved lines and no fixity of size of its various parts makes it even more suitable for manipulation.⁶⁰

"شينات الوجوه زينات البراقع"

The popular saying above, relates to the burqa for '*Shinnat Al-Wojooh Zenaat Al-Burqas*'⁶¹ meaning 'women without burqas are not pretty, especially if they have large teeth and

⁵⁶ Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment Among Arabian Women* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.68.

⁵⁷ Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.69.

⁵⁸ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani, Tradition Renewed* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), p.289.

⁵⁹ Souad Athman, 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrah Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aymarar [Changes in Women's Traditional Dress, Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society]', in Al Gohary, M. (ed.) *Dirasat fi Elm Alfolklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore], (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1998), p.402.

⁶⁰ Unni Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.98.

⁶¹ Appendix 1. Interviews, Metha Said Mohammed, Emirates, 22.08.2013, pp.220-221.

button noses'. As this local Emirati saying suggests, wearing the burqa allows a woman to hide her flaws and any signs of ageing and thereby enhance her beauty.

Kanafani also discusses the burqa as an adornment object as follows:

The mask, in addition to other functions, aims at concealing what UAE women considered as ugly; namely, wrinkles, pimples, and bad teeth. At the same time the mask beautifies their faces by the indigo colour that decorates the mask, by the harmony of lines and features that it creates, and by emphasis it places on the eyes of the wearer.⁶²

Aisha, a burqa maker, recounted in interview that she demanded to wear the burqa to hide her wrinkles, scars and other flaws and imperfections such as her thick lips (once considered unattractive) and her missing and uneven teeth.⁶³ The contradictions between wearing the burqa as a symbol of decency, and wearing it for adornment are commented upon by Jenny Paulin as follows:

The burqa concealed any less than desirable facial features, but also highlighted the eyes, which appeared particularly beautiful when women wore black kohl eyeliner. This is certainly the case in Sohar (a city in Oman) where the burqa can signify modesty and moral propriety while, at the same time, making the face more beautiful and, in particular, the eyes more striking.⁶⁴

This emphasis on beauty or adornment was a key feature that was mentioned by all of the Emirati women that I interviewed.

Experiencing the Burqa

As part of this research enquiry I wore a burqa for the first time in 2013 (Fig. 34). When I first looked at myself in the mirror, I realised the burqa enhanced my eyes and did indeed hide flaws and imperfections. Speaking with the burqa on was unsettling because the timbre of my voice changed and my speech was rather muffled. I felt that there was a barrier between the outside world and myself; this helped me to consider how the burqa felt for its wearer. Does the burqa really give a woman more freedom in public spaces or does it restrict or confine her in some way? Does it make one more beautiful or alluring?

When I was with my children they treated me as if I was a stranger and they did not look directly at me, not even into my eyes. I even felt different within myself, not my usual self.

⁶² Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment Among Arabian Women* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.72.

⁶³ Appendix 1. Interviews, Aisha Yusuf, Emirates, 26.08.2012.pp.235-236.

⁶⁴ Jenny Paul, *Indigo in the Arab World*, (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997), p.141.

It was as if the burqa was controlling me. This experiment provoked a great deal of curiosity in me and spurred on me to understand Emirati women's actual experience of wearing the burqa. How did it feel and why did they wear it? I also remembered how my grandmother, who lived in a tribe in the desert, was responsible for raising her children, looking after her husband, doing the housework and tending to the animals. There was no stability in her life as every month or so the tribe needed to move on to look for water and food for themselves and their animals.⁶⁵ She, like other Bedouin women, had to do all this while wearing a burqa in temperatures of around 45–50°C.⁶⁶



Fig.34 Karima Alshomely, 'Self-portrait', Photograph, 2013

Wearing the burqa is not a straightforward act as I discovered as the traditional way of putting on the Emirati burqa is complex and requires good co-ordination skills. The steps might seem simple but, as Miller discusses in relation to the Indian sari, such an embodied cultural practice is learnt over a period of time. As my photographic record of putting on the burqa shows below there are many tricky stages (Fig. 35). First the carefully folded burqa is unfolded and the long cords on the left are threaded through the short cords on the right. Continuing to hold the cords as the burqa is carefully lifted over your head, the threads are evened out over the hair. Then at the same time as holding the burqa by its central 'sword' part, it is balanced on the nose. It is then necessary to make sure that the forehead part of the burqa covers the eyebrows fully. Continuing to hold onto the burqa with one hand on the front, the other hand holds the long cords at

⁶⁵ Rashed Elwan, *Economic and Social Conditions in the UAE Coast 1945-1971* (Sharjah: Gulf Press, 2011), pp.162-163.

⁶⁶ National Archives, *Historical, Geography and Cultural Study of the United Arab Emirates* (Abu Dhabi: National Archives, 1972), p.232.

the back. These are then tightened in order to secure the burqa on the face. The long cord is then dangled over the front of the right shoulder and the act is complete.⁶⁷ As part of my art practice I returned to experiment with wearing the burqa as discussed in chapter five.



Fig.35 karima Alshomely, 'The stages of putting on the Burqa', Photograph, 2014

Burqa Rituals and Rites of Passage

Stories about rituals surrounding the burqa abound in the UAE. Some interviewees from Khor Fakkan, for example, recounted how brides used to wear the burqa on their wedding night. When the groom entered the bedroom where his bride was waiting for him, the tradition was allegedly that if he wanted his wife to remove her burqa, he had to give her money first. This would have been the first time they had seen each other. This tradition was called 'Revealing the burqa'.⁶⁸ Mariam Kalifah, from Al Khan recounts the story about a groom seeing his bride's face for the first time on their wedding night and getting a shock: the groom entered the bedroom and took off his bride's burqa to find that she had crooked teeth and a cleft lip. He said that he cursed those who made burqas

⁶⁷ There are many instances in popular culture where the burqa is incorrectly worn. Examples include the video of the Emirati popular song "Bedouin Tortures", 1996 where the forehead part of the woman's burqa is higher than the eyebrows and most of the mouth is visible: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkAvwhzVVms> (Accessed: 20 November 2014). Kanafani cites a photograph in a brochure for the hotel Le Meridian, Abu Dhabi where the burqa is completely misaligned on the face. Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment Among Arabian Women* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.69

⁶⁸ Appendix 1. Interviews, Aisha Abdullah Khamis Barashid Naqbi, Emirates, 28.08.2012, pp.223-224.

as they hide the beauty and the ugliness of women. 'My heart felt pain, having removed this burqa showing two deformities: crooked teeth and a cleft lip'.⁶⁹

Similarly, the burqa has been associated with fertility. In her 1999 study of Emirati heritage, Souad Athman states that the bride wore a large-sized, borrowed burqa three days before her wedding day to signify that the owner of the burqa is a good woman and bore children - an extremely important ritual for the bride's future and confidence. The belief was that by wearing this burqa the owner's attributes would be passed onto the bride.⁷⁰ This ritual marking the rite of passage by marriage was confirmed by Amina Ali from Kalba in the UAE: a bride would wear a large red burqa in the days leading up to her wedding night. This had to be a used burqa and it would typically belong to either the bride's mother or another woman who had already had children. She added that the indigo dye of the burqa also highlighted and enhanced her face.⁷¹

The use of indigo dye to lighten the skin is a long-standing practice in the UAE. Through wearing the burqa it was known that the skin was whitened by the indigo dye and it seemed to glow. Al Mughanni discusses the burqa's skin enhancement qualities by referring to the wives of pearl divers and traders who were accustomed to wearing the burqa twenty-four hours a day while their husbands were away. The belief was that the indigo dye would penetrate the skin, whitening it and also rendering it smoother; these women, according to Al Mughanni, wanted to be able to greet their husbands with their improved skin upon their return.⁷² Kanafani also observes that women from Al-Ain in the UAE, named the burqa's indigo dye after the Prophet Yusuf based on the observations that the burqa fabric made her face glow.⁷³

The rites of passage discussed above have become less common post 1960.⁷⁴ As women increasingly became educated, graduating from universities and taking up employment,

⁶⁹ Appendix 1. Interviews, Miriam Kalifah Said, Emirates, 02.12.2013, p.226.

⁷⁰ Souad Athman, 'Malameh Alqaeer fi Mellabs Almrah Altaqlediuah, Dirasat Halat Alburqa fi Mojtamah Aymarar [Changes in Women's Traditional Dress, Case Study of the Burqa in UAE Society]', in Al Gohary, M. (ed.) *Dirasat fi Elm Alfolklore* [Studies in the Science of Folklore] (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Studies, 1998), p.407.

⁷¹ Appendix 1. Interviews, Amina Ali Salem, Emirates, 01.10.2013.p.228.

⁷² Fatimah Al Mughanni, *Zeenah wa Aziah Almarah Altaqlediuah fi Alimarate Ala'rabiah Almthdah* [Woman's Traditional Adornment and Fashion in the United Arab Emirates], (Emirates: Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 2012), p.40.

⁷³ Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment Among Arabian Women* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.65.

⁷⁴ Mohammed Abdullah, *Aziah wa Zeenah Almrah Alemiratiuah* [Costume and Adornment of

the typical age at which a girl or woman would get married increased from 12 to 18 years old to 19 to 23 years old.⁷⁵ Nowadays, regardless of whether an Emirati woman is married or not, she is unlikely to wear a burqa. Many women now only wear the burqa at special ceremonies and large gatherings where men are present. Elderly women, however, have found it difficult to abandon their inherited traditions and can still be seen wearing the burqa today, even in their own homes, at times.⁷⁶ Descriptions of such ritualistic practices nonetheless have been a powerful repository and source for my artistic practice as discussed in the next chapter.

The Burqa Textile: Remedies and Popular Beliefs

Here, I focus on popular beliefs associated with the burqa textile that are part of Emirati culture and its oral history. As Jenny Balfour-Paul, observes in *Indigo* (1998):

Indigo dye is one of the major components of the burqa textile, in much more than just a literal or physical sense, as there are many spiritual, cultural and social beliefs attached to using indigo dye in the UAE and beyond.⁷⁷

As a source of natural indigo dye, the woad plant has been used for several thousand years in Europe and the Middle East for a variety of medicinal purposes. As Balfour-Paul details, in the fourth century BC Hippocrates recommended a woad treatment for ulcers, and much later, in 1576, woad leaves were used for haemorrhage, gangrene and putrid ulcers. In 1710 it was also discovered that woad juice had its uses as a coagulating agent and could be used to slow bleeding of all sorts, whether internally or externally, from the mouth, nose or genitals, as well as resisting putrefaction. It is used to relieve pain and reduce chronic coughing.⁷⁸ The list of ailments it has been reported to cure is extensive, mostly based on its apparent antiseptic, astringent and purgative properties; however, it has also been used as a treatment for nervous afflictions such as hysteria, epilepsy and depression.⁷⁹ Balfour-Paul also writes about the uses of indigo as a health treatment in *Indigo* (1998):

Emirati Woman], (Abu Dhabi: Al-Dhafra Group Press, 2007), Al-Dhafra, v.47, p.28.

⁷⁵ Hind Al Qasimi, *Al Thabit wa Al Motaqyer fi Thaqafah Almrh fi Alimarat* [Fixed and Variable in Women Cultural in UAE], (Sharjah: Social Association, 1998), p.172.

⁷⁶ Reem El Mutwalli, *Sultani Tradition Renewed* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2011), pp.287-288.

⁷⁷ Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo* (London: British Museum, 1998), p.160.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 218.

⁷⁹ Abdullah Al Thaboor, *Altab Alsha'by fi Alimarat Ala'rabiya Almthdah* [Folk Medicine in United Arab Emirates], (Dubai: Gulf Centre Press, 2001), 3 rd. end, pp.373-376.

All parts of the plants have been used - crushed leaves, dye pigment, roots and seeds. They have been mixed into unlikely concoctions with all sorts of substances including goat hair, egg white, castor oil, fat, polenta and pepper, and applied externally or consumed orally.⁸⁰

In *Indigo in the Arab World* (1997), Balfour-Paul further details tests using indigo pigment and infusions from indigo plants for the treatment of mumps, hepatitis, eczema, chickenpox and meningitis,⁸¹ and discusses Emirati women's use of the indigo dye from the burqa fabric as a medical treatment and a protection. For example, it was believed on the eastern coast of the UAE that after giving birth mothers should draw circles with indigo dye from the offcuts of their burqa fabrics after soaking the fabric in water to extract the excess dye. The indigo dye stained water would be applied to the new baby's wrists, eyebrows, chest, back and ankles as a way of preventing envy from others.⁸²

Through my research interviews I have also discovered that Emirati women continue to use the burqa textile as a beauty aid as well as for medicinal purposes. Thirteen out of the twenty women I interviewed spoke about using the burqa textile as a cosmetic. In the past, Bedouin women would apparently apply oil mixed with indigo dye to the skin, not only to treat various skin ailments and conditions but also to remove or lighten freckles through bleaching. Indigo dye was also popularly used as a perfume.

Eight of my interviewees chose to speak (without being prompted) about the indigo dye that saturates the burqa fabric. Scraps from the burqa are used to treat wounds after soaking them in water. When the indigo dye dissolves, the burqa pieces become soft and can then be put directly onto a wound, helping to 'dry out' all traces of chicken pox and the like.⁸³ In one case cited, the burqa fabric was applied to the face of a male stroke victim with paralysed facial muscles. Referred to as the 'Bobriqia' recovery method, he remained inside a warm, dark room for a week until he was cured.⁸⁴

These personal accounts made me curious about the substances used to make the artificial indigo dye that has been used in the production of the burqa fabric. What did the

⁸⁰ Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo* (London: British Museum, 1998), p.219.

⁸¹ Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo in the Arab World* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997), p.217.

⁸² Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo in the Arab World* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997), p.160; Balfour-Paul's extensive volume, also discusses the use of the indigo dye from burqa textiles in Oman and the Arabian Peninsula; pp.159-160.

⁸³ Appendix 1. Interviews, Aisha Rebiah Abdullah, Bahrain, 07.07.2013, pp.207.

⁸⁴ Appendix 1. Interviews, Um Ali, Emirates, 30.08.2012, pp.229-231.

dye contain and how could it possibly be used for such a wide range of treatments? Accordingly, I obtained samples of two different artificial indigo-dyed fabrics from one of the Indian manufacturers I interviewed and sent these to the American University in Sharjah to be analysed. The table below shows the indigo dye components (Table 2).

Component	Red textile (mg/L)	Blue textile (mg/L)
Aluminum	96.63762	205.3369
Arsenic	18.38674	21.22007
Boron	49.25067	47.16499
Barium	17.12038	17.12038
Cadmium	4.531047	4.50651
Chromium	9.711284	9.519438
Copper	9.871745	12.32118
Iron	45.29798	50.88176
Manganese	4.642191	4.623285
Nickel	10.61277	10.68907
Lead	20.00614	20.83501
Vanadium	20.24937	18.5586
Zinc	46.73806	56.13386

I focused on the substances that appeared in the highest concentrations. In this respect, aluminium, zinc and boron are metal compounds used in the cosmetics industry today, such as in lipstick and deodorant. Boron, copper and arsenic are also used in preparations for skin rashes and allergies, and chromium and copper are elements used as a pigment dye.⁸⁵ This analysis shows why the medicinal and cosmetic effects associated with the

⁸⁵ Raymond Chang and Kenneth A. Goldsby, *Chemistry*, 11th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013).

indigo-dyed burqa do indeed create physical changes and suggests their potential toxic nature if not carefully administered.

The findings also made sense of why the fine paper burqa textile wrap is also used for varied medicinal purposes. One interviewee, who said that she used small pieces of burqa textile to stop nosebleeds by placing them on burning coals and inhaling the fumes, also described the uses of the burqa packaging. For example, she put Aloe Vera and Myrrh onto the packaging, which was then applied to a swollen lymph gland beneath the ear. The burqa packaging could also be used in the treatment of various illnesses such as tonsillitis.⁸⁶

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how the use of ethnographic and artistic methods of observation and recording through interviews, empirical research and drawings, alongside historical and archival research, have been key to establishing an archive of thirty different named types of Emirati burqa by reference to their specific material characteristics and region of production. In reference to the twelve-burqa forms detailed, I have also identified their relationship to the rites of passage associated with age, status and regional identities.

This represents a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding of the Emirati burqa and the personal and social meanings that it held for the female, her family and tribe.

As this chapter shows there is no singular reason for wearing or not wearing the burqa; the diversity of women's responses depend upon their social class and education, family customs, where they live, the tribe they belong to and local traditions. There were a small percentage of women who tried to resist wearing the burqa just as there were examples of young girls desperate to start wearing the burqa before the acceptable age. For the majority of interviewees the burqa was seen to represent their identity as Emirati women. Further, the act of burqa wearing is an embodied practice. As an embodied object the burqa interfaces with the outside world and conveys tactile and sonic qualities to its

⁸⁶ Appendix 1. Interviews, Um Ali, Emirates, 30.08.2012, pp.229-231; that is conformed in the following publication: Abdel Basset Mohamed El Sayed, *Almosoah Alam li Nabatat Altabeyh wa Alilaj Balachap* [Encyclopedia Mother for Treatment Plants and Medicinal Herbal], (Egypt: Alfa, 2010)

wearer. If burqa wearing modifies every day actions, such regular actions also shape the burqa as it retains the traces of its wearer touch, smell, and imprint.

As I have emphasised the burqa is an intimate object that was made and worn by women. Experimenting with the making and wearing of the burqa provided insights into both the craft of making and the experience of learning to don the burqa. An understanding of the different forms of the burqa, its material qualities, the beliefs and the stories surrounding the uses of the burqa textile and the indigo dye have provided a starting point for my own artistic work that imaginatively engages with this rich material history. My practice detailed in the next two chapters is a response to, and an engagement with, the traditional craft of burqa making and the rituals associated with it in order to create a new visual language and embodied understanding of the burqa as a material object.

Chapter Four: Contemporary Practice Research: Engaging with the Materiality of the Emirati Burqa

Introduction

The decision to research the history of the Emirati burqa and, in particular, the practices of burqa makers and burqa wearers, has radically changed my art practice and my approaches to art making. Initially, my research interest was the burqa as a form of mask or concealment. In the summer of 2012, I embarked on a series of filmed interviews with Emirati burqa makers and burqa wearers to understand how they viewed the burqa. Repeatedly watching my initial interviews and transcribing them, I became aware of the richness of the history and culture associated with the burqa and the intimate relationship that existed between the women and their burqas. These two insights led me to change the focus of my research from the burqa as mask to the material culture of the Emirati burqa as an embodied object worn by women. In particular, I became fascinated with the burqa fabric, its material qualities, and the rich cultural associations it carried as a material produced specifically for women's face coverings. I focused initially on the material qualities of the burqa fabric as the starting point for the new body of work presented here.

As this chapter aims to show, the dialogue between the historical, theoretical and empirical research on the Emirati burqa and the artworks has been a continuous one. Material gained from initial interviews, historic archival material, literature and storytelling traditions, and the examination of craft processes have formed the basis for my new work and throughout the production of art work, I have continued to research historical and contemporary practices associated with the burqa. After an initial discussion of my prior art practice, in this chapter I present, analyse and reflect upon my practice-based research that engages with the materiality of the Emirati burqa and its associated histories and rituals. This includes my first experiments with the burqa fabric as a surface for painting and for acts of inscription that use predominately modern technologies to embed memories and beliefs associated with the burqa within the fabric. These experimental methods were used to develop a new visual language in my practice that could convey through the materiality of the burqa fabric the intimacy and the ritualistic aspects associated with the Emirati burqa. I reflect upon the resulting art works in relation to selected artworks by other contemporary artists employing the image of the burqa, craft materials or methods of inscription. I also analyse the role that workshops

played in developing my understanding of the burqa and its meanings for different audiences in Britain and the United Arab Emirates.

As noted above, at the beginning of this PhD I was thinking about the burqa as a mask, a metaphorical covering that certain people prefer to wear and use within particular situations. In 2010, just before embarking upon this PhD, I organised a workshop at the National Copenhagen Museum where I asked visitors to the accompanying exhibition to participate by wearing the burqa and observed their reactions and the psychological effects the covering seemed to have on them.⁸⁷ This photographic work seemed important at a time when physical concealment and its association with religion was so controversial, and I wanted to examine whether the act of visual concealment is, in fact, any different to the invisible and mental ways in which we conceal ourselves on a daily basis in contemporary culture (Figs. 1 & 2).



Figs.1 & 2 Karima Alshomely, 'Mask (Burqa) series', National Museum Copenhagen, Photograph, 2010

In 2012, during the first year of my PhD, I presented works that engaged with this theme in the solo exhibition entitled 'Mask' at Sharjah Fine Arts Society in the UAE.⁸⁸ These

⁸⁷ The exhibition and workshop was part of a week-long cross-cultural exchange between The Department of Culture and Information in Sharjah, UAE and the National Museum in Copenhagen, June 2012.

⁸⁸ 'Mask', solo exhibition, Sharjah Fine Arts Society, UAE, February 2012; Exhibition catalogue, 'Mask' (Sharjah, 2012). The exhibition was under the auspices of 'The Emirates Fine Arts Society', a non-profit organisation of art professionals in different cities in the UAE that holds annual

included paintings, photographs, ceramics, mixed media sculptures and installations based upon mask forms in the shape of a burqa. The variety of methods of making paralleled the idea of the variety of masks that people wear when dealing with others. I metaphorically represented this 'invisible' mask through the traditional burqa used in the Arabian Gulf. I referred to this as 'the multiplicity of one face' and it served several purposes including concealing one's identity as well as escapism, hypocrisy, expressive evasion, and duplicity, just as the burqa can hide the identity of the wearer. The mask form is open to both the inside (the way we view others) and the outside (the way others view us). My work at this time focused on the burqa as an iconic object or sign without any consideration of its place in Emirati history and culture or its material qualities.⁸⁹ (Figs. 3 & 4) The research presented in the previous chapters resulted in a profound change in my work as detailed below.



Fig.3 Karima Alshomely, 'Mask (Burqa)', Acrylic colour on Canvas, 50cm x250cm, 2012



Fig.4 Karima Alshomely, 'Mask (Burqa)', Scissors, Blades, Ceramic, Pins, 2012

exhibition at the museum. Available at: http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/art_destinations/sharjah/arts_area/emirates_fine_arts_society. (Accessed: 19 April 2015).

⁸⁹ The Mask project has parallels with Dawn Black's work 'Conceal Project' (2008-present). Black examined the practice of masquerade and its role in relation to conceptions of identity and power with 200 postcard-size works on paper painted in watercolour, ink and gouache that presented portraits of individuals altering their identity through masks, uniforms, haute couture fashion, ceremonial dress and other forms of concealment. 'Ashton Chandler, artist interview: Dawn Black'. Available at: <http://www.blu-magazine.com/post/5390433250/artist-interview-dawn-black> (Accessed: 18 March 2013).

Experiments with the Burqa Material: Painting and Inscription

Fascinated by the burqa material, I initially wanted to challenge myself by using the burqa fabric as my painting surface instead of canvas. As discussed previously, the stiff texture of the fabric and the indigo dye that it contains makes it difficult and messy to handle. I first conducted some tests on the burqa fabric by applying oil and acrylic paints to the typical red and gold-green burqa materials worn in the UAE. The results of these tests showed that some colours changed when saturated with the indigo dye. Acrylic dried in minutes, compared with oil, which took a month to dry (just as on canvas) and the colours changed dramatically. These results were not what I was looking for; I wanted a fabric that would not change my palette of colours. (Figs. 5-8)

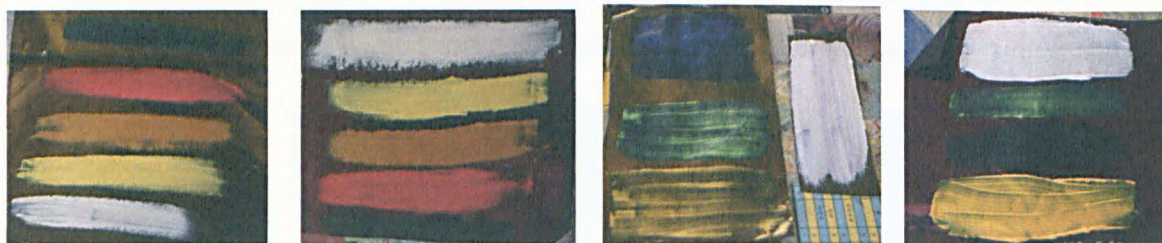


Fig.5 Karima Alshomely, 'Oil paint on Gold-Green Burqa Textile', 15cm×10cm, 2013

Fig.6 Karima Alshomely, 'Oil paint on Red Burqa Textile', 18cm×10cm, 2013

Fig.7 Karima Alshomely, 'Acrylic paint on Gold-Green Burqa Textile', 20cm×10cm, 2013

Fig.8 Karima Alshomely, 'Acrylic paint on Red Burqa Textile', 10cm×10cm, 2013

Although these initial experiments were not successful they led me to think about the craft of burqa making as parallel to the processes of painting: the preparation of the surface of the burqa fabric that is worked upon and imprinted by the hand of the maker. This prompted questions about the relationship of craft and art. As artist Caroline Broadhead states, one part of this is the making:

What craft means to me is the making part, the how you make, and this is an exchange with materials - what you give to a material, and what it gives back. This exchange can be awkward, it can be a struggle, or one party can dominate, but if it is a productive exchange, then that's when it's worth looking at⁹⁰

As David Revere McFadden, Chief Curator and Vice President of the Museum of Arts& Design in New York observes, 'Craft, art, and design are words heavily laden with cultural baggage.' In this respect I concur with McFadden when he further argues:

For me, they all connote the profound engagement with materials and process that is central to creativity. Through this engagement form, function, and meaning are made tangible. It is time to move beyond the

⁹⁰ Victoria and Albert Museum, Available at: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/w/what-is-craft/>, (Accessed: 28 December, 2014).

limitations of terminologies that fragment and separate our appreciation of creative actions, and consider the 'behaviours of making' that practitioners share.⁹¹

For me, the shared 'behaviours of making' are the physical qualities and the associated cultural meanings embedded in materials and the embodied processes of making. In this context, I wanted to find a way of using the burqa material to create contemporary artwork.

To best consider how to use the burqa fabric, I choose to analyse the fabric. For this purpose, I visited a science laboratory at the University of Sharjah in October 2013 where the red and gold-green burqa fabrics were examined under a microscope. What surprised me when I looked through the microscope was not seeing the wavy piece of fabric that I imagined but rather a rocky landscape with dry cracks (Figs. 9 & 10). These cracks in the fabric evoked mental images of desert sands, the thirst for water, Bedouin women wearing burqas, and the rock houses that women inhabited in mountain regions.

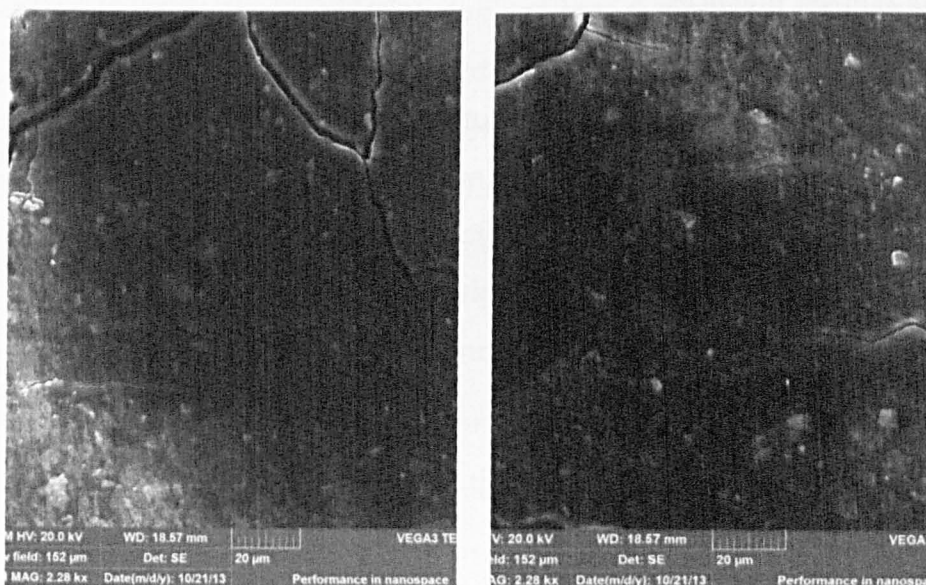


Fig.9 Red Burqa Textile, Micro image, 2013 (left)

Fig.10 Green Burqa Textile, Micro image, 2013 (right)

The unexpected image of the burqa fabric under the microscope resembling the desert terrain could be seen as a form of inscription embedded in the fabric. For me, this idea of associative qualities embedded in the fabric made a direct connection with the various rituals and beliefs associated with the saturated indigo dye discussed in chapter three,

⁹¹ Victoria and Albert Museum, Available at: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/w/what-is-craft/>, (Accessed: 28 December, 2014).

including the belief that the burqa holds the Prophet Yusuf's (Joseph's) light.⁹² According to the Quran, the Prophet Yusuf was the most handsome man, with a special light illuminating his face,⁹³ and some Emirati women believe that they will inherit this light through wearing the burqa.

An additional inspiration for considering the possibilities of inscription as a conceptual and physical method to create artwork using burqa fabric was my discovery of a nineteenth-century African writing board in the British Museum (Fig.11). The accompanying label stated: 'Blessings are called on the prophet Muhammad and then one of the names of God. Oh most affectionate one.' These words were hand written in Arabic calligraphy on the surface of the wooden board with ink. The inscribed text repeats the name Daoud (David), giving the feeling of prayer and beseeching. This style and method of writing was apparently common in West Africa where students needed to practice Arabic calligraphy and use such texts to memorise the Quran.⁹⁴ Sometimes these boards contained diagrams of magic talismans and they can be seen as a visual dialogue between Islam and local magic practices.⁹⁵

This artefact gave me a starting point for thinking about communicating the power of the belief in the light of Yusuf on the burqa fabric itself as part of a contemporary art practice. By repeatedly inscribing the word 'Noor', a metaphor for the light of prophet Yusuf, it materialises the wishes of burqa wearing women for his light on their faces and embeds this little known cultural practice of the past into the present. In effect, making this history present.

⁹² Aida Kanafani, *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates: The Anthropology of Food and Personal Adornment among Arabian Women*, (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p.70.

⁹³ For the verse on the beauty and miracle of the Prophet Yusuf in the Quran (12:24-28) see: Available at:

[http://www.quranful.comhttp://www.alim.org/library/biography/stories/content/SOP/15/11/Yusuf%20\(Joseph\)/Zulaikha's%20Feelings%20for%20Joseph](http://www.quranful.comhttp://www.alim.org/library/biography/stories/content/SOP/15/11/Yusuf%20(Joseph)/Zulaikha's%20Feelings%20for%20Joseph) (Accessed: 22 December 2014)

⁹⁴ Unknown, Quranic Writing Board, Available at:

https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/2909/Qur%E2%80%99anic_Writing_Board, (Accessed: 3 December, 2015).

⁹⁵ Unknown, 'Inscribing Meaning', Available at:

<http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/inscribing/scripts.html>, (Accessed: 3 December, 2015).



Fig.11 Writing board, British Museum, 19th century

From interviews, I had discovered that Emirati women had used oil to bring out the shine of the burqa and, conversely, perfume to reduce the sheen.⁹⁶ With this in mind, I experimented with writing the word 'Noor' (light) in Arabic with a nylon paintbrush on a fragment of burqa fabric, repeating it using both perfume and oil separately (Figs. 12 & 13). The first experiments with perfume proved unsuccessful in embedding the inscription in the fabric as no trace of the writing was left on the surface of the cloth after the perfume had dried.

I subsequently experimented with using a sewing pin (an object associated mainly with women's craftwork) to scratch out the word 'Noor' which also unexpectedly allowed light to shine through the fabric (Fig. 14). This manual method was time consuming, echoing the labour of women burqas makers. In effect, I was scratching a piece of Emirati culture into the burqa fragment and enabling the belief of the light of the Prophet Yusuf to become visible.

⁹⁶ Appendix 1, Interviews. Tarifah Kamis Al Shehhi, Emirates, 21.08.2013, p.213-214.



Fig.12 Karima Alshomely, 'Word Noor' written with Perfume on Burqa Fabric, 5cm×4cm, 2013

Fig.13 Karima Alshomely, 'Word 'Noor' written with Oil on Burqa Fabric, 5cm×4cm, 2013

Fig.14 Karima Alshomely, 'Word 'Noor' scratched onto Burqa Fabric with Pin, 5cm×4cm, 2013

For the next set of works I experimented with laser cutting as a method to embed or literally cut the word 'Noor' into the burqa fabric. I choose to inscribe the word 'Noor' in a classical Arabic calligraphy called *Diwani*.⁹⁷ This type of script has a curved line and smooth edge which compliments the line of the burqa shape. For me, the use of calligraphy, regarded as one of the most beautiful art forms in the Arab world, was the most appropriate form for inscribing the concept of the light of Yusuf into the burqa fabric and conveying its associated meaning of beautifying the woman's skin. Calligraphy also carries an additional meaning that resonates with the craft of burqa making and burqa wearing. In Arabic, calligraphy is called '*khatt*' which derives from the word for 'line', 'design' or 'construction', and it literally means 'to outline' or 'to mark out'.⁹⁸

To create the Arabic text for the work I used a traditional bamboo stick sharpened into a nib and calligraphy ink and then scanned this original into 'Illustrator' to adjust the size and repeat the design (Figs. 15-18). Once transferred to the laser machine, the word 'Noor' was engraved onto the shiny side of the burqa textile and literally revealed the word by eradicating the surface sheen but without burning the fabric (Figs. 19 & 20). In further laser cut works, I created circular forms setting the word 'Noor' in the centre of the fabric. Here, I laser cut the word out and the laser machine removed the sheen in sunray lines while leaving the image of many small burqas. This seemed to me to be a fitting metaphor of being protected from the sun's rays by wearing the burqa (Fig. 21).

⁹⁷ Diwani is an Arabic script style developed by Ottoman Turkish calligraphers during the fifteenth century and often used on official state documents. Saeb Eigner, *Art of the Middle East*, (London: Merrell, 2010), p.16.

⁹⁸ Nada M. Shabout, *Modern Arab Art*, (United States of America: University Press of Florida, 2007), p.64.

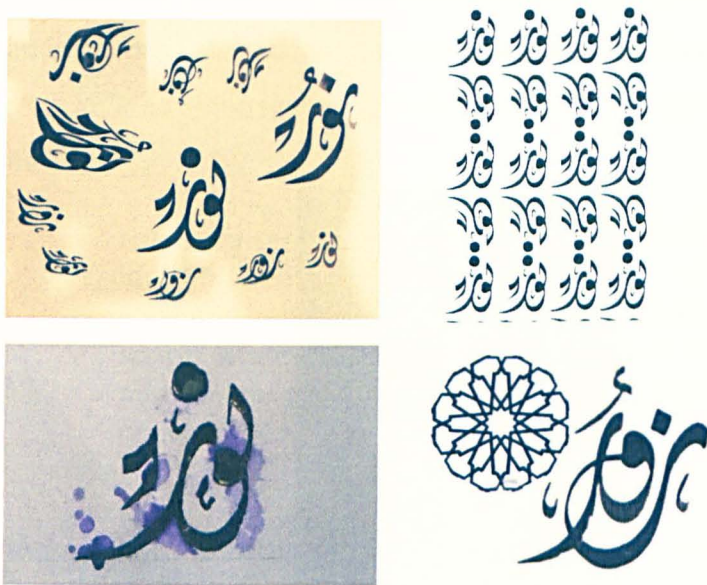
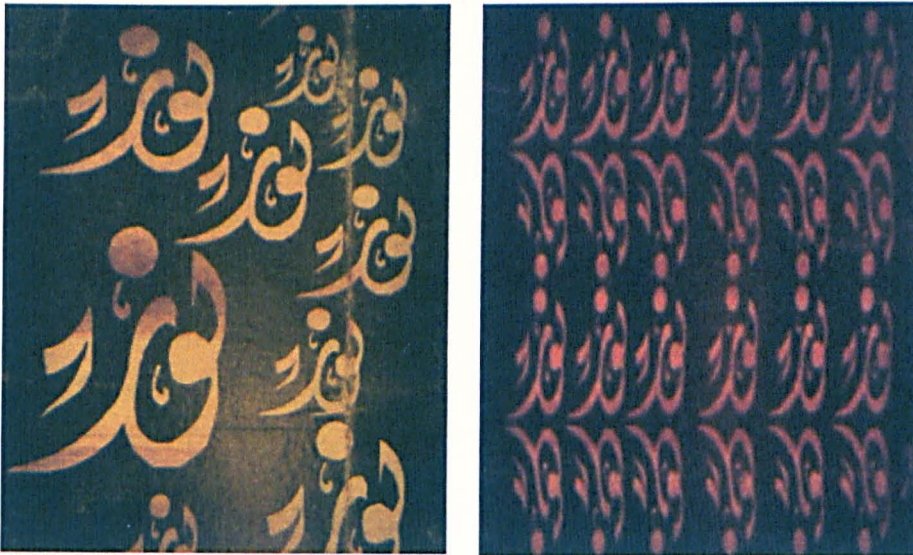


Fig.15 Karima Alshomely, Hand Writing word 'Noor', 30cm×25cm, 2013

Fig.16 Karima Alshomely, Illustration of word 'Noor', 21cm×19cm, 2013

Fig.17 Karima Alshomely, Cutting word 'Noor', Burqa Fabric, 30cm×20cm, 2013

Fig.18 Karima Alshomely, Illustration of word 'Noor', 21cm×19cm, 2013



Figs.19 & 20 Karima Alshomely, 'Noor Series', Rubbing the Shine, Burqa Fabric, Laser, 35cm×28cm, 2014

I also experimented with other methods of imprinting the fabric. For example, I used a woodcut printing technique that left the image of 'Noor' proud so that when run through a hand press the word 'Noor' was raised from its background (Fig. 22). Through all of these varied processes of inscribing and cutting 'Noor' into the burqa fabric, my aim was to produce contemporary works that drew upon the rituals and beliefs associated with the Emirati burqa. This group of experimental works both symbolises and embodies the light that passes through the burqa fabric, representing the light of Yusuf as a

contemporary manifestation. They bring together beliefs associated with the past into the present and also link craft and art practices through the burqa material and the use of modern technologies.



Fig.21 Karima Alshomely, 'Noor Series', Rubbing the Shine, Burqa Fabric, Laser, 35cm×35cm, 2014

Fig.22 Karima Alshomely, 'Noor Series', Embossed, Burqa Fabric, 50cm ×85cm, 2014

Contexts of Practice: Inscription

Although in one sense art making may be generally seen as an act of inscription by the artist, there are several contemporary artists working with specific concepts and forms of inscription, including the use of calligraphy prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa.⁹⁹ In particular, there is a well-established history of contemporary women artists using acts of self-inscription, often linked with semi-autobiographical work, as a means of subverting stereotypical images of women and/or of inserting themselves into cultural histories that women have previously been absent from. To contextualise my practice and reflect upon my use of inscription on burqa fabric I have selected works by three contemporary women artists working in the very different media of film and photography who each use personal handwritten texts to open up the spaces of specifically female subjectivities in relation to stereotypical images of Arab women and gender conventions. Each of the artists live outside of their country of birth and share an Arab cultural heritage although from the different geographies of Palestine, Algeria and Morocco.

⁹⁹ For contemporary calligraphic art practices in the Middle East and North Africa see: Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi and Nada Shabout, (2009) *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*; Kobena Mercer, (2008), *Discrepant Abstraction*; T. J. Barringer, (1998) *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and Museum*; Nada M. Shabout, (2007) *Modern Arab Art*.

The first examples are by the British based artists Mona Hatoum (born 1952) and Zineb Sedira (born 1963) who both trained in Britain. Hatoum's much discussed and multilayered video work, 'A Measure of Distance', 1988 (Fig. 23), as Rosemary Betterton notes,

sets up a series of connections between the female body, subjective identity and the ethnocentric gaze ... the images of her mother washing herself in a shower are overlaid on the screen by Arabic script, while on the soundtrack extracts from the letters written by mother to daughter and translated into English are heard over conversations in Arabic.¹⁰⁰

The mother's letters, written in Arabic in Beirut, are received by the Palestinian born Hatoum in exile in London and together with the spoken voice and image, emphasise the intimacy between mother and daughter.

Of particular relevance to my work is what Hatoum describes as her concerns with 'literal closeness and implied distance' and 'trying to go against the fixed identity that is usually implied in the stereotype of Arab woman as passive, mother as non-sexual being'.¹⁰¹ Although Hatoum's work is dealing with issues of separation and loss and she uses very different materials and methods, the sense of female links through time and space or what Betterton calls 'a sense of intimacy and distance',¹⁰² and the inscription of these lived experiences links with my concerns with using inscription to materialize women's experience and beliefs and the embodied intimacy of burqa wearing.

¹⁰⁰ Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.189-190

¹⁰¹ Michael Archer, Guy Brett, Catherine de Zegher, *Mona Hatoum* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), p.140.

¹⁰² Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.189-190.



Fig.23 Mona Hatoum, 'Measure of Distance', 1988, (<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hatoum-measures-of-distance-t07538>) (Accessed: 18 December, 2013)

The second work of relevance is a video work by the Franco-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira referencing the practice of hand-drawn henna designs common to many Muslim countries. In 'Autobiographical Patterns' 1996 (Fig. 24) the artist's hand is filmed writing an autobiographical text in French onto her other hand. Through the intense act of writing onto her skin the text becomes overwritten suggesting a wealth of untold female stories that need to be made visible. As Karen Alexander notes, 'the process of writing functions as a mark of identity: a determination to write her own subjective experience into representational narratives and to inscribe her own fiction of identity.'¹⁰³ In this sense, I also use inscription to tell a specific story about Emirati women's experience of the burqa and the use of the burqa fabric as the surface is directly associated with the female body and the imprint of the female on the fabric.



Fig.24 Zineb Sedira, 'Autobiographical Patterns', 1996, (<http://www.freetoair.org.uk>)(Accessed: 20 December, 2013)

¹⁰³Karen Alexander, 'Free to Air Part 1 of 4 Freedom of Speech', (FREE TO AIR, 10 September 2009), <http://www.freetoair.org.uk>, (Accessed: 20 December, 2013).

The third artist who uses calligraphy as a key part of her work is the Moroccan-born photographer Lalla Essaydi who now lives in the USA. Essaydi's large-scale photographic works are based on nineteenth-century Orientalist painting themes and always feature women in an interior and hand written calligraphy across all of the surfaces depicted. For example, in 'Writing Femininity, Writing Pleasure (Les Femmes du Maroc)', 2006, (Fig. 25) the hand-drawn Arabic classical calligraphy made with henna is applied to the different surfaces including the architecture, the dress and body of the female. Essaydi employs the female tradition of henna drawing as a consciously 'feminine visual language' to produce the calligraphic writing that she considers a 'male' high art.¹⁰⁴ The texts, often overwritten and illegible, are poetic stories associated with Arab women's experiences. Essaydi regards her photographs as expressions of her own personal history that 'can also be taken as reflections on the life of Arab women in general.'¹⁰⁵

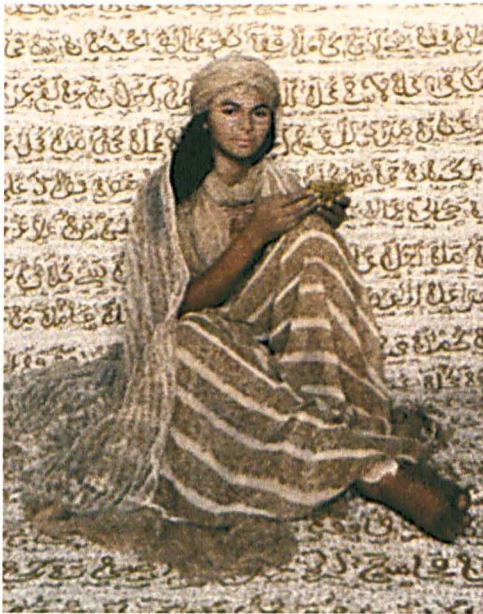


Fig.25 Lalla Essaydi, 'Les Femmes Du Maroc', 2006, (www.lallaessaydi.com) (Accessed: 22 December, 2013).

From the above examples it is clear that the act of inscription for contemporary women artists of Arab descent has been particularly important as a visual and material means of exploring female subjectivities within the wider context of women making art and western perceptions of the Arab female. In the examples of Sedira and Essaydi, they consciously draw upon the tradition of women's henna rituals to make links with other

¹⁰⁴ Olivia Sand, 'Profile: Lalla Essaydi', *Asian Art Newspaper*, 26 May 2015, <http://asianartnewspaper.com/article/profile-lalla-essaydi> (Accessed: 22 March 2016).

¹⁰⁵ Lalla Essaydi, *Harem beauty*, www.lallaessaydi.com, (Accessed: 22 December, 2013).

forms of women's practice that have a long history in different Arab cultures. In researching and selecting these examples I am clearly positioning my art practice in the context of women's contemporary art practice rather than within a tradition of craft. What is distinctive about my use of inscription however is that the surface that I use is a material produced specifically for women and carries a wealth of meanings intimately associated with Emirati women's lives of the past and, to a lesser degree, the present. Through this interlinking of the burqa material with the materiality of women's past practices and beliefs my practice has opened up and become richer in its use of layers of meaning and experimentation with processes.

Using inscription methods in my experiments with the burqa fabric was challenging. It was the first time I had used a delicate fabric as my 'canvas', and I found that it presented several material difficulties. It is like stiff cardboard in the sense that it is impossible to bend without cracking, it needs to be stored in a dry place in order that it does not oxidise and lose its sheen, and it requires careful handling as the dye transfers easily onto adjacent surfaces. Through my experimentation with the fabric I discovered that exposing the fabric to laser rays did not burn the fabric and this encouraged me to continue to produce work using the laser machine as a mode of inscribing memories and beliefs.

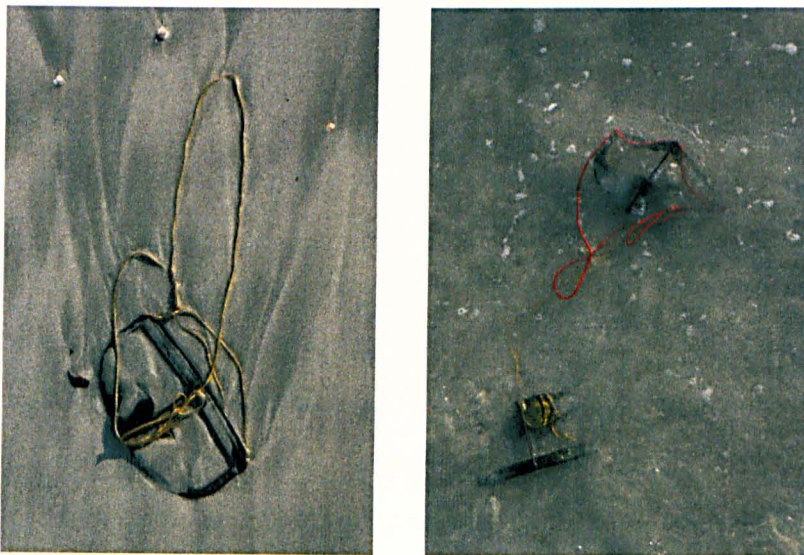
Embodying Memory: Loss and Recovery of the Burqa

Using the burqa fabric as my main support or canvas, I also created works carrying indirect references to the importance Emirati women attached to the burqa fabric as an embodiment of their culture, history and lived customs. In a series of subsequent works I experimented with the burqa form itself as a potential means of conveying the intimacy of this object for its wearer, its association with memory and ritual, and lived experience for a contemporary audience less familiar with this fast disappearing form of face covering.

My experiments with the burqa form took a variety of approaches based upon my engagement with the images, stories, and personal memories generated through my research in the UAE and the associated archives of burqas and artefacts that I gathered during this process. One of my first experiments was prompted by a personal childhood memory of seeing women bathing and washing their clothes in the sea, leaving their burqas on the beach for safe keeping. This memory spurred me to think about what

would happen if a burqa was immersed in the sea. To test this out, I went to the beach in Sharjah early one morning when the sea was calm, taking my camera with me. Throwing several burqas into the sea, I wanted to see if the indigo colour seeping from the fabric would be visible in the seawater. Although I used the 'Mama Fatima' brand of burqa fabric because it contained the most indigo (as discussed in chapter two) traces of the indigo dye was not visible. I was also unable to see any visible changes to the burqa even when it had been in the salty water for some time.

After throwing several burqas into the sea, the current took one away and buried it in the sand. Another floated out to sea and I managed to catch the others and stop them from drifting off. The resulting photographs depict the burqa that was buried by the sea in the sand like an abandoned or discarded object, paralleling the disappearance of the Emirati burqa. These photographs (Figs. 26 & 27) inspired me to think about my work for the first time as a form of performance or enactment that I discuss further in the next chapter.



Figs.26 & 27 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa on Beach', Photograph, 2013

In order to capture the visible effects of indigo seeping from the burqa, I re-submerged the surviving burqas in a large glass basin of mineral water and recorded the process of seepage on film. When submerged, the indigo started to escape immediately as if the fabric was bleeding. I had mixed emotions about this. On the one hand, the indigo escaping was like the burqa disappearing or fading. On the other, I was happy that the dye was running out as the effect was visually stunning. In the resulting 00:03:57 minute video entitled 'Neel' (Indigo) (Fig. 28, see Appendix 5: Documentation of Practice) the

indigo disperses in the water in a mesmerising way. This visual dispersal, with no accompanying sound, could be seen as a metaphor for the disappearance of the burqa and, in time, a loss of the personal and collective memories associated with it in the fast changing society of the UAE. In this context, 'Neel' could be seen as visually representing or re-presenting the burqa as an active witness to its lost past. It also plays a part in rediscovery or keeping this material object alive through re-activation. Incorporating some of the personal narratives and memories of my interviewees, the film could also be perceived as a visual diary of the life of a woman who used to go to the beach to wash her family's clothes and bathe, leaving her burqa on the beach.

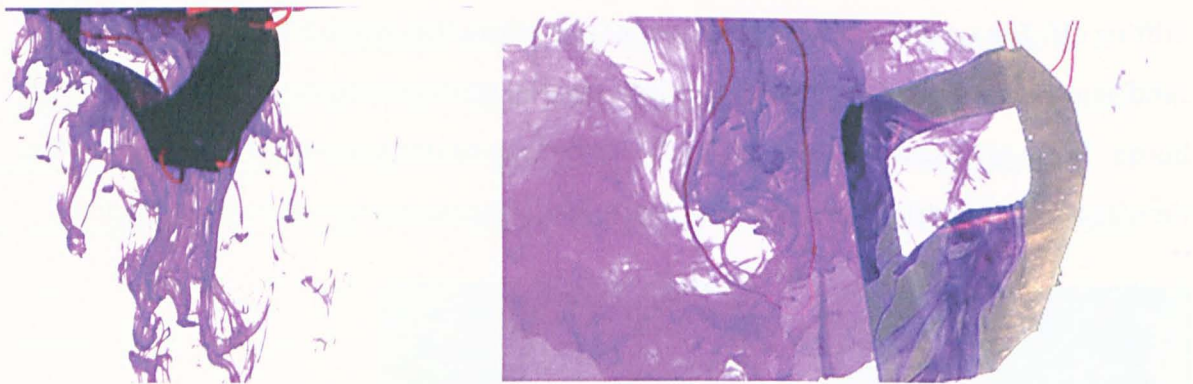


Fig.28 Karima Alshomely, video stills of 'Neel (Indigo)', 00:03:27 min, 2014

Subsequent groups of work featuring the burqa form were inspired by visual material including photographs, magazines and a health booklet that I discovered at the Museum of Women in Dubai in 2013. The museum library contains booklets produced by The Oasis Hospital in Al Ain, the first hospital to open in the area in 1960. The undated booklets contain illustrations of nurses and of a pregnant woman wearing traditional dress and a burqa. As guides for women's prenatal health, the booklets are entitled 'Care of the Pregnant Mother' and contain simple texts and numerous illustrations for predominately illiterate women (Figs 29 & 30). These diverse sources, alongside the growing collection of original burqas given by interviewees, made me aware of the changes that had occurred in the burqa form over time. Inspired by these booklets, I used the act of drawing in black ink as a way of both gaining knowledge of these changing burqa forms through detailed observational recording, and of re-presenting these changes in visual form. The final profile drawings were arranged within one frame as a guide to the changing forms of the burqa (Fig. 31).



Figs.29 & 30 'Care of the Pregnant Mother', booklets, Oasis Hospital in Al Ain, Women's Museum, undated

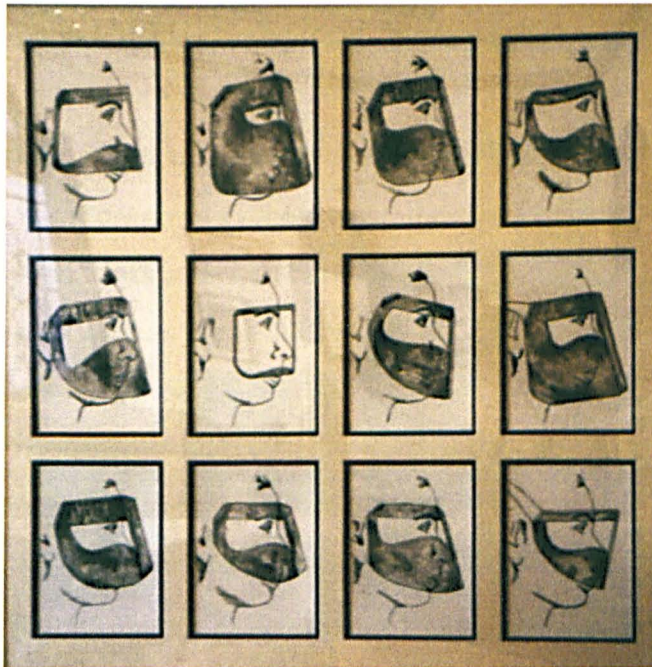
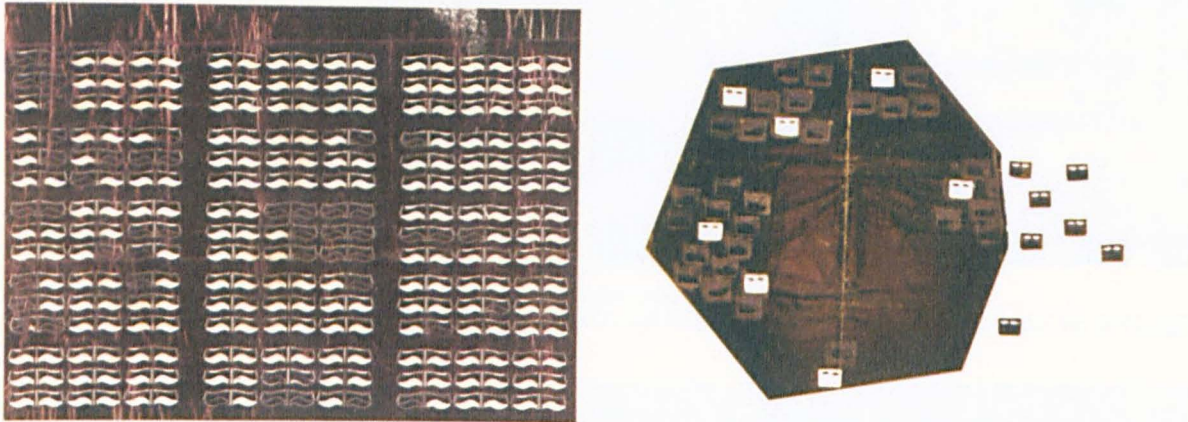


Fig.31 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa Shapes', Black ink on Paper, 120cm×120cm, 2013

I also used my collection of drawings from booklets, books and magazines as visual sources for the transfer of the burqa shapes onto the burqa textile using laser cutting (Figs. 32 & 33). Further, I experimented with embroidering these burqa shapes, using different coloured threads, onto the burqa textile using a sewing machine before stretching the burqa fabric in the same way as I would a canvas. Using the two different coloured burqa fabrics, my aim was to bring together processes of the craft of burqa making with art making processes, and to make these visible in the public space of the gallery. As the artist Grayson Perry notes: 'Craft, by definition, is something that can be

taught to someone else ... Whereas art is very much linked to the individual and their vision and it's not necessarily something that can be taught or passed down'¹⁰⁶ (Fig. 34).



Figs.32 & 33 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa Shapes', Burqa Fabric, 2014

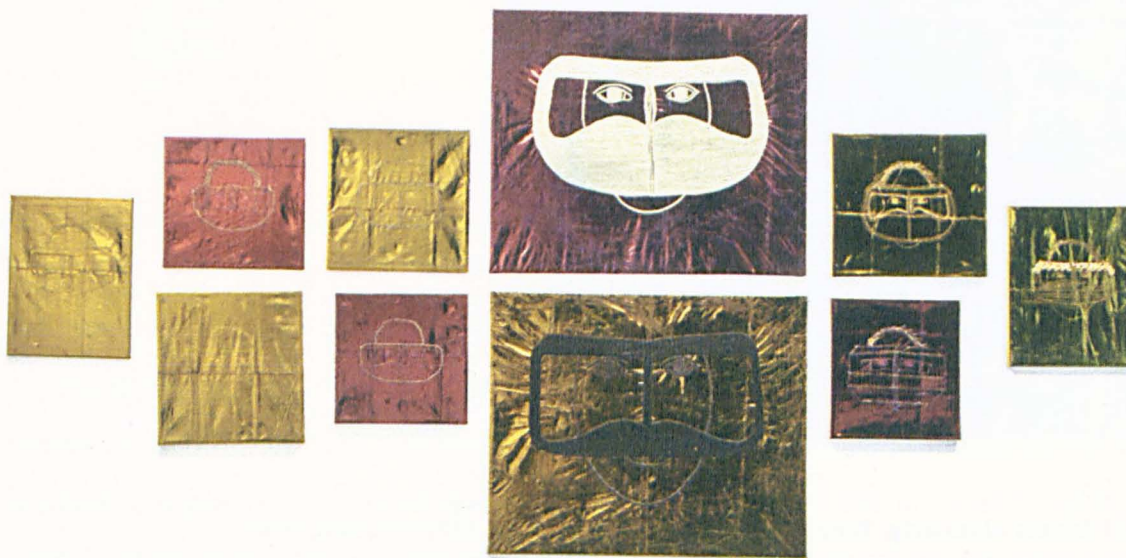


Fig.34 Karima Alshomely, 'Embroidery', Burqa Fabric, 2014

Artistic Context: The Burqa in Contemporary Art

The burqa form appears in contemporary artworks, produced predominately in the Arabian Peninsula, and as part of my research I met and interviewed a number of artists for whom the burqa was, or is, a key representational element in their work.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Grayson Perry, *Craft and Art*, 2015, Available at: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/videos/g/video-grayson-perry-discusses-craft-and-art> (Accessed: 14 February, 2015).

¹⁰⁷ Examples of other Emirati artists who use the burqa as subject include: the Abu Dhabi mixed-

Both of the artists that I discuss here use the burqa image as a means to reflect on Emirati culture although their interests and approaches are very different from my own.

The first, the Emirati artist Mohammad Yusuf (born 1953) frequently uses the motif of the burqa to directly comment upon women's position in Emirati society. A key example of his early sculpture made of wood; 'Divorced Woman' of 1979 represents a stylized figure of a woman wearing the Emirati burqa (Fig. 35). The artist depicts the plight of the divorced female who, as is customary in the UAE, must move from her marital home back to her parents' house.¹⁰⁸ The elongated figure is represented carrying her few belongings on her head with the focus on conveying a stoic sadness and aloneness.

In the later three-dimensional mixed media work entitled 'Freedom' of 1988 (Fig. 36), Yusuf presents a reconstructed metal burqa attached to a roughly finished wooden panel, with a lock attached beneath the burqa form. In interview Yusuf explained that in the past women in the UAE would very rarely leave the house, and when a girl had her first menstrual cycle, her family would essentially force her to start wearing a burqa; it was not optional and there was no possibility of declining. The placement of the metal burqa form and the lock on what could be read as a door panel emphasises the idea of the two worlds of the inside and the outside, and the seclusion of women. Although the door handle in the piece does not have a lock, the mask with its iron bar, as Yusuf recounted, suggests imprisonment. The work is clearly raising questions about the lack of women's freedom and the constraining aspects of the burqa. In Yusuf's work the burqa stands as a sign for a wider social system that constrains females and he has no interest in the materiality of the burqa as a physical form or its specific cultural meanings for individual women.¹⁰⁹

media artist Fatima Al Mazroui, the painter Abdul Rauf Khalfan. See also the following publications: Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetic* (2007); ADMAF (Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation) *The Art of the Emirates* (2015); Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi and Nada M. Shabout, *New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*, (2011).

¹⁰⁸ Abeer Abu Saud, *Qatari Women, Past and Present* (England: Longman House, 1984), pp.94-99.

¹⁰⁹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Mohammad Yusuf, Emirates, 24.05.2012. 237.



Fig.35 Mohammad Yusuf, 'Divorced Woman', 1978, Wood, 90cm×9cm

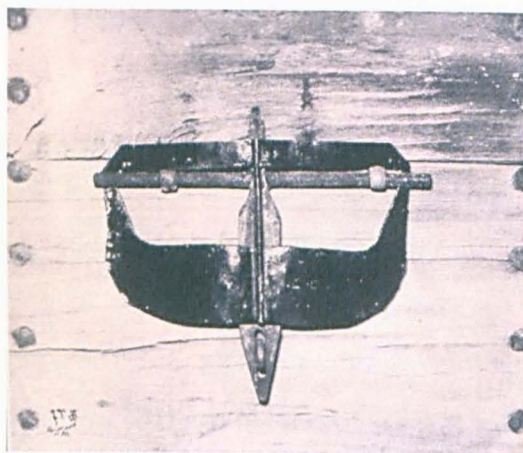


Fig.36 Mohammad Yusuf, 'Freedom', 1988, Wood; Metal; Paint, 100cm×80cm

By contrast, the Qatari painter Abdulrahman Almutawah depicts colourful portraits of women wearing burqas with a focus on their faces and expressive eyes (Figs. 37 & 38). As the titles suggest, his works represent memories of the past. In interview in 2013, Almutawah explained that for him the burqa represented three important women in his life: his mother, aunt and grandmother. These women all helped to raise him, in one way or another, and have deeply influenced him, and now they are dead he sees his work as a way of remembering precious moments with them. In the case of his grandmother, as he explained, he never saw her face and he felt that her burqa was her real face. Almutawah's paintings are deeply personal: they acknowledge loss and are homage to each of these women.¹¹⁰

As the artist's comments suggest, the act of painting the portraits of these three burqa wearing female relatives brought back personal memories and emotions and, although he does not explore the material qualities of the burqa, his images engage with time passed, memory and embodied sensations that have a relevance to my engagement with the burqa. In this sense, Almutawah's concerns with the burqa, female embodiment, and memory are closer in approach to my own work than the social critique evident in the sculptural work of Yusuf.

¹¹⁰ Appendix 1, Interviews. Abdulrahman Almutawah, Qatar, 07.10.2013. p.214-215.



Fig.37 Abdulrahman Almutawah, 'Nostalgic Memories', 2013, Acrylic Paint on Canvas, 120cm×80cm

Fig.38 Abdulrahman Almutawah, 'Nostalgic Memories', 2013, Collage; Screen print on Paper, 60cm×40cm

What distinguishes my work from both of these artists is my concerns with the materials, processes and rituals associated with the craft of burqa making for their potential to embody memory and overlooked female subjectivities, to link the past with the present, and to explore the material, aesthetic and poetic qualities of burqa practices. In this sense my work is closer to that of contemporary artists who use traditional craft materials or processes to create new art works that re-enact the past and the histories of the often-anonymous craft makers.¹¹¹

One example of such an artist is Bita Ghezelayagh (born 1966) the Iranian artist who produces work made from traditional felts and carpets. In 2004 in her first solo exhibition in London, 'Felt Memories' (Fig. 39), Ghezelayagh presented felt works that used a variety of methods to record events and memories in Iranian history as Rose Issa explains:

She used a thousand and one metal keys and tulips (symbols of martyrdom) and crowns (symbols of pre-revolutionary Iran) and sewed them onto garments. Ghezelayagh used silkscreen and embroidery on felt to show the testaments of war heroes ... Her work brings back memories of many things to her, including of her grandmother...¹¹²

In her more recent series of works titled 'The Letter that Never Arrived' of 2013 (Fig. 40) Ghezelayagh uses old discarded carpets as her base material and creates new hybrid hand

¹¹¹ See also: Dieter Ronte; Karin Roques, *Languages of the Desert* (2005); Talal Muala, *Almutalaf wa Almutakhtalif [Recombinant and Different]* (2006).

¹¹² Rose Issa, *Felt Memories*, <http://www.roseissa.com/past%20exhib/2/past-exh2-0.html>, (Accessed: 20 December, 2013).

sewn forms. As Rose Issa discusses, she 'washes, deconstructs, disfigures and re-conceives these textiles, giving them a new life and dignity by placing them on a stand, transforming a floor covering into a sculpture.'¹¹³ Presented as remodelled shepherd's cloaks, they directly pay homage to several craft traditions, and as Issa observes, suggest 'the possibility for craft and modernity to meet on common ground.' This meeting of craft and art is certainly part of my practice but, unlike Ghezelayagh's practice, I do not seek to create new craft objects as the form of the shepherd's cloak implies. Instead, I use the burqa material as a material for making art works.



Fig.39 Bitā Ghezelayagh, 'Felt Memories', 2009, (<http://www.roseissa.com/past%20exhib/2/past-exh2-0.html>) (Accessed: 20 December 2013)



Fig.40 Bitā Ghezelayagh, 'The Letter that Never Arrived', Woven Carpets; Embroidery and Pen Nibs, 2013, (http://islamicartsmagazine.com/magazine/view/the_letter_that_never_arrived_by_iranian_artist_bita_ghezelayagh/) (Accessed: 22 December 2013)

¹¹³ Rose Issa, 'The Letter That Never Arrived', *Islamic Arts Magazine* http://islamicartsmagazine.com/magazine/view/the_letter_that_never_arrived_by_iranian_artist_bita_ghezelayagh/, (Accessed: 22 December 2013).

Workshops

Alongside my studio practice focusing on the materiality of the burqa I wanted to find out how art and design students in Sharjah and London perceived and experienced the burqa so I organised two workshops. In both cases the aim was to find out what prior knowledge the participants had of the burqa before introducing the Emirati burqa.

The first workshop was with fashion students at Kingston University London on 1 May 2013 (Fig. 41). I began this workshop by informing the two participating students that the title of the workshop was 'The Burqa'. I did not mention the Emirati burqa specifically or provide any information about it. There was an array of burqa fabrics and materials for the students to make their own burqas from. Both students were Muslims: one was a British Somali and the other a British Pakistani.

They carried out some research into the burqa through the internet and then proceeded to cut their chosen fabrics in the style of a typical Afghan burqa. After making their burqas, they wore them and described what it felt like. Both students agreed that the burqas were not practical: the burqa material made it difficult to breath, and the form obscured their vision and made it hard to move around. They also felt it was isolating and impossible to wear outside as they could not see where they were going. In terms of understanding the uses of the burqa, both students believed that the burqa was used for modesty, to cover up the body to prevent men from looking at women, and as a way of not being identified. The British Pakistani student said that she thought the burqa was connected with Islam and that the religion made the wearing of it compulsory. The British Somalian student commented that when a woman covered her face with the niqab it was her choice, she was not forced to do so.

After this discussion, I introduced the Emirati burqa and its history and they tried on the burqas. They both said that the shapes and colours were aesthetically pleasing and that they were easy to wear. They also photographed themselves wearing the Emirati burqa.



Fig.41 Karima Alshomely, 'Workshop', Kingston University, Photograph, 2013

The second workshop was with Fine Art students at Sharjah University on 20 October 2013. (Fig. 42) Fourteen students attended (four men and ten women) as well as two male lecturers. After giving a short explanation about the purpose of the workshop, I asked if anybody had any knowledge about the Emirati burqa: less than half knew anything at all about it. One possible reason for this lack of awareness is that many of the participants had parents from other Middle-Eastern countries and would not, therefore, be that familiar with Emirati customs. I talked about the burqa and burqa wearing practices and laid out different burqa styles on the table to enable participants see how the burqa was made and what materials were used.

Selecting from a choice of burqa materials participants made their own version of the burqa and commented on how they felt wearing it. Responses varied from feeling uncomfortable; being reminded of wearing a mask as a child enabling confidence, strength and the ability to feel like a different person; enjoyment of the new experience to understanding why the burqa would be regarded negatively in western countries.



Fig.42 Karima Alshomely, 'Workshop', Sharjah University, Photograph, 2013

As these workshops confirmed there is much confusion about the burqa both in the UK and in the UAE. In both workshops internet searches, whether in English or Arabic, showed the Afghan burqa and it is only when the specific research term of the Emirati burqa is entered that this type of face covering can be found. It is evident also that within the UAE little is known of the Emirati burqa, especially amongst the younger generation. Notably, Arab students who participated in the Sharjah workshop who were not from the UAE were not familiar with the Emirati burqa and its history. Those who were from the UAE saw it as something worn by older women or as a mask that is seen at traditional ceremonies, without understanding its function. From my perspective, the workshops were important as a means of introducing younger audiences to the Emirati burqa as I was developing my research and finding out how they responded to the burqa fabric and to burqa wearing, however briefly.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified the profound shift in my art practice through my engagement with concepts of material culture and experimentation with the burqa fabric and the burqa form as a material and embodied object. Through research on the materials, processes and rituals associated with the craft of burqa making and the

practices of burqa wearing, I have experimented with different ways to embed these different forms of knowledge about the materiality of the Emirati burqa and its associated histories and rituals into my contemporary art practice using acts of painting, inscription, drawing, photography and film. On one level, this has transformed burqa making practices from a craft manipulation of material into contemporary art with the communication of ideas, memories, and emotions.

The artworks that I have presented and analysed here are concerned with the intimacy between the burqa and her wearer through the use of the burqa material and the acts of inscription, drawings based on women's health booklets, and the use of the burqa form itself as a disappearing object explored through photographs and film. In particular, the act of throwing the burqas into the sea opened up the possibilities of performing the burqa that led me to develop a new body of film, photographic, and installation work that is addressed in the next chapter. To contextualise and reflect upon my practice, I have related my work to particular works by other contemporary artists employing the image of the burqa, craft materials or methods of inscription. I have also analysed the role that workshops have played in developing my understanding of perceptions of the burqa and its meanings for different audiences in the Britain and the United Arab Emirates.

Chapter Five: Performing the Burqa: Video, Photography and Installation

Introduction

This chapter focuses upon my practice in the form of performative acts realised through video and photography and installations that engage with the Emirati burqa as a material and intimate object that was once a central feature of Emirati culture. Drawing primarily upon folklore stories and the personal accounts of Emirati women uncovered during this research, and concepts of the performativity of embodied material culture, this chapter presents and reflects upon a body of work produced in the latter part of the PhD from 2013 to 2014 and exhibited in 2014 and 2015. The focus of this work is on presenting imagined moments in the lives of Emirati women as burqa wearers and makers. As such, moving beyond the use of the burqa material as a support or surface for inscription as discussed in chapter four, the works presented here seek to materialise the imagined felt and lived experiences of Emirati women through film, photography and installation that centre on the wearing or making of the burqa and associated rituals. My engagement here, informed by Miller's theorisation of materiality and, in particular, the material culture of dress, is with performing the material culture of the burqa as a response to its disappearing practices and previously little recorded history. The works are also informed by the interconnected understanding of the 'significance of the body and the senses in knowledge production',¹¹⁴ that characterises the recent writings of Marsha Meskimmon on women making art and Kanafani's writing on the Emirati burqa previously discussed in chapter three.¹¹⁵

The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first, I present and discuss the filmed performance and photographic works where I literally place myself in the frame as a female artist enacting rituals associated with the burqa and imagined moments in the life of an Emirati bride to be; I experiment with wearing the burqa in everyday life and consider the changing embodied forms of the burqa across time, alongside materialising the labour of burqa making. In the second part, I present and analyse two installation works that focus on materialising the multi-sensorial aspects of the burqa and were

¹¹⁴ Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.133.

¹¹⁵ Chapter Three: The Diverse Forms of the Burqa: Uses, Significance and Meaning in Emirati Culture

created specifically for exhibitions in the Emirates and in London respectively. The documentation of these exhibitions, including works produced as part of my doctoral studies that are not discussed in this text, are presented in the accompanying DVD films that form part of the appendix, alongside feedback from both exhibition audiences.

Part One: Video and Photographic works

The Bride-to-Be

As discussed in chapter three, I discovered many rituals and beliefs surrounding the uses of the indigo dye and the burqa fabric including those associated with marriage customs and the transference of the light of the prophet Yusuf to a bride when the dye was applied to her skin.¹¹⁶ Such accounts provided a starting point for two films and a series of photographic works that imagined the personal and private moments of the bride-to-be as a way of materialising burqa wearing practices and rituals. As a context for my reflection on these works, it is first necessary to briefly consider Gulf marriage customs at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the sociologist Abu Saud notes:

In the past, girls could be married from the age of twelve onwards. Early marriage was a social custom, which revealed the honourable status of the family. People were proud that their daughters married young because this meant that the family had a good name and men would want to marry into it. If the girl reached the age of twenty without marrying, this was considered an indication that no-one wanted to be attached to that particular family, thereby casting shadows of doubt on both the girl and her family. On an economic level, it meant that the girl's future could be secured, thus transferring the financial burden from the father to the husband, at a time when people lived on a subsistence economy.¹¹⁷

According to Emirati custom, the family of the potential groom typically sent a trusted woman to the bride's home. If the young woman's family was deemed suitable in the eyes of the visiting woman she would reveal her mission and inform the family of the real reason for her visit. If the girl's family was interested they would allow the boy's family to visit. The girl, however, would not know what was going on until marriage preparations were well underway.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Appendix, 1 Interviews. pp.206-237.

¹¹⁷ Abeer Abu Saud, *Qatari Women Past and Present* (England: Longman House, 1984), p.64.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.65.

Traditionally, it is recounted that in the three days before a bride's wedding she would have been isolated and hidden from her family. Her mother (or close female relatives/friends) would have been responsible for preparing her for her groom, applying indigo dye with herbs and aromatic oils onto her entire body, and she would have had a mixture of oils applied to her hair to soften it.¹¹⁹ All of her pre-wedding clothes would also have been saturated with indigo dye to lighten and soften the skin. Henna was painted on the palms of the bride-to-be's hands and the soles of her feet. On the day of her wedding appointed women would have bathed her to remove all the indigo dye. The result would apparently have been a paler and smoother skin, intended as Ghobashi notes, to make her more beautiful and desirable for her wedding night.¹²⁰ Some of the women I interviewed confirmed their experience of this custom saying that the dye contained the light of the Prophet Yusuf and that they wanted this light to exist in their faces.¹²¹

'Zeena' (Adornment) of 2013 (Fig. 1, See Appendix 5: Documentation of Practice) was filmed in an old building in Sharjah, formerly a prominent family home, recently restored by the Sharjah government and now used as the office for the Fine Arts Society.¹²² I chose this location because of its former life as a domestic dwelling and its highly textured interior walls that provided a striking colour contrast with the white clothes I had selected to wear. Creating the idea of a woman's personal life and of her treasured belongings, I placed metal tins on the floor containing burqas. Once again I used the 'Mama Fatimah' burqa fabric as part of this imaginative re-enactment as I wanted the maximum amount of indigo dye to be released. Through the use of a mirror I observed myself performing the role of the bride-to-be applying the indigo dye from the burqa textile to my face. As a form of female embodied enactment I wanted to experience what a bride might have felt just before her marriage. Applying the dye with my fingers as if I was painting a portrait, I focused on certain parts of my face in order to intensify the colour and repeated slow, purposeful circular movements. I focused on moving from one area to another of my face in order to enhance the features. In the process, my fingers touched the burqa and then moved to touch the skin, creating an intimacy between the

¹¹⁹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Yusuf, 26.08.2012, pp.235-236.

¹²⁰ Moza Ghobash, *Studies in Folklore of Emirati Society* (Dubai: Reading for All, 2003), p.30.

¹²¹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Aisha Yusuf, 26.08.2012, pp.235-236.

¹²² Tourism Development Authority, available at: <http://sharjahmydestination.ae/en-us/Explore-Sharjah/Culture-Heritage> (Accessed: 29 April, 2015.)

burqa and my body.

I used the device of the mirror for practical and symbolic purposes. I needed to see myself in order to know where I was applying the dye and I wanted to see myself performing and experiencing the ritual. The mirror, often associated with the world of women,¹²³ is also a metaphor for painting and acts as a frame within a frame,¹²⁴ where my body and the reflection of my body in the mirror reveal feeling and emotions both as the subject and object of the work.¹²⁵ In reality 'the bride' would not be able to see herself during or after this ritual.

Through repeated, mesmeric actions I created moments of intimacy with my indigo dyed hands playing with the saturated burqa textile, turning one way, then another. Depicting a woman isolated from the outside world, without a sense of time, and involved in an inner dialogue, the silent video imaginatively reflects upon the marriage ritual and the isolation of the three days before her first night of marriage.¹²⁶ I imagined what it was like to have the indigo dye applied to one's body. Whilst performing this ritual I could see my face gradually turning indigo blue and memorized my physical and emotional feelings. Looking at the mirror I could see a stranger looking back at me, an out of body experience. It was an uncomfortable experience and I wondered how brides felt after three days of this, all in the name of beauty. An unexpected result of this work was that the next day I went to the College of Fine Arts and Design at Sharjah University. The technician at the print studio asked me if I had done something to my face. I asked him why and he replied that there was some kind of light on my face!

¹²³ 'Mirrors, Signs and Symbols', Available at:

http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/pharos/collection_pages/northern_pages/PD_32_1968/TXT_B_R_SS-PD_32_1968.html (Accessed: 30 December 2015).

¹²⁴ Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection* (London: Scarlet, 1996), p.4.

¹²⁵ For a discussion of the frame as a visual mechanism to privilege the subject over the object and its association with the female nude see Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics*, 2003, p.98.

¹²⁶ Abdullah Abdulrahman, *Mellaabs wa Taqlediush Alzawje fi Alimarat Ala'rabiah Almthdah fi Almady* [Historical Costumes and Traditions of Marriage in United Arab Emirates]. (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Heritage Club, 2001), (38), pp.22-29.



Fig.1 Karima Alshomely, video stills from 'Zeena' (Adornment), 00:03:37 min. 2013

After producing 'Zeena', I pursued the theme of the inner dialogue of the bride in a number of photographs, a medium that allowed me to realise my ideas more quickly than video. In 'Bride Reflecting' (Fig. 2), I considered the traditional custom of the bride and groom not seeing each other until the night of their wedding: the burqa-clad female waiting for the groom and the custom of 'Revealing the Burqa', as discussed in Chapter Three.¹²⁷ Using myself as the subject, I wanted to capture the bride's imagined emotions at the particular moment of waiting alone in the 'marriage bedroom' and her internal conversation with herself.¹²⁸ Is he handsome? Is he kind? Will I have a good life with him? Will he like me? I wanted to portray the bride asking herself these questions and the feelings she may have experienced in the moments before the groom walked through the door. Was she experiencing fear, excitement or uncertainty?

Wearing a burqa decorated with crystals and the white traditional garment worn in 'Zeena', the black background of 'Bride Reflecting' symbolised night and created maximum contrast. Using motion capture methods, I produced three self-images within a single frame, creating an imagined narrative about the unknown husband in the 'form' of a conversation. In re-presenting stories of past Emirati traditions in a visual and material form, the photograph was intended to express a female subjectivity with an obvious

¹²⁷ Appendix 1, Interviews.pp.206-237.

¹²⁸ The 'marriage bedroom', used for the first seven nights after the ceremony, was in the home of the bride's family; the bride and groom would then move permanently to the groom's house.

sense of self-communication. The three figures were intended to symbolize the bride with two other voices in her head. Two of the figures are facing one another and the third is looking at the viewer, inviting us to share a private moment and reflect upon her inner conversation as an embodied female subject.¹²⁹ The still photograph emphasized the imagined silence of such a wait.



Fig.2 Karima Alshomely, 'Bride Reflecting', 180cm x120cm, Photograph, 2014

This particular work shares a dialogue with another work by Zineb Sedira that I first encountered in 2011 when I was artist in residence at the Delfina Foundation as part of the 'Shoppolis Festival'.¹³⁰ At this time Sedira was concerned with issues of the 'veil' and 'veiling', represented here by 'Self Portrait' or 'The Virgin Mary'¹³¹ (Fig. 3). In conversation with Sedira at the Delfina Foundation, she explained that 'Virgin Mary' was based on a childhood experience of her first visit to Algeria with her mother. Sedira, who was brought up in Paris - recalled that when they arrived in Algeria her mother immediately covered herself with the traditional Algerian white veil. Sedira panicked

¹²⁹ Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.26.

¹³⁰ Delfina Foundation is an independent, non-profit foundation dedicated to artistic exchange and developing creative practice through residencies, partnerships and public programming. Available at: <http://delfinafoundation.com/about/mission/> (Accessed: 1 May 2015)

¹³¹ In 2002 Sedira initiated the following UK touring exhibition and accompanying publication: *Veil; Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, eds. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros, Institute of International Visual Arts London in association with Modern Art Oxford, 2002.

because she did not recognise her mother and thought she had lost her in a crowd where all the women around her looked the same. Sedira explains the meanings surrounding her work as follows:

At first sight, my artistic practice refers to the veil as a visual motif. But the veil is never purely a physical code, delineated and present. It is also a transparent and subtle mental code. My postcolonial geography has marked my practice and I tend to draw upon the veil worn by Algerian women because of my own personal history and experience.¹³²

In a further commentary on this work Elizabeth Harrington writing in 2010 notes:

The title of the work blurs the Algerian haik with Christian veils, calling attention to the historic similarities in veiling practices between Christianity and Islam... In this series, the veiled woman is visible, but barely; the photographs contain little contrast between the background and the subject, the whiteness at once suggesting an ethereal invisibility, transparency, but also absence.¹³³

As these comments suggest, Sedira's work draws upon her specific cross-cultural experiences to raise questions about how veiling practices are perceived in the west and to reflect upon the invisibility of Arab women as individual subjects. In this sense, we both draw upon our differently situated knowledge as women artists in our engagement with female subjectivity and the complexities of cultural identity.¹³⁴ We also both present these through using our own bodies in these two works. Drawing upon Christian iconography Sedira presents us with a triptych form in *Virgin Mary*, each panel containing a single figure of a woman. There is no communication between the figures and no contact with the viewer. By contrast, 'Bride Reflecting' seeks to materialize the figures against the black background and suggest an intimacy of a shared conversation between the figures through the slightly overlapping monumental figures.

¹³² Zineb Sedira, *Mapping the Illusive* (article) in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2003), p.57.

¹³³ Zineb Sedira, blog. Available at: <http://delightedobservationist.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/zineb-sedira-silent-sight>, 17 November 2010, (Accessed: 2 December, 2014.)

¹³⁴ For a discussion of female subjectivity in the making of art and its articulation in visual and material form see Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics*, 2003, pp.6-7.

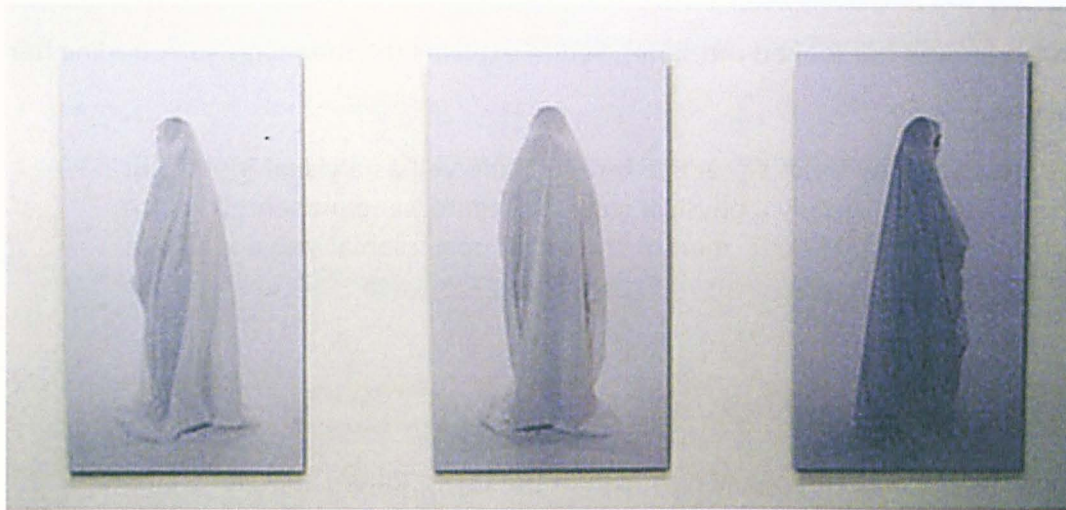


Fig.3 Zineb Sedira, 'Self-Portrait' or 'Virgin Mary', 2000, (<http://delightedobservationist.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/zineb-sedira-silent-sight/>), (Accessed: 2 December, 2014)

Photography is a powerful medium to present such subject matter with its historical usages often associated with western colonialism and the western male gaze of Orientalism.¹³⁵ However, in relationship to photography's ability to capture a moment of time, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) in his well-known publication *Camera Lucida* writes about what the photograph means to himself as a viewer: 'looking at these pictures of my mother, one by one, under the lamp, gradually moving back in time with her, looking for the truth of the face I had loved. And I found it'. For Barthes, reflecting on a family photograph album following the death of his mother, the photograph as generally understood as a direct 'historical truth' of 'what is', carries instead a 'has-been' quality that makes us aware of the passage of time and of death.¹³⁶

In this context, 'Bride Reflecting' can be seen as a re-presentation or enactment of a past personal moment or custom that expresses the 'has-been'. Emirati women now choose their own husbands,¹³⁷ the bride and groom meet before their wedding, and women are typically heavily involved in planning their own weddings.¹³⁸

Changing Forms

¹³⁵ Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (New York: Berg, 2000), p.xi

¹³⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflection on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard, (New York: Hill and Wary, 2010), p.67.

¹³⁷ Moza Ghobash, *Studies in Folklore Emirates Society* (Dubai: Reading for All, 2003), p.91.

¹³⁸ Yaser Sharaf, *Emirates Society* (Abu Dhabi: Dar Al-Mutanabbi, 1990), pp.209-225.



Fig.4 Karima Alshomely, 'Changing Forms I', 180cm x120cm, Photograph, 2014

The idea of time passing is also explored in two large-scale photographic works entitled 'Changing Forms'. In 'Changing Forms I' of 2014 (Fig. 4) the photograph captures the changing historical form of the burqa by presenting three figures wearing three different Emirati burqas. Taken as one shot with a long exposure, the dramatic black background and black abaya focus attention on the woman's face and hands, the only parts of the body visible when a female steps outside of her house in the UAE. Intended to be read from right to left in the Arab mode, I wanted to show three generations of burqa wearers starting with the 'grandmother', the 'mature woman', and finally on the left, the 'young married woman'. The three female gazes are averted away from the onlooker so that the burqas are the focal points. On the right is the oldest type of burqa, prevalent before the mid-twentieth century, that modestly conceals more than it reveals. The figure's pose was intended to convey sorrow at the passing of this era and the disappearance of the full burqa. The middle image wears the slightly smaller burqa, exposing a small amount of the chin, typical of that worn in the middle of the twentieth century when the UAE was in the process of transitioning from a Bedouin to a modern society.¹³⁹ Worn now by older women, often to hide their flaws and signs of ageing, the position of the face and the pose conveys uncertainty, paralleling her role between two

¹³⁹ Moza Ghobash, *Dirasat Folklore fi Mojtamah Alimarat* [Studies in Folklore of Emirates Society] (Dubai: Reading for All, 2003), p.40.

generations. On the left, the smallest burqa reveals most of the face and is worn with a confident pose, suggestive of showing off, and represents the generation of younger burqa wearing women today. The image is deliberately theatrical suggesting a living archive of the changing forms of the burqa. (See Appendix 3 and DVD of 'Intimate Object').



Fig.5 Karima Alshomely, Changing Forms II, 150cm×99cm, Photograph, 2014

'Changing Forms II' (Fig. 5) creates another perspective on the passing of time and changes in Emirati society by depicting the figure wearing three different burqas. Again this is one photograph with a long exposure. The intention here was to explore and present burqa customs in relation to a woman's age and rites of passage. I have purposefully made the images blur into one another as I wanted the viewer to look at the work and consider its content. The bright light casts strong shadows to represent the passing phases of life.

As the writer Dawn Chatty discusses in her study of the Burqa face covering:

There are three important stages in a woman's life. The first is marked by ceremonial behaviour and a dramatic change in dress. The latter two are socially rather than physically obvious ... In late childhood and early adolescence a girl will start to make face masks for herself. She will have a free hand in deciding the length of the mask and the size of the eyeholes. She will try on her masks for months, in preparation for the day she will be permitted to wear one. That day can occur with little ritual if her

first menarche precedes her marriage, generally though, her taking on the burqa will occur during her marriage ritual ... The second important ritual occurs when a woman adds to her wifely status that of mother as well ... The third major transition in the life of a woman occurs more gradually. It starts at about the time she becomes a grandmother and stops bearing children herself, when gradually she grows into the role of the household matriarch and takes on the status attached to that role.¹⁴⁰

If the burqa as the subject of my research is located, on one hand, within a social framing of woman as a bearer of Emirati culture marked by the above rites of passage, on the other hand, it also connects with the photographic work of women artists from the 1990s onwards that focus on challenging western conceptions of women and the veil.¹⁴¹ Here the work of Jananne Al-Ani's 'Veils Project' is of particular relevance (Fig. 6). Al-Ani's work was produced in a different context, depicting members of her family, including herself, who had left Iraq because of the war and as a reflection on the invisibility of women during these difficult times. As Fran Lloyd notes, 'The photographs of Al-Ani examine the issues of sexual and gender politics and the representation of women, particularly the fetishized oriental woman in western art and photography.'¹⁴²

In 2006 I met Al-Ani, who is based in London, when we were both exhibiting at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris.¹⁴³ In her 'Veils Project' she is responding to the Orientalist vision of concubines in the harem stating: 'I wanted to disrupt the normal cliché of the veil being something that is either oppressive or subjugates women and try and think about it as being something that could be quite powerful.'¹⁴⁴ Both of us are concerned with the representation of Middle-Eastern women and the function of the 'gaze' that has been an essential element of the figurative poses. It shows that women have the power to invite the viewer into a private space to gain knowledge about their

¹⁴⁰ Dawn Chatty, *The burqa Face Cover: an Aspect of Dress in Southeastern Arabia* in *Language of Dress in the Middle East*, (London: Curzon Press, 1997), p.143.

¹⁴¹ For a consideration of contemporary photographic practices challenging dominant concepts of the veil see Zineb Sedira, *Mapping the Illusive* (article) in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2003), pp.56-71.

¹⁴² Fran Lloyd, *Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogues of the Present* (London: Women's Art Library, 1999), p.156.

¹⁴³ 'Regards des Photographes Arabes Contemporains', Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France, 2006.

¹⁴⁴ MoMa Multimedia, 2006, http://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/audio_file, (Accessed: 10 December, 2014)

lives. Women are not invisible, passive, nor exotic as they have so frequently been portrayed for the pleasure of a western audience.

In 'Changing Forms I', I represent the historical changes of the burqa form and in so doing seek to point to the changing experiences of Emirati burqa wearing women across the generations counteracting the tendency to regard such practices as singular and fixed. At the same time, the scale of the work and the proximity of the figure to the picture plan was intended to give the triple image a strong presence in the encounter with the viewer.



Fig.6 Jananne Al-Ani, 'Veil Project', 1997, (*Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogues of the Present*, 1999), p.64

Every Day Life: Living with the Burqa

Over a continuous period of three days I experimented with wearing the burqa during a visit home to the UAE in February 2014 (Fig. 7). I cleaned, cooked, ate and did virtually everything while wearing the burqa in order to discover how a burqa wearing woman experiences daily life. Coming from a family where females had not worn the burqa since my grandmother's time, I asked myself: how come the burqa does not get in the way? What does it feel like? While wearing the burqa I mentally recorded how I felt around others and how, burqa clad, I was received in my daily life. I quickly discovered that it was hard to keep the burqa stable whilst doing housework and that I needed to keep tightening and adjusting it. I also observed that my voice changed: it echoed. However, the most difficult task was eating and drinking.

I continued this performative act outside my home, among strangers. I wore the burqa in a busy shopping centre and finding that I was the only woman wearing a burqa made me feel self-conscious. I decided to test the reactions of some shop assistants by asking them about various products. I also sat for some time in a coffee shop with a friend. In all these situations I was not treated any differently than usual which was curious. The exception was a visit to my mother at my sister's home where my brother-in-law did not recognize me. He thought I was a visiting Bedouin woman until I revealed myself. It was difficult for him as I was wearing the larger type of burqa that hides most of the facial features and also because he comes from a non-burqa wearing family.

In wearing the burqa, I found interaction with others to be awkward as it was such an alien item for me to wear and because the distortion of my voice was peculiar. While it remains impossible for me to imagine wearing the burqa as an everyday object it was a productive experiment that enabled me to gain some knowledge of the corporeal specificity of burqa wearing. This performative method acknowledges 'sensory modes of cognition' or knowledges that, as Meskimmon argues, are important to the production of 'the work of art as "theory"',¹⁴⁵ and that specific knowledge about the materiality of the burqa is gained through such embodied, physical acts.¹⁴⁶

My experience after wearing the burqa knowledge through senses translated by the physical acts of an embodied subject.¹⁴⁷ Having worn the burqa continuously for three days, I could understand through all of my senses how I perceived myself, as if I was a different person. I had stepped back into my history and now I was ready to impart this knowledge to others.

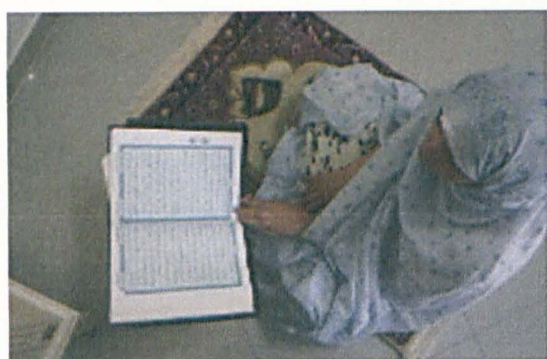
¹⁴⁵ Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.6.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p.29.

¹⁴⁷ Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.4.



Fig.7 Karima Alshomely, 'Life with the Burqa', Photograph, 2014



The Labour of Burqa Making

An absent dimension in existing accounts of the burqa in the UAE is the female labour involved in the craft of burqa making. As discussed in detail in chapter two, burqa makers frequently discussed this aspect of their lived experience. Nissa Ahmed from Kalba in Sharjah, for example, sewed burqas all day, every day, sometimes working until the middle of the night with no electrical lighting, only lanterns (*fener*). She recounts that even though she often heard and saw ghosts in the dead of the night which caused her to be afraid, she continued to work as she had important deadlines to meet. As many women recalled, the indigo dye stained their hands entailing arduous journeys to collect water from a well to get rid of the dye. Water was precious and a lot was needed.¹⁴⁸ Production was particularly intense as festivals approached. The intensity of such events are well described by Mariam from Khor Fakkan who recalls the eve of one Eid:

I was working all day, making burqas, with women constantly coming and going, placing orders and collecting their finished burqas. I was consumed with my work and my children were crying, as I could not give them the attention they needed. My husband complained and threatened to take the tin where I kept my finished orders and put the burqas under the tap. He repeatedly said that the children came before making burqas.

Women makers needed the money for themselves and their families and yet their husbands demanded that they look after the children at the same time.¹⁴⁹ Such accounts led me to reflect upon the physical demands of burqa making.

In the 2014 video entitled 'Khait' (Thread) (Fig. 8, See Appendix 5: Documentation of Practice), completed alongside the visual record of living with the burqa, I re-enacted the labour of burqa making by performing the act of sitting on the ground in a domestic setting and continuously hand machine sewing burqa fabric, with metal storage tins all around. I repeatedly ran the burqa fabric through the sewing machine giving the work my full attention as if I did indeed have many burqas to make. The continuous rotation of the sewing machine wheel suggests the repetitive process of this activity. The incessant sound of the machine echoes this and could be seen as embodying a woman's psychological state and the labour that is her life; despite her tiredness, she must carry on to get the job done. Highlighting the unrecognised contribution these crafts women have made,¹⁵⁰ 'Khait' offers an opportunity to reflect on the lives of women burqa

¹⁴⁸ Appendix 1, Interviews. Nisa Ahmed, 02.08.2014, pp.209-210.

¹⁴⁹ Appendix 1, Interviews. Mariam Ahmed Abdullah, 17.06.2014, pp.208-209.

¹⁵⁰ Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body*, (London: Routledge,

makers from the past, giving them a visible and active labouring presence for the first time,¹⁵¹ far removed from the passive images of Arab females frequently presented by Orientalists.



Fig.8 Karima Alshomely, Video Stills of 'Khait (Thread)', 00:02:48 min, 2014

Part Two: Installations: Multi-sensorial Aspects of the Burqa

As previously stated a primary aim of my research has been to engage with the materiality of the burqa and, in the light of Miller's and Kanafani's writings, to consider the multi-sensorial aspects of burqa making and burqa wearing. Whilst aware of experimenting with aspects of sound and touch in the works discussed above, and in the video works in particular, it is in the two different installations created specifically for an exhibition in Sharjah and in London that the multi-sensorial dimensions most clearly came to the fore.

In February 2014 (at the end of my second year of doctoral studies) I participated in the annual group show at the Sharjah Museum for Arabic Contemporary Art with the selected curator's title of 'Untold Stories'.¹⁵² Responding to this theme, I created an installation entitled 'Zeena and Khazeena' (Adornment and Preservation) that focused on the senses

1996), p.191.

¹⁵¹ Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection* (London: Scarlet, 1996), p.11.

¹⁵² The Emirates Fine Arts Society's Annual Exhibition' (32nd year), Sharjah Museum for Arabic Contemporary Art, February, 2014, 'Untold Stories Annual Exhibition' 32nd year (Sharjah: Fine Arts Society, 2014).

in relation to the Emirati burqa (Fig. 9, See Appendix 5: Documentation of Practice). Conceived of as an intimate encounter with the burqa, I constructed a wooden partition in the allocated exhibition space in order to create a room where Emirati women might have once made burqas. The partition wall was covered with burqa fabric and small viewing windows were cut through at eye level to form eye slots allowing visitors to look through them and watch a video of women burqa makers being interviewed by myself. While watching the video the viewer would notice the smell of musk, jasmine and rose that emanated from perfume samples placed behind the wall, evoking the smells imprinted on the burqa by its female wearer.

To watch the video (on the other side of the wall, at the far end of the room) the viewer needed to negotiate a series of hanging burqa cords (also behind the wall) to get a clear view. In doing this, the viewer would be rubbing up against the burqa fabric and transferring the indigo dye onto their faces. In effect, the viewer physically made contact with the burqa materials and inadvertently connected with its past through the senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch and potentially taste in the present.



Fig.9 Karima Alshomely, 'Zeena and Khazeena' (Adornment and Preservation), Contemporary Art Museum, Sharjah, 2014

The installation was accompanied by the following dialogue displayed on the right hand side of the space.

- She said: I won't wear you, like my mum and grandmother.
- Burqa said: I am your adornment and beauty.
- She said: (with amusement) My adornment and beauty!
- Burqa said: I am your adornment ... to emphasise the beauty of your eyes and hide the flaws that you don't want people to see.
- She said: What do you mean? What flaws can be hidden?
- Burqa said: The wrinkles on your skin, your blackheads and your prominent teeth.
- She said: What else?
- Burqa said: In the indigo dye that is within me ... when it sticks to your face as you wash it off, it will glow like the face of Prophet Yusuf.
- She said: Is that possible? What else?
- Burqa said: I protect you from the evil of envious eyes by covering some of the features of your face, in the same way as, in the past, your mother was keen to keep me in a metal tin and put me inside her wooden clothes chest as if I was a precious treasure.

This artist's statement was an imagined intimate conversation presented in a form that evoked the strong oral tradition of Emirati culture. Here I gave the burqa a voice in a conversation that draws upon past traditions referencing protection and its value as a personal and precious object.

As the visitor entered the space, on the left were two plinths that had a metal tin on each, tins that were used for storing burqas. In one were burqa-shaped cards on which my viewers could respond to my questions and write a burqa story or anecdote. The completed response cards were then placed and stored in the second tin and will be discussed below (Fig. 10). (See Appendix 2: Visitor Responses)

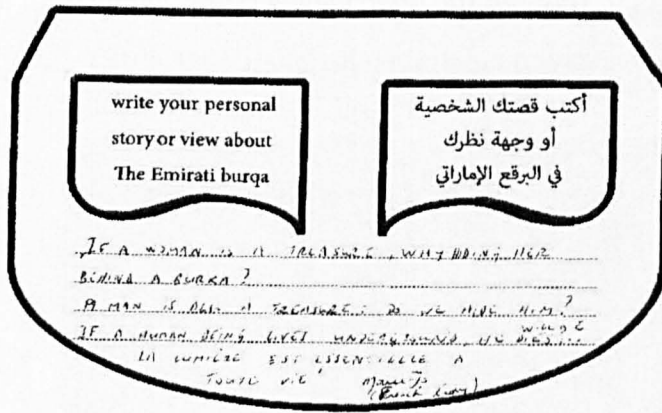


Fig.10 Feedback/comment card, ('If a woman is a treasure, why hide her behind a burqa? A man is also a treasure, do we hide him? If a human being lives underground, he dies. The light is essential for all life'), 2014

The second installation entitled 'Gathering' was created for a solo exhibition in London that took place six months after the Sharjah exhibition in November 2014 at the Edge of Arabia (See Appendix 5: Documentation of Practice), a commercial gallery space. Entitled 'An Intimate Object', in total, the exhibition included 36 works, produced between 2012 and 2014 (See Appendix3). As part of the continuing exploration in presenting the burqa as an individualised and intimate object, I wanted visitors to experience the typical smells associated with the burqa as well as the different shapes and colours that Emirati women could choose to wear.

Placed in the middle of the second large gallery, 'Gathering', consisted of a 3m x 1.8m piece of sheer black cotton fabric suspended from the ceiling (the material used by Emirati women to cover their hair) and covered with used burqas, and a nearby group of metal tins containing burqas. (Figs. 11 & 12)

At first sight, approaching the installation from the entrance to the gallery, the screen of cloth acted as a curtain, screening part of the space beyond where sound emanated from the 'Khait' video. Moving nearer to the work, the visitor could observe that each of the highly individualised burqas attached to the fabric included the names of its owner and its place of origin. On closer inspection, the differently coloured and shaped burqas had been personalised by their owner's use of different perfumes and this sensorial aspect was heightened by the smell of the burqas emanating from the arrangement of open tins

containing burqas that viewers could touch. Through the open weave fabric, glimpses of a burqa wearing female could be seen on the screen behind the installation. (Fig. 13)



Figs.11 & 12 Karima Alshomely, 'Gathering', Installation, 2014

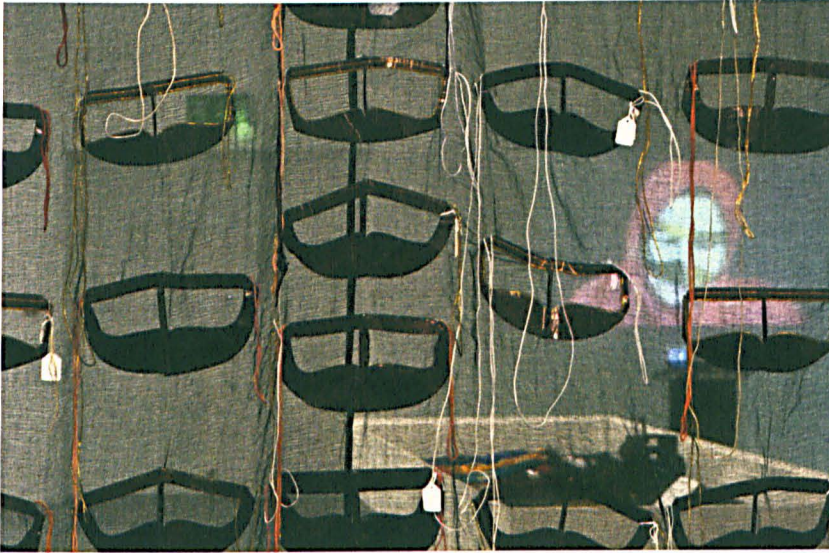


Fig.13 Karima Alshomely, 'Detail of Sheer Black Fabric with Burqas', 2014

Significant elements in this installation are the burqa containers, previously discussed in chapter two, that I collected from interviewees between 2012 and 2014. When I met with female burqa makers, each one of them brought with her a metal tin in which she kept both her used and new burqas. These tins were like small treasure chests containing valuable objects and when the women opened the tins I immediately caught a waft of the perfumes they used. Emirati women protect the shine of their burqas from the atmosphere and humidity by keeping them in these metal containers, typically biscuit and sweet tins. Each tin has its own story and betokens the intimate rituals related to owning a burqa. In interviews, I asked each woman where the highly personal container had come from. Amina Saleem from Kalba in the Emirates recounted:

My sweet tin dates back more than sixty years. My first husband bought it for me when he was working in Kuwait. I wanted to keep it and use it to put my burqa inside. Sometimes I feel that this tin holds something of my dead husband. It certainly reminds me of him, although I have been married two more times since him.¹⁵³

Miriam Khalifa from Al Khan in the UAE produced an unusual tin that, following further research, I found had been used for storing cinema film. I asked her where it came from and she said that her now dead husband had given it to her. He had worked at Sharjah airport (then called Al Mahatta station and run by the British) and was given the tin.¹⁵⁴ Its

¹⁵³ Appendix 1. Interviews. Amina Ali Salem, Emirates, 01.10.2013.pp.228.

¹⁵⁴ In 1932, the first airport in the United Arab Emirates opened in Sharjah for commercial flights on route from the UK to India. <http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/Inner-Pages/Our-Museums/Al-Mahatta-Museum.aspx?lang=en-us> (Accessed 5 December, 2014).

small size made it portable and easy for her to carry around when she went on a trip to visit her family in Umm Quwain which was two days away by camel.¹⁵⁵ Research revealed that this tin dates back more than seventy years. The function of these metal tins has changed from simply containing sweets and biscuits to being precious personal boxes that store the burqa imbued with the scent of its wearer and memories that are part of each woman's life.

These now antique biscuit/sweet tins were once a significant yet overlooked or forgotten part of the material culture of women's burqa making and burqa wearing practices. With such a diversity of colours, sizes and shapes, and personal meanings, I decided to collect as many tins as I could from the women who inspired me. Within the installation, viewers could touch and smell the burqas, and while the women were not present physically, the intimacy of their bodies was present. (Fig. 14) As the title suggests, 'Gathering' both evokes the process of my research and refers to past moments when Emirati women came together in their private courtyards to make the burqa and chat together. By re-presenting these once used intimate objects that hold personal recollections and memories for their owners as an installation in a gallery space, they offer the potential for the creation of new meanings and affects through a dialogue with the embodied viewer.¹⁵⁶

Displayed on the adjacent wall, next to *Gathering*, was a selection of vividly coloured paper packaging that once contained the burqa textile. As discussed in chapter two, the packaging was used as a shield or guard against humidity as well as for various medicinal purposes. Seen alongside the burqa containers, these fragile packagings, once part of an everyday material culture of the burqa, also convey a history of usage and of personal memories. Some women I interviewed, for example, had kept their burqa packaging as mementos of the time when their burqas were made. As part of the installation, they also presented as objects of aesthetic interest in their own right (Fig. 15).

¹⁵⁵ Appendix 1. Interviews. Miriam Khalifa Said, Emirates, 02.12.2013, p.226.

¹⁵⁶ Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection* (London: Scarlet, 1996), p.72.

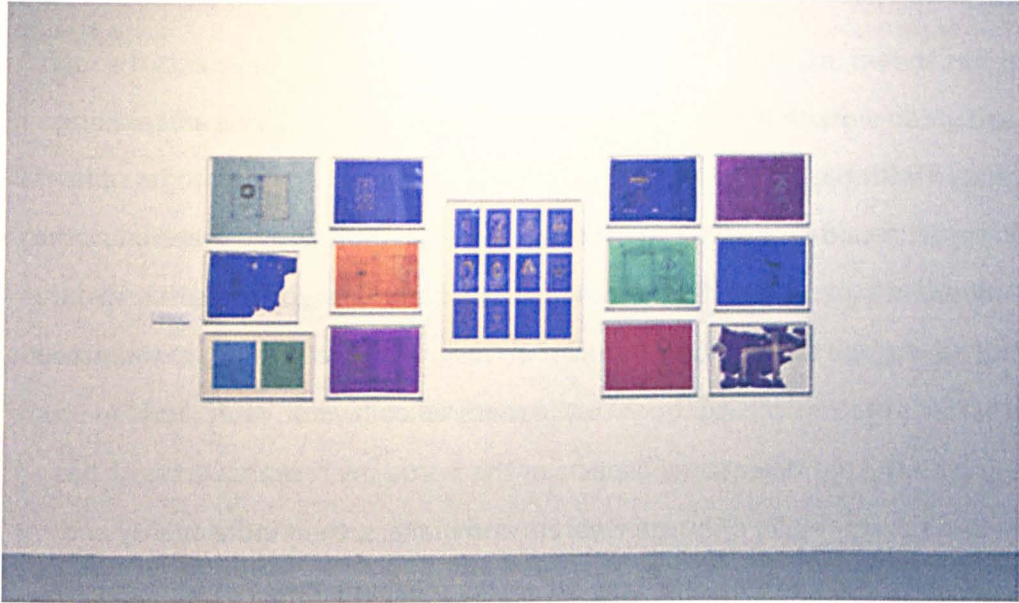


Fig.14 Karima Alshomely, 'Burqa Packaging', 2014

Passing beyond 'Gathering' the viewer encountered the previously discussed video '*Khait*' (Thread), the sound of which permeated much of the gallery and had made viewers curious enough to follow the sound. In one half of an open cabinet, near the video, were displayed craft tools and the materials of burqa making including burqa fabric, needles and the burqa machine that visitors could handle (Fig.15).



Fig.15 Karima Alshomely, 'Open Display Cabinet', 2014

Encountered together, in the same space, the smell of the burqas, craft tools, paper packaging and the sound of the video '*Khait*' create the sense of arduous labour, contrasted with the customs, rites of passage and rituals associated with the burqa. As part of a conversation with the audience I also interviewed and recorded the responses of twenty exhibition visitors. (See Appendix 3 & 4)

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, my practice has taken the form of performative acts through photographs and video work that present myself enacting imagined rituals and making practices associated with the Emirati burqa and installations that engage with its sensorial qualities. As a fine artist and researcher my central preoccupation was to materialise the corporeal or embodied aspects of burqa wearing and making through works that had the potential to directly engage the embodied viewer in this overlooked history in the present. Engaging with Miller's theoretical approach to the material culture of 'stuff' and Kanafani's writing on the multi-sensorial aspects of the burqa my research artwork has also emphasised the corporeality of burqa wearers and makers, their individuality and their agency as Arab women. In this sense my art works present a range of female subjectivities, my own as artist and those of other Emirati women including burqa makers who choose to have some independence within their families by earning a small living making burqas.

Conclusion

Framed by Daniel Miller and Aida Kanafani's theories of material culture and embodiment that focus on dress as an intimate sensory object, this practice-based thesis has researched and detailed the history of the Emirati burqa and its associated rituals as an embodied material object, made and worn by Emirati women and presented and contextualised a new body of fine art work that engages with and responds to specific parts of this history, as well as to the materiality of the burqa itself.

As discussed in the introduction, the aims of the thesis were firstly to explore the history of the burqa in the United Arab Emirates, its historic roots in the Arabian peninsula, its role within Emirati society past and present, and the diverse ways in which it has and continues to be experienced, perceived and understood as a symbolic, material and embodied object by burqa wearers and burqa makers. The research presented in the first chapter provided a context for the Emirati burqa through an introduction to the wider historical and social contexts of face coverings, an analysis of the history of the burqa face covering in the Arabian peninsula with a specific focus on the written and visual accounts of mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth-century British travellers in Arabia. Through an analysis of these texts and images I established that the burqa existed in the Arab peninsula from the 19th century and, more specifically, in the region now known as the United Arab Emirates.

Chapter two furthered this first thesis aim by focusing on the craft of Emirati burqa making as a material and embodied object informed by interviews with burqa makers and textile producers. The key findings presented in this chapter are the first extensive documentation of the processes involved in the production of the burqa textile, an analysis of the complex craft of burqa making, and the identification of the range of burqa manufacturing brands and packaging sold in the UAE. As part of this enquiry into the material qualities of the burqa, I also tested burqa makers perceptions of the textile's qualities in relationship to the indigo dye content.

The second aim of the thesis was to document and record the different types of Emirati burqa by focusing on the processes of its material production in both the past and the present, including accounts of the experiences of women burqa makers and wearers, and to establish a visual archive of the varying Emirati burqa forms. This is achieved in chapter three where, based upon extensive interviews in the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar and a variety of historical sources, including photographs, and magazines, I centre on the diverse forms of the Emirati burqa and identify the different types of Emirati burqa through reference to their specific characteristics and usage according to the rites of passage associated with age, status and regional identities. Using the visual device of a map, the locations of specific burqa designs within the Emirates are detailed. Through specific examples, I also demonstrate in this chapter how the Emirati burqa differs from those worn in the neighbouring Gulf States of Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Drawing upon the material culture methods of Daniel Miller and Aida Kanafani's concerns with embodied experience, this chapter also focused on burqa wearing practices and the associated uses of the burqa textile in the UAE. My findings show that these embodied social practices were part of their everyday lives and contributed to their specific identity as Emirati women.

Chapter four and Chapter five fulfil my third and fourth aims of presenting a body of experimental artwork that is informed by, responds to, and materialises the complexities of the burqa as a physical, handcrafted and embodied sensory object imbued with symbolic, physical and personal meanings, and of contextualising my fine art practice. Focusing on my fine art practice, these two chapters detail the research processes that inform the work, and the conceptual and intellectual shifts that occurred during my PhD research from my initial viewing of the burqa as a form of mask to the exploration of the materiality of the burqa as an aesthetic and intimate object with associated embodied histories and rituals. Through experiments with traditional craft materials, inscription methods and workshop initiatives in chapter four and performative acts realised through video and photography and installations in chapter five, I present, analyse and reflect upon my practice-based research and the new visual language developed to convey the intimacy and ritualistic aspects associated with the Emirati burqa, informed by knowledge and experience of women's practices of burqa wearing and burqa making, and the work of contemporary artists using traditional materials and/or related subject matter.

Contribution to knowledge

This thesis has engaged with and critically reflected upon the burqa's little known history as a material object that was once part of the everyday social life and rituals of Emirati women through written and practice-based research works. It has sought to uncover the history of female Emirati burqa-wearing practices and the craft of burqa making within the wider social, religious and cultural context of the UAE and to produce a new body of art work that responds to and engages with these histories. Through detailed ethnographic research I have documented the fast-vanishing craft of traditional burqa making, recorded the diverse forms of the burqa in the Emirates, and identified and re-presented a number of rituals associated with the burqa.

Through this research the thesis makes a significant contribution to several fields of knowledge including the study of craft, dress, social practices and rituals that will have significance for the broad field of material culture studies as well for Middle Eastern and Arabic studies and the specialist areas of Emirati history and culture. As the first in-depth analysis of the Emirati burqa as a form of female embodied adornment, of protection, and a marker of local, regional and national identity, the thesis will be a useful reference for those interested in the history of face-coverings, of dress, heritage, and Emirati cultural traditions and rituals. These will include anthropological and ethnographic researchers, alongside historians of dress, of heritage and historians, and potentially craft makers interested in preserving the rich history of female craft practices in the UAE. In this respect, I am proposing to donate my extensive archive of Emirati burqas and memorabilia to The Heritage Museum in Abu Dhabi. Similarly, the aural and filmed interviews with burqa makers, burqa wearers and burqa fabric manufacturers, together with photographs and historical material gathered during this research will be held by The National Archive in Abu Dhabi. This will include the unique collection of burqa fabric packaging created through this research. I also have the agreement of the manufacturer in Mumbai to add further items to this collection for the Abu Dhabi National Archive.

Within the field of fine art, the thesis offers a variety of methods of engaging with and animating the past through the use of the material qualities of an embodied object to convey knowledge about disappearing social and cultural practices and overlooked memories that are part of our history. Through the creation of new work that engages with the specific sensorial world of the Emirati burqa as an intimate object once made and worn by women, the thesis gives this little studied subject a new life in the present and transforms it from an inanimate, dead object to a living object with its own history and new contemporary meanings through the performativity of embodied material culture. I hope this research will inspire other artists and researchers in the future and contribute toward establishing a practice based PhD in the United Arab Emirates.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviews

The following are transcripts of the interviews I conducted as a key method to gather previously unrecorded histories of women burqa makers and wearers and through this to document different forms of the burqa within the Emirates. In total, I interviewed twenty-five Emirati women and five women from Bahrain. The burqa makers I interviewed were predominately in their late 60s and 70s and early 80s, with a couple in their mid 50s. I also interviewed four men: two artists and two social researchers as they had personal stories regarding the burqa. In addition, I interviewed two London-based women who themselves came from countries that had face covering practices of their own. I also interviewed the owners of two manufacturing companies who produced the burqa fabric in Mumbai.

1- Name: Abdelaziz, Souad

Age: 79

Born: Somalia

Date of interview: 11.06.2013

Location of interview: London, UK (at her home)

My family emigrated from the Yemen to Somalia before I was born. I was later born in Mogadishu and lived there until I finished high school, at which point I went back to the Yemen.

I started to cover my hair when I was twelve years old. In my culture, the piece of black fabric that covers the hair is called '*Al-Shuga*'. Some women start to cover their hair after marriage.

Yemeni women also use black fabric to cover their bodies in public. It is our tradition. The face covering is called '*niqab*'. In some areas, married women must cover their faces with it, but elderly women do not. I have never worn the niqab outside of the Yemen, but when I go back to my country, I always do so, so as not to stand out and attract negative attention.

2- Name: Abdullah, Aisha Rebiah

Age: 80

Born: Bahrain

Date of interview: 07.07.2013

Location of interview: Bahrain (UCO, Old People's Community Centre)

I wore the burqa when I was 12, before I even got married, and I am still wearing it now. When a girl starts to wear the burqa, it signifies she has reached womanhood. The bride's burqa is small with gold decorations and is quite expensive. Now I wear a large burqa, as I am old and I need to hide my wrinkles! I take the burqa off when I am at home, but I am too shy to go out without it. I wear three different burqas during the year. I have one that has lasted for 5 years. I used to have a red cotton cord burqa, but now I use elastic as it is easier. I use the scraps that are left over after cutting the burqa patterns as a treatment for oral health issues. When the indigo dye dissolves, the burqa pieces become soft and can then be put directly onto a wound, helping to 'dry out' all traces of chicken pox and the like. I used to work as a burqa cutter and maker, but now I am old, I cannot do it anymore. I used to buy the '*Marawid*' fabric from Qatar.



3- Name: Abdullah, Amina

Age: 77

Born: Bahrain

Date of interview: 07.07.2013

Location of interview: Bahrain (UCO, Old People's Community Centre)

I have worn the burqa since I was twelve years old. This was before I was even married. It is a tradition in my family, that when a girl reaches this age they must wear the burqa, and I did not refuse, as I always obeyed my parents. It was very difficult for me in the beginning, but I got used to it. The shape and size of my burqa was the same as my mother's. I would always wear the burqa when I went out and at home in the presence of strangers. When I did take it off, I would sometimes immediately reach for it again, as I felt naked without it. When I got married and went to live in my husband's house, I kept the burqa on; even on my wedding night, my husband did not order me to remove it. For my wedding, I actually wore a burqa decorated with gold stars, but when my circumstances changed and I needed money, I had to sell it. During the year, I would wear three or four different burqas. In the past, the forehead of the burqa was lined with cotton fabric. I actually think that the burqa is very beautiful, unlike the niqab, but I have since switched to wearing the niqab myself; I think it is more decent. None of my daughters wear the burqa or the niqab. I never made burqas myself.



4- Name: Abdullah, Mariam Ahmed

Age: 55

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 17.06.2014

Location of interview: Khor Fakkan, Sharjah, (at her home)

I started making burqas after I got married aged 13, while I was pregnant with my first child. When I was a small girl, one of my friend's mothers made burqas. I enjoyed watching her work; it fascinated me. I practised at home with paper and once I took some offcuts and started making tiny burqas for dolls and young girls in our neighbourhood. My stepmother made burqas and, at first, I would sell hers for her. Later, when I started making my own, I did not go to my stepmother with questions; I went to my aunt. After

two years of hand-making burqas, I finally bought a sewing machine. Then in 1988, I bought a burqa machine when they started to be imported from Mumbai.

Since 2000, only Indians have made burqas. This has happened as the traditional makers are getting too old to make burqas, the burqa was prevalent in past, and the younger generation are not interested in learning the craft. Customers prefer going to buy their burqas from Indian shops anyway, as they prefer them to be readymade. These new burqas have masking tape for a lining, not cotton. Burqa fabrics come in many different packets with pictures of stars, telephones, diamonds, and more on them. This helps to distinguish between them, but I can tell them apart just by looking at them anyway. The price for one burqa is now 10-15DH, but years ago it was just 1DH.

On my wedding day, I was forced to put on the burqa for the first time. I was crying, but my father (not my stepmother) explained it was really important that I wore the burqa. He said it was safer for me and that I would understand when I was older. My older sisters were already wearing the burqa by that point. My father added that it would preserve my beauty and that, when I was older with wrinkles and no teeth, it would hide all this from the world. When my husband took off my burqa for the first time, he gave me 655DH; this is called '*Kashfa Al-Burqa*' (revealing the burqa). The burqa that I first wore was the '*Mankous*' burqa, which had small eye slots and covered the mouth. Now I wear a modern burqa, which is much smaller and reveals my lips and more of the skin surrounding my eyes. When I got married, I did not wear the burqa with the gold stars. Older women in eastern coastal areas consider the *Mankuos* burqa inappropriate as it reveals more than it conceals. I did try and wear the niqab at one point, but my family and friends said that I looked more beautiful with the burqa on and that, more importantly, the burqa is part of our heritage and I should respect that. Very few women wear the burqa nowadays, but on national days, heritage days, weddings, and other occasions, they are still very much in demand.

I have a special room in the house I make burqas in. Before I start, I cover my thighs to protect my clothes from the indigo dye. I spend three hours every afternoon making burqas and sometimes continue after dinner. The women in my family and even my neighbours do not need to give me their used burqas as a template as I can always remember their measurements and styles. I always offer readymade burqas as well as my bespoke service.

As a side line, I make burqa key rings and bracelets and I also knit small dolls wearing the burqa. I sell these products wherever I am able to. Sometimes, to save time and money, I would get others to go and buy the fabric for me, whether in Dubai or Mumbai. My husband used to complain that the children would be crying whilst I was making burqas. He wanted me to earn money for the family but, at the same time, he said family had to come first. Once he threatened to take away my burqa tins and throw them into the water! I use the burqa fabric as a kind of medicine for skin problems too and, for children who have oral problems, I wet the fabric and wash out their mouths with it; it is effective.



5- Name Ahmed, Nisa

Age: 55

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 02.08.2014

Location of interview: Kalba, Sharjah, UAE (at her home)

I started to make burqas sometime before I was 20. I learnt by studying my stepmother. I did not wear the burqa myself until after I got married. Before the wedding night my stepmother applies indigo all over my body to smooth and glow. I already knew how to wear it by this point, as I was always my stepmother's model, so it did not come as a shock or surprise to me. I did not wear the burqa all the time - just when I went out or at home when in the presence of a male stranger; my mother wore the burqa all the time though. The Balochi burqa is red and has very small openings for the eyes. The burqa that I wear now is called '*Mankous*' (*abou shelah*). I used to wear a smaller one but, as I got older, I lost a few teeth and needed to cover my mouth more! I never wore the burqa decorated with gold stars, but saw women from Oman wearing burqas decorated with *Al Mishakhis* (rings) at weddings. The burqa fabric we used was red and called '*Zerag Warag*'. I bought the fabric from a door-to-door saleswoman who also sold perfumes, haberdashery etc. The quality of the fabric was much better in the past. It is strange because we did not have air conditioning then and sweated a lot more than we do now. I think the quality of the burqa fabric can be determined by the amount of indigo dye residue it leaves. A lot of indigo dye comes out onto the hands and clothes during cutting now. I think it is due to a change in chemical composition over the years.

I became so skilled at burqa making that I just had to glance at a woman's face or burqa to instantly know what shape and size I needed to cut. The size of the burqa was dependent upon the age of the woman. Older women asked for the larger size, whereas younger women preferred the smaller one. Brides wore special burqas called '*Al Raeacy*'. Sometimes women would ask me questions or for advice about making burqas generally and I was happy to oblige them and offer what help I could; I would not stop working though. As I was a well-known burqa maker, I had customers from Al Ain, which was quite far; a group of women would come and bring fabric with them and ask me to make burqas for them. Women actually used to lend their burqas, jewellery and clothes to others for special occasions.

I did not work to a particular schedule; I would just make burqas whenever I had some free time. Sometimes I worked until midnight; as I did not have electricity, I used an oil lamp. Even when I heard an unexplained noise or saw a strange shadow, it would not stop me working, especially near Eid. I could usually make 15 burqas a day. I got 46 burqas

from one packet. While I was working, I put a dark piece of fabric across my thighs to protect my clothes.

The part of the burqa that flanks the sword part is called '*Mestera*' (cover) or '*Waraka*' (paper burqa). I used the branches of the date palm tree, wooden medical spatulas and ice lolly sticks to make the sword. I put cotton lining on the forehead part to absorb sweat. I kept the burqas I made in metal tins or plastic bags under my bed. I used a glass ball to burnish the fabric.

A family member eventually bought me a burqa machine as a present but, when I stopped making burqas some time ago, I gave it to another burqa maker I knew. I do not need to ask the Indians to make burqas for me now, as I made so many myself before I stopped working. I use the burqa fabric as a kind of medicine or treatment for skin and mouth complaints. I also use the packaging papers to aid in the recovery of broken bones and as plasters/bandages.



6- Name: Al Khatri, Parvez

Age: 54

Company: Nimex (Burqa Manufacturer)

Date of interview: 19.08.2014

Location of interview: Factory in Mumbai, India

My grandfather founded our dye factory in 1900 so, you see, we have always made burqa fabrics in our family. We always use 100% white cambric cotton. In one day, we can dye 100 pieces. The whole process though takes eight days. We only use industrial indigo dye. My grandfather did used to use organic/natural indigo dye, but the result is quite different. The shine used to be produced by hand by putting the fabric on a tree trunk and hitting it with a hammer. Now we pass the fabric through a pressing machine ten times.

During the rainy season, we cannot produce burqa fabric as we need to be able to dry the fabric after the dying process and the weather conditions simply do not allow for this. For 40 years we have been exporting our burqa fabric to Dubai, but now the younger generation do not use this kind of fabric anymore and only small quantities are needed. 20 years ago the Gulf States actually used to account for more than 90% of our sales, but now it is less than 60%. We used to produce 300 pieces of burqa fabric a day, but now we only need 100. I observed Emirati women preferred the green because elderly women as green made them look younger

The price of the raw materials has risen so we have also had to increase the price of the burqa fabric. The price depends on the type of cambric cotton used. The '*Mama Fatimah*' brand is named after my mother; it is my kind of tribute to her. The '*Gold 999*' brand is our top seller though. If our customers demand new brands, we create them. I make sure the packaging is bright and attractive to draw more customers in. Our packaging

illustrations are sometimes on the right-hand side and sometimes on the left-hand side; it does not mean anything.

I have close relationships with some traders in Dubai. If we produce a new brand, I send some samples to these traders; if their customers like it, we produce the amount needed. Red used to be the only colour the burqa came in, but for the past ten years we have produced green as well, as requested by our customers. Sometimes when we are producing green fabric it comes out yellowish-green by accident. The length of each fabric piece is always two yards; it cannot be any longer as the fabric is so delicate. It cannot come into contact with the air.

I have created a kind of archive of burqa fabrics over the years. I would like to show you.

Follow up E-mail Correspondence 23.02.2015.

Name: Parvez Al Khatri, owner of Nimex factor

[23/02 2:08 PM] During 70s, 80 and 90 and till 2005 The production/requirement was approximately 300 to 400 pieces of 2 yards.

From 1 piece of 2 yards about 30 this pieces are made. During earlier times from interior villages where broad size burqa was used only 15 pieces were made from 2 yards piece.

During 70s, 80 and 90 and till 2005 The PER DAY production/requirement was approximately 300 to 400 pieces of 2 yards.

[23/02 5:03 PM] Presently production of 120 pieces of 2 yards per day is sufficient for entire market. From 1 piece of 2 yards they make 30 burqa pieces and in interior villages where broad burqa is used they make 15 to 20 burqa pieces.

[23/02 5:30 PM] I will explain again clearly:

First from our factory, We make 1 pieces of size 2 yards.

From this 1 piece of 2 yards in UAE/ OMAN they make 30 in this burqa.

[23/02 5:33 PM] We make pieces in size 2 yards. So during from 1970 till about 2005 we were making daily around 300 to 400 pieces of 2 yards. But during June, July, august, NO PRODUCTION BECAUSE OF RAIN.

Presently we are making about 120 pieces of 2 yards every day. Only during June ,July and august, NO PRODUCTION .

[23/02 5:46 PM] In our factory we were making from 1970s till 2005. Production was about 300 to 400 pieces of 2 yards DAILY.

During June to august, NO PRODUCTION.

From 2005 till now we make 120 pieces of 2 yards DAILY. From June to august, no production.

Message from the factory owner [01/03 11:02 PM] The price rise is mainly because the labour increased. The price rise in cotton and all other raw materials and colours.

The rejection in number of pieces increased. The climate changes its composition changes. Nowadays, not a single dot of reddish or brownish is acceptable by the lady. It must be fully green.

[01/03 11:05 PM] When we make 120 pieces we get properly coloured pieces, about 80, and about 40 pieces are failed which we cannot sell.

Also because of small quantity overhead expenses of maintaining the factory has increased.

[02/03 2:00 AM] The labour charges increased because the cost of living increased.

[02/03 2:02 AM] The rate of every commodity increased by almost double ... vegetables normal rates was about rs.30 to rs.40 per kilo



7- Name: Al Mazroui, Bakheeta Obaid Suhail

Age: 60

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 30.09.2013

Location of interview: Dubai (at her home)

I started wearing the burqa one day before my wedding when I was 14. My friend started wearing the burqa when she started menstruating. Girls could always be persuaded. They would wear the large burqa with the small eye openings to protect their skin from the sun. I bought my burqas from a maker until I learnt how to make them myself. I learnt by watching others and practising my cutting skills with paper. In 1980, the price of the burqa was 50-100DH. I bought fabric from a dealer in the souk in Dubai. During the winter, my family goes camping in the desert, so I have make large burqas from the red fabric for every female member to protect our skin from the sun during the day and the cold and the wind during the night. In my opinion, the burqa is now more about adornment than decency.

8- Name: Al Mulla, Khalid

Born: Qatar

Age: 54

Date of interview: 06.10.2013

Location of interview: Identity & Heritage Centre, Qatar

I did not see my mother's face until I was 40 years old. I always imagined what she looked like. I would look at my uncle's face and wonder if my mother had similar features; did she have the same nose, for instance? Pondering over this helped to satisfy my curiosity for many years. However, one day my mother became ill and I had to take her to hospital. At the hospital, she had to take off her burqa for an operation and that was the first time I saw my mother's face. I found it difficult to express how I felt at that moment.

It was like she was a stranger to me and I wondered which one was her true face: her masked one or her unmasked one.

Note: Khalid is the Manager of the Identity & Heritage Centre, Qatar.



9- Name: Al Shehhi, Tarifah Kamis

Age: 70

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 21.08.2013

Location of interview: Ras Al Kamiah (at her home)

When I was a young girl, I imitated my mother by wearing her burqa. When I got married (at age 15), I started wearing the burqa myself. I did not know how to tie the burqa though, so I tied it like a shoe lace. I had to go to my mother to ask her to sort it out for me!

There are different burqa fabrics like 'Mama Fatimah', 'Three Stars', 'Seven Stars', and 'Nine Stars'. The quality of the burqa fabric depends on its level of sheen and the amount of indigo dye ('Bugham') it bleeds. The green burqa fabric is better than the green/gold one. I used oil to restore some shine to the burqa fabric. I also used cotton for the lining of the forehead, as I did not want sweat to ruin the fabric. The Indians who make the burqas now do not stitch the cord, but rather use superglue. I used to buy the burqa fabric from Dubai. The price was 60-100DH a piece then and I bought it in bulk to get a better price. From each piece I could make 45 small burqas or 15 large ones. I would sell my hand-made burqas for 10DH.

In Ras Al-Khaimah Emirate, women wore the burqa called *Al-Mishakhis*. Both edges of the forehead part of the *Al-Mishakhis* have *Mishakhis* (rings) made of gold attached to the burqa; the red cord dangles from the end rings so it can be tied around the woman's head. This type of burqa shows the status of a woman's family. Nowadays, the *Mishakhis* (rings) are no longer used to decorate the burqa; women from Ras Al-khaimah prefer to use crystals, which are cheaper and more fashionable.

Girls from this area had to start wearing the burqa from the time they got engaged and it had to be the large red burqa. On their wedding day, it was swapped for a small green burqa. Older women still prefer the red burqa fabric though. The difference between the Arabian burqa and the '*Ajam*' (non-Arabian burqa) is that the '*Ajam*' is stitched all around. The size and shape of the burqa and the way one wears it differs from area to area and also from woman to woman. If I compare my burqa to my mother's, mine shows more of my face than hers does. My mother wanted me to discard my burqa at one point, as she did not think it showed off my features. I decided to wear the niqab for a while instead, as it covers more. It gave me a headache though and I thought I looked like a witch so I soon gave up!

I travelled to Germany once and wore my burqa. The Germans kept coming up to me and asking what my burqa was made of. They even wanted a photo taken with me – I was flattered. This made me see that the burqa is an important Emirati tradition. I felt proud to wear one. I use the burqa fabric for medicinal purposes too. I put the burqa on a stroke sufferer, for instance, and I also use the paper packaging as a plaster/bandage.



10- Name: Al Thani, Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed (artist)

Born: Qatar

Age: 55

Date of interview: 10.06.2013

Location of interview: Katara, Qatar

In 1967, when I was a young boy, my mother and her entourage were shopping in John Lewis on Oxford Street. They were descending a staircase when all the shoppers on the floor below stopped to look up at my mother who was dressed in a very colourful 'Jellabya' (a traditional garment) and burqa. Suddenly, a group of press photographers started to frantically photograph her; there were flash bulbs going off in every direction. She was absolutely mortified obviously; she did not understand why she was receiving so much attention. She covered her face with her 'abaya' (cloak) and fled down the stairs and out of the shop. I remember thinking that my mother was acting like Batman at that moment!

When I was young, I was terribly curious to see my aunt's face, as she always wore the burqa. Once, when she was praying and not wearing her burqa, I naughtily took a peek at her, but afterwards I felt very guilty as I had breached her privacy.

I prefer to see my mother wearing the burqa because I believe it gives her a kind of sense of equanimity and prestige.

11- Name: Almutawah, Abdulrahman (artist)

Age: 45

Born: Qatar

Date of interview: 07.10.2013

Location of interview: Doha, Qatar

I have been an artist since 1997. All my work is of women wearing the burqa. My grandmother, mother and aunt all wore the burqa when I was growing up and we all lived together under one roof. I was used to seeing the burqa, as all the women in my household wore it, as did all their friends, and yet I would still sit for hours looking at them. I was fascinated by the burqa.

I never once saw my grandmother's face; whenever my uncle visited my grandmother, I would sit there and try and imagine what her face was like.

I started to draw my female relatives in their burqas as a way of celebrating and remembering them. No matter what medium I used - photography, paint, clay, or graphic design - there was always some reference to or element of the burqa present. One day, when I was small, I asked my mother why she wore the burqa. She said it was for decency

and that her beauty was just for the eyes of her husband (my father). I was so curious to know how I would look and feel in a burqa that one day I tried one on!

The central theme of my work is my grandmother, mother and aunt; I have essentially transposed my life with these three women into my art. My journey towards becoming an international artist started from very humble beginnings, at the centre of which were always these three women; they were and are very important to me and my work.

There are two types of Qatari burqas. There is a larger burqa that comes down to below the shoulders, which is worn by the Bedouins, and a smaller one for those who live in the city. My grandmother's burqa was the longer one, as she wanted to cover her chest.

Years ago, the burqa meant prestige, respect, status or position, and women were cherished. However, nowadays, it has become a trivial item of clothing that has lost its original meaning.



12- Name: Group of women who sell perfumes, fabric, henna and burqas (made by Indians)

Age: most of them over 60s.

Date of interview: 23.03.2014

Location of interview: The souk in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi

A girl would wear the burqa either when she started menstruating or on her wedding night. Girls were forced to wear the burqa; they had no choice. As women, they would never take their burqa off. Now things have changed and women only wear the burqa when they go out.

The burqa makes a woman look more beautiful, hiding wrinkles and crooked teeth and making the nose look more elegant. Women used to wear a much larger burqa than they do now. I also used to wear a larger burqa, but now I wear a smaller one, as I need to feel young again! Since 1990 this type of burqa doesn't exist anymore, there is no demand I stop make this type of burqa. It is difficult to distinguish the different burqa shapes these days; only experts can do this now.

Al-Aynnawi burqa shows most of the facial features, I feel naked without my burqa (even though it exposed more than conceal).

Most women used to have an *Al Raeacy* burqa, which was decorated with gold; gold was cheaper then, of course! There is a song about it that is sung at weddings and goes, "The bride's burqa is called *Al Raeacy*. Its stitches are perfect and decorated with gold stars." I use to make ten burqas by hand each day. I could make 36 burqas from one piece of fabric. I would model the burqas for my customers when they visited. I would work day

and night, using an oil lamp after it got dark. One day, my husband noticed that the indigo dye had stained my face – after I washed it off, I was paler (which my husband loved!). The burqa fabric also had medicinal properties. If one of my children burnt themselves, for instance, I would wet the burqa fabric and apply it to the burn to soothe it



13-Name: Iqbal, Yaser Khatri (Age: 26) and Iqbal, Hazer Khatri (Age: 24)

Company: KHB Exports (Burqa Manufacturer)

Date of interview: 18.08.2014

Location of interview: Factory in Mumbai, India

This factory dates back to the 19th century; it has been in our family for four generations. Even though we have been making burqas since 1890, we still make them in the same way today with just a few differences in terms of the dye and the cloth – and, of course, now we use machines.

It used to take a day or two to make two yards¹ (one piece) of cloth. After we introduced machines, we were suddenly able to finish 400 pieces in one day! The chemical indigo dye is still made by hand following a secret recipe that only our family knows. It is different to the one used by other factories. We cannot tell anyone about it, as it is the reason for the high quality of our fabric! There is also a difference in quality in terms of the type of base cloth used. We use white cotton cloth made right here in India. We used to get the fabric to shine by hitting it repeatedly with a big wooden hammer, but now we use a pressing machine.

The factory is split into two in terms of the dyeing process and the making process. To produce the burqa fabric, we basically dye the fabric ten times and then pass it through the pressing machine six times. We dye the fabric black the first time and then only indigo thereafter.

In the past, our grandfather imported indigo dye from Germany, but the price became very high and we started sourcing it from India. We have always used industrial indigo dye. We are very pleased with the results and have never needed to look at organic or natural dye.

Our burqa fabric brands are called 'Three Stars', 'Necklace', 'Aeroplane', 'Seven Stars' and 'Two Swords'. Our unique drawings are always on the right-hand side of the packaging. We use dark colours that do not show fingerprints from the indigo dye! The packaging paper that covers the burqa fabric is very thin, but we put thicker paper between individual bundles. We cannot fold the fabric or roll it, as it would crack and we need to protect the fabric from humidity.

¹ 1 yard = 0.9144 metres

The 'Necklace' fabric is only for the Royal Family. *Quwani*, a trader in Dubai, is the only person allowed to order this fabric for the Sheikh family before Eid (special burqas are made for Eid).

The brands differ in terms of the type and quality of the cloth and the dye. We are constantly changing them. 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, we just stop producing them.

We produce burqa fabric from October until May. During the rainy months, we cannot produce, as we need to be able to dry the cloth under the sun. Buyers know this and always order well in advance. We used to get orders of about 4,000 pieces annually. Nowadays, we do not have as much demand. We used to export to the likes of Dubai, the Gulf States and Iran, but things are changing now. Women have started to follow western fashion more and no longer want to wear the burqa. There is a lot of choice now in terms of make-up and women are very good at using it to hide their flaws and highlight their best features. Burqa fabric is also very expensive now due to the high cost of the materials involved. I am proud though that we are one of only two factories in Mumbai to produce this fabric. My business card shows a burqa-clad woman.

When we first started to produce our fabric, customs at the border thought it was leather and tried to stop us from exporting it. After a lot persuasion, we proved that it was, indeed, cotton and we were allowed to continue. Indian people do not use our fabric. Just by way of anecdote, a thief once stole a large quantity of burqa fabric from customs warehouse and tried to sell it to fabric dealers in the local market. No-one wanted to buy it though, so he approached some burqa factories to try and sell it there instead. They too refused so, in the end, he just returned the fabric to customs warehouse. He was not a very successful thief!



14- Name: Jafari, Shakardokht

Age: 35

Born: Afghanistan

Date of interview: 28.05.2013

Location of interview: Guilford, UK

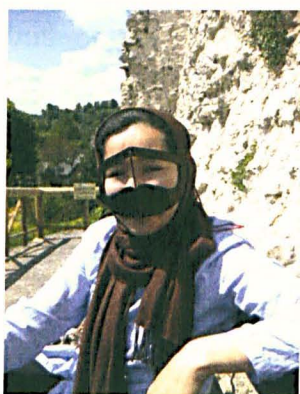
I am a PhD student in England and the mother of two children. Not all women in Afghanistan wear the veil. It depends on the area and tribe that you come from. In Afghanistan, we have four major ethnic groups: Pashtun, Hazara, Tajik and Uzbek. The chador covers a woman's hair and body but reveals her face. The blue burqa covers the whole body. I have never worn the burqa, nor has any woman in my immediate family.

Wearing the burqa is not common in the area I come from the Hazara tribe. We normally wear a long dress and a colourful scarf. Pashtun women must wear the burqa. In Kabul,

there is a much more relaxed attitude to wearing the burqa, although sometimes a man will shout abuse at a woman in the street if she is not wearing it. During the rule of the Taliban, all women were forced to wear the burqa outside their homes. I was living in Iran during this time.

In the centre of Kandahar, if a woman was not wearing the burqa, a member of the Taliban would be within his rights to kill her. My sister-in-law used to wear the burqa for this reason. Some women who did not like to wear the burqa would use the lower part of their headscarves to cover their faces instead. My sister-in-law said there was one good thing about the burqa and that was that she could go about her business without anyone recognising her; she was essentially invisible. The worst part, however, was that, in the scorching heat, there was not enough air and you could not breathe properly. My cousin also said that you could say whatever you wanted when you were wearing the burqa, as no one would know it was you! If I were to go back to Afghanistan and the government insisted that I wore the burqa (this is not the case at the time of this interview), I think it would seriously hinder my life and job.

When I visited the Emirates, I saw the Emirati burqa. It is a traditional custom to cover the face rather than a religious dress. Emirati women wear it to protect themselves from the sun. In my opinion, covering the whole body limits you. For example, if I want to run and play with my children with my face covered, it is hard to do this. The burqa is a cultural not an Islamic icon. Every country is of course culturally different. Islam does not stipulate that women should cover their faces. After been given Emirati burqa to try on, I looked at myself and felt strange. I was not able to see clearly. My voiced also echoed and I wondered if others would be able to hear me properly. Once, when I was walking with a friend in Guilford (both of us were wearing headscarves), an English woman hit me with her handbag and screamed at us to go back to our country.



15- Name: Jasem, Haya

Age: 65

Born: Bahrain

Date of interview: 07.07.2013

Location of interview: Bahrain (UCO, Old People's Community Centre)

I switched from wearing the burqa to the niqab because I wanted to cover my face more as I was going to make a pilgrimage to Mecca; the burqa showed more of my cheeks than I liked. When women wear the burqa, I am able to recognise them, but if they wear the niqab, I cannot. I think that the burqa is connected to our religion; our God says that we should cover up. I wore the burqa before I got married, but on my wedding day at age 16, I did not wear it. The young girl's burqa is different to, say, the grandmother's burqa. I learned how to cut and make the burqa from my grandmother. I used to sit and watch

her and, when I had picked up a few things, I began to help her. I cut the burqa without a pattern and sewed rolled hems. I wore the burqa to go out or when strangers visited. Without it, I felt shy. Those who wore the 'Al-Raeacy' burqa (decorated with gold) were from rich families who could afford the high price. The indigo dye in the burqa gave light to the skin of the face; the lined burqas did not do this.

We used to chant this rhyme:

هيوه فسخي البطولة باعطيك عشرين روبية
قالت اخاف من ايراني يطقني بالقبية يراني الا صاحبها ولا يرضا عليه.

Translation: "If you remove your burqa, I will give you 20 rupees". The woman replies that she is afraid of Iranians, that they might hit her with a branch. The man says, "Do not be afraid. The owner of the burqa is from Iran" (the burqa originally coming from Iran) In Bahrain, the burqa fabric used is called 'Marawid' and is imported from India. I can tell the quality of the fabric from its sheen; the shinier, the higher the quality. The yellow fabric is lower quality than the green fabric.



16- Name: Mohammed, Fatimah Said

Age: 58

Born: Khor Fakkan, UAE

Date of interview: 17.09.2013

Location of interview: Sharjah Craft Centre, UAE

I am from Khor Fakkan, but I moved to Sharjah when I got married.

Older women must wear a large red (indigo dye) burqa, as must younger women who are engaged. The indigo dye in the fabric is used as a cosmetic, will lightening of their skin, wearing burqa is considered desirable, and it is important that a man who sees the woman instantly knows that she is engaged. If a woman is not wearing a burqa, it means that she is not married or engaged.

I myself got married when I was 14. I wore the burqa from that point on, but I felt like it was a kind of screen; I did not feel like myself wearing it. However, it did give me freedom to communicate with strangers.

I learnt how to make burqas from the women in my family, by using brown paper cement sacks. I made burqas in the afternoon, after finishing my domestic chores. I always worked in a three-day cycle. On day 1, I would cut the burqas (10-15); the next day I would sew the sword part on all of the burqas; and on the third day I would finish all the burqas off. The fabric names were: Telephone, Rabbit, Star and Diamond. Rabbit was the lowest quality. I used oil to restore shine to the burqa. I used to sell my burqas for 2DH each; women would wear them for just six months. I put all my burqa materials into a basket made from palm leaves. To get rid of the indigo dye on my hands, I used shampoo. Because I am an expert, I can make burqas without taking measurements.

The shape of the burqa in Dubai is curvier and the forehead is wider and the 'Al Kharah' (the side of the nose) is in the shape of tears. The fabric on either side of the 'sword' part of the burqa is called the 'Butterfly'.

My daughter does not wear the burqa. I do not know how to put on the niqab, but I would like to wear it as the burqa is now more of a fashion item than anything else; it reveals more than it conceals.



17- Name: Mohammed, Metha Said

Age: 67

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 22.08.2013

Location of interview: Social Services Development, Ras Al Kamiah, UAE

When I was very small, I would take my mother's burqa, trace around it on paper, and cut it out.

When I was 10 years old, I started to learn how to actually cut the burqa. I would take the offcuts from my mother's burqas and make miniature ones out of them and try and sell them to little girls in my neighborhoods. With this keen interest from such a young age, it was not surprising that I grew up to be a professional burqa maker. After I got married, I stopped making burqas though. I only returned to the work when I became a member of this Social Development Centre.

When I got married, I wore the burqa myself, but after six months, I took it off and now I only wear it occasionally when we have visitors to the Centre. For me, the burqa is part of our heritage and something that we can pass down to our children (inherited). We also use it as an adornment and as a sign of self-respect and decency. I do not like the niqab. I can determine where a woman is from by the style of her burqa. A woman from Ras Al Kamiah, for instance, has a wide forehead part to her burqa. The burqa remains an important Emirati symbol. Brides used to like to wear full Emirati costume on their wedding day, as guests liked to see this tradition being kept alive, but they always took the burqa off for their wedding night. When a girl reached 16 or 17, she had to wear the large burqa to protect her and keep her skin light. Also, a girl wore a burqa; it meant that she was engaged. Women should not wear the small burqa as it is a means of seduction. In the afternoon, when I make burqas, I wear a black abaya so the indigo dye does not stain my clothes. I can only make 2-3 burqas a day. I do not like anyone watching me, as I

do not want them to be envious of my skill and work! I am willing to teach others how to make burqas though.

Now, the price of a folded piece of fabric is 60–70DH and I sell each burqa I make for between 10 and 15DH. There were two high-quality fabrics: one red, called *Sherbeti*, and one green, called cambric, the yellow fabric, *Qshashat*, was apparently of very low quality the fabric is made of cambric cotton and is green from the indigo dye. The quality is measured by the amount of indigo dye that comes off on your hands as you handle the fabric. Also, if the fabric frays easily, this is a sign of poor quality. I use oil to restore shine to the fabric.

The fabric on either side of the 'sword' part of the burqa is called '*Al-Ferrisah*'. The cord on the left side is called '*Megsaar*' and the one on the right side is '*Mudtwaal*'. The needles used need to be short.

Interestingly, I can use the paper the burqa fabric is packaged in as a kind of medicine. I buy the burqa fabric from Dubai and Ras Al Kamiah. The names of the fabrics I use are: Star, Airplane, and Boat. Now, I just give burqa size to an Indian burqa maker and then selling for the visitor centre.

There is a well-known saying about the burqa that goes:

"شينات الوجوه زينات البراقع"

'Shinnat Al-Wojooh Zenaat Al-Burqas' means women without burqas are not pretty, especially if they have large teeth and flat noses. As this local Emirati saying suggests, wearing the burqa allows a woman to hide her flaws and any signs of ageing; it enhances her beauty.

I travelled to some western countries with other members of this Centre and wore my burqa. Foreigners like to ask questions about the burqa and take photos; they even try it on themselves.



18- Name: Mohammed, Shaikha Jasem

Born: United Arab Emirates

Age: 79

Date of interview: 02.12.2013

Location of interview: Dubai (at her home)

As an orphan, I was raised by Mohammed Sharif's family. Mohammed worked on the boats carrying cargo from the big ships to the harbour. There was a small office at the harbour run by the British and Indians. I used to look through the window at what they were doing; they were always developing photographs and I was very curious. One day, they lent me a camera and showed me how to develop my own photographs. Later,

Mohammed brought me my own camera back from India. I began to take photos of women wearing the burqa.

When I was 16, Mohammed's wife said that I myself had to start wearing the burqa. It was a very large one (indicating that I was not married). I did not want to wear it because people had never seen me in a burqa and I felt uncomfortable. Sometimes I would put it on to leave the house, but then later take it off, fold it up and put it in my pocket. Once I was wearing the burqa on top of my head like a pair of sunglasses. I had forgotten it was there and someone pointed it out and asked me about it in the market. After I got married, I wore it all the time and I just got used to it until it became part of me. Now I would be embarrassed to go anywhere without it.

Note: Shaikha is the first woman in the UAE to become a professional photographer.



19- Name: Naqbi, Aisha Abdullah Khamis Barashid

Age: 67

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 28.08.2012

Location of interview: Khor Fakkan, Sharjah, UAE (at her home)

I know some famous burqa makers like Mariam Mohammed Al Murr, Mariam Ali Ahmed and Halima Khamis. I myself used to make burqas for everyone: young and elderly alike and brides too. I also made men's and women's clothing. The *Mankuos* burqa (where the burqa sits away from the forehead) is worn by women from the 'Al Aouh' tribe. In other areas in the Emirates, women wear the straight forehead burqa and, in Al Ain, women wear a burqa with wide eye slots. The names of the burqa textiles typically used are *Abu Korah* (Ball), *Abu-Thlat-Najmat* (Three Stars), *Abu-Aarnip* (Rabbit), and *Abu-Sarookh* (Missile). The names sometimes change over time, but the nature of the fabric always remains the same. If the non-shiny side is soft and little indigo dye residue is left on the hands, this means that the quality is good. The burqa fabric is imported from India. In the past, the burqa did not have a lining, but nowadays women prefer the forehead part to have a cotton one. The sword part also used to be larger and wider. Now I use a crystal cord to stabilise the burqa on the face as most women prefer it to the traditional red cotton cord although the cotton cord stabilises the burqa more easily on the face and also absorbs sweat but women prefer the colourful cord.

I learnt to cut burqas from my mother. As a trainee burqa maker, I was given leaves from the sea almond tree (*terminalia catappa*) and required to cut them into burqa shapes;

this, of course, had to be done by hand and we were not allowed to mark out the shape first. This was designed to teach us scissor skills and how to accurately cut burqa shapes from memory. The girls would have had to practise for many hours to master the art. The burqa makers would then help them to market their burqas through their own networks as a way of encouraging them. After I got married, I started to make and sell clothes and burqas myself. I used to sell a burqa for 1-1.5DH. The price of one burqa packet was 8-10DH and with one packet I could make 32 to 40 burqas, so I was making quite a lot of money. I used to buy the burqa fabric in bulk, as my work was in demand and I knew I would be able to sell the burqas. I did not need to take any measurements; with one glance, I immediately knew what size a woman took.

I cut the burqa and sewed it and presented it to the customer, who would then put in the sword part and cut the cheek part out herself according to her own requirements. The two types of stitches I used to make the burqa were the '*shallalah*' and the hem stitch. After a while, I began to work with two other women in my neighbourhood. We sat together on the roof of my house for hours, producing large numbers of burqas. This made us more efficient. It was a kind of production line; we each had our own specific jobs: one cutting, one sewing and the other installing the cords. There was also a fourth woman who would sell all our burqas for us, so that we could just concentrate on making them. We would divide the money equally between the three of us makers. The seller worked on commission, but sometimes we let her keep the money as a kind of gesture. Once we had made enough money, we could afford to buy a burqa machine, which made our work much easier and even more productive.

In two hours, I myself can make three to five burqas, whereas novice makers will typically take two hours to make just one. I begin my work at 10am after I have finished my household chores.

I go into the courtyard and sit under a tree where I begin to cut the fabric. Other women from the neighbourhood join me to complete their own work; it really is a social occasion. After a couple of hours, I need to prepare the family lunch, but first I wash my hands carefully to get rid of the indigo dye. It is difficult to divide my time between my family, house and burqa making. After lunch, I need to go to the farm to milk the cows and goats and clean there. When a customer came to my house to buy a burqa, I would only offer her ready-made burqas. I have a different burqa for special occasions and store it separately. In the past, we would lend out special burqas (especially ones decorated with gold stars) and clothes to a bride for a week.

Often prospective brides (from 13 years old) would actually be forced to wear the burqa before their wedding day. They would persist for some time to tear them off and destroy them. It would continue to be replaced until eventually someone would persuade the girl with the fact that, if she kept the burqa on, on her wedding night, her husband would give her money when he took it off for the first time. There is a saying that goes, the burqa is to do with adornment and preservation, adornment because when a girl wears it, it enhances her beauty, and preservation in the sense that, at night, she keeps it in her wooden chest for safe keeping. I keep new burqas in tins and everyday ones between the pages of an exercise book. Every month, I get through many burqas due to the heat, sweat and dust. I use perfume to try to restore some shine to my burqas when this happens. I never take my burqa off in the presence of strangers and this includes my son-in-law and even my female friends; I feel naked without it. For me, it is a sign of modesty and a woman who is not wearing one loses her sense of modesty.

The burqa is part of our tradition and culture and is not related to our religion. Many women nowadays choose to wear the niqab instead of the burqa, as they feel the

modern day burqa actually tempts men through the shapes and decorations it uses. I do not wear the niqab though because I do not like that people cannot recognise me. I use the burqa fabric for medicinal purposes too, to treat skin ailments and mouth ulcers. If a man has a facial stroke, I make him a burqa made of thick white fabric. I am still making burqas, as I am active in our local heritage centre. I try to keep the tradition alive and also participate in important festivals and ceremonies.



20- Name: Rushid, Aisha Mohammed

Age: 77

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 14.10.2013

Location of interview: Defta, Ras Al-Khaimah (at her home)

I started to make burqas after I got married. I was very busy as I also had to take care of the house and run the farm! I taught myself by observed the burqa makers during tea time; I started by practising with paper first. From mid-morning onwards when I was alone, I would start making burqas and selling them to neighbours.

There are different types of burqa packaging like 'Telephone' and 'Three Stars'. The red burqa fabric is called '*shems al duha*' (midday sun) and the green one is called '*shems al asur*' (afternoon sun). I used two types of stitches to sew the burqas, '*shallalah*' and the hem stitch (over stitch). I finished them off with silver, red and gold cords (burqa fastenings). A quick rub with a bar of soap would soften the edges of the burqa and make it easier to sew. *Al Kharah part* is the bottom corners of the eye hole that are attached to the 'sword', with the curved shape. This is the part distinguish Emirati burqa form from other burqa form worn in the rest of the Gulf region.

Younger women wore smaller burqas than older women and widows wore old burqas without any shine until the end of their mourning period which lasted 4 months and 10 days. Each packet of burqa fabric would cost me 30-50DH. I bought it from a dealer called Mohammed Al Iranian at the Souk in Sharjah. I would then sell each individual burqa for 10DH. After a while I bought myself a burqa machine to make the embossed indentations on the forehead part. Nowadays, the Indians have taken these jobs away from me. I would love for the Indians to go home, just so I would not be so redundant anymore and could start making burqas again.

I myself wore the burqa after I got married, as it was a tradition in my family. I never tried to tear up the burqas I was given to wear because I came from a poor family and I knew they could not afford to replace them. The niqab I did refuse to wear though as I wanted people to recognise me. I kept the burqa on all the time, even when I was at home. The only time I took my burqa off was for my ablutions before praying and when praying itself and sleeping.

The burqa is part of our tradition and culture; it is part of a woman's adornment and not related to religion. I have worn both the red and green burqas in my lifetime. I used to have just two a year. Now I get a new burqa for each special occasion. I prefer to wear the

smaller burqa even though I am old because it makes me feel young again. I also prefer the silver and gold cords.



21- Name: Said, Miriam Khalifa

Born: United Arab Emirates

Age: 77

Date of interview: 02.12.2013

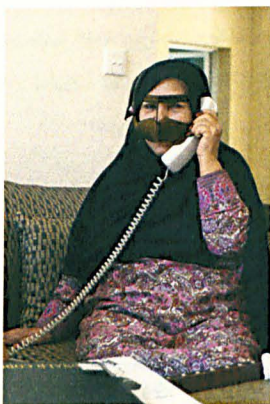
Location of interview: Al-Khan, Sharjah, UAE (at her home)

I started to wear the burqa when I became engaged at 14 years old. I have worn the same style of burqa the whole time. The burqa is prestigious for me. It contains 'Noor Yousef' (the light of Joseph) and makes my skin brighter and lighter. I wore the burqa on my wedding night but, before my husband entered the bedroom, a female relative took it off to show off my beauty, firstly to my female relatives and secondly to my husband.

The burqa is well-known for covering large lips and wrinkles and enhancing beauty. I know a true story of a groom and his bride that highlights this rather humorously. On their wedding night, the groom entered the bedroom and took off his bride's burqa for the first time to reveal that his bride had crooked teeth and a cleft lip. At that point, he exclaimed, "Curse those who make burqas and hide the beauty and the ugliness of women. My heart feels pain having removed this burqa, as there are two deformities, crooked teeth and a cleft lip."

I had to cut the bottom part of a new burqa to the shape I wanted. I would use the offcut for when someone in my family had a mouth ulcer or scraped/grazed a part of their body. I used to think that the fabric contained cherries. I used the tissue paper from the burqa packaging to relieve back and knee pain. Men would wear the burqa when they had had a facial stroke. I know that covering the face has nothing to do with my religion because, when I go to Saudi Arabia and walk around the Kaaba,² I am not allowed to have my face covered. I hate wearing the niqab, as I feel like a different person and cannot recognise myself.

² A cuboid building in the centre of Islam's most sacred mosque in Mecca. Muslims are expected to face the Kaaba when praying wherever they are in the world.



22- Name: Said, Shamah

Age: 78

Born: Umm Al Quwain, UAE

Date of interview: 15.09.2013

Location of interview: Umm Al Quwain, UAE (at her home)

I used to make burqas and then sell them; not many women did this work, so I did not have a lot of competition and the work was quite lucrative. I travelled to Oman and learnt how to make burqas from a woman there; by this time, I was already married with (small) children. I bought the fabric from a door to door saleswoman. Mid-morning, after I had finished my domestic chores, I would sit and do my work as part of a group of women and my daughter (who I also taught how to make burqas). The colour of burqa fabric varies depending on the age of the woman. Older women prefer madder red burqas which are the most expensive, affordable only to women of high status, whereas girls and young women from lower social classes prefer the golden yellow or green burqas because they are cheaper. Thus, the colour (as well as the size) of the burqa instantly reflects differences in status and age.

I would know just by looking at a woman what size she was. I used ice lolly sticks for the 'sword' part. I stored my burqas in metal tins; I have a metal tin that is more than 50 years old and burqa fabric that is 20 years old.

I myself started to wear the burqa from the age of 12. My mother, father and grandmother all persuaded me to wear it. I mainly wore used burqas, I felt naked without it and also it is essential to wear the burqa as a sign of my modesty. Women from relative would apply indigo on my skin because they believe this indigo has prophet Yusuf light. On my wedding night, I wore a new small burqa. I use a red cord; in the past I used *Al Mishakhis* (golden rings) to decorate my burqa. Even a spinster needs to wear the burqa! Older women prefer the red burqa. I also use the burqa fabric to treat injuries.



23- Name: Saif, Moza

Age: 55

Born: Al Dhaid, Sharjah, UAE

Date of interview: 19.09.2013

Location of interview: Sharjah, UAE (at her home)

On the eve of my wedding, I wore the red burqa because it was believed to have more indigo dye in than the green burqa. My skin will absorb it and after wash it will lighten. The bride wears the green one, whereas the mother and the grandmother wear the red one. When you are in mourning, you must wear the red burqa. I did not refuse to wear the burqa because all my female relatives wore it. It is our family tradition and it would have been shameful to go out without it. When women get older, their burqas get larger because they want to hide more of their ageing face.

When I am at home, I do not wear the burqa. This is different to my mother and grandmother and so on; the earlier generations wore the burqa all the time. I wear the niqab when I go to the souk; it is better in this environment as it covers me completely. My daughters do not wear the burqa at all.

I used to make burqas myself; my older sister taught me. I only used to make them for myself and the women in my family though; I did not sell them. Now, of course, the Indian burqa makers make all my burqas for me. For 'sword' part of my burqa Indian male workers use kebab sticks make burqa more elegant. I used to start making burqas mid-morning and continue into the afternoon. It would take me half an hour to make a burqa. I used bars of soap to smooth the edges of the burqa fabric to make it easier to fold and sew. The fabric on either side of the 'sword' part is called '*Sitrah*' (meaning 'Cover'). If the quality of the fabric is rigid, the indigo dye is 'faster'. I collected ice-lolly sticks for the sword part.

With my used burqas I give them away to poorer women. Now every week I get a new burqa. If a child has a mouth ulcer, I dip a piece of burqa fabric in water and then swab the child's mouth with it. If a child has mumps, I take the packaging paper and put herbs on it to make a kind of plaster.

24- Name: Salem, Amina Ali

Age: 85

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 01.10.2013

Location of interview: Kalba, Sharjah, UAE (at her home)

The first time I wore the burqa was three days before I got married. My mother persuaded me to wear one of her burqas, so I could get used to wearing it and eating and drinking in it and so on. I did not like the feel of it though and cut it up. However, I was simply made to wear another and another and another, until I got to my 13th burqa, at which point one of my relatives hit me and shouted at me "to stop". The other reason my mother wanted me to wear one of her burqas was that it would stimulate my fertility and she wanted me to have many children of my own. I did not wear the burqa on my wedding night, but eventually came to accept it.

Every year, I had three new burqas made. As the burqa absorbs sweat, I would have to dry it on the tree in the courtyard after every use. When it was dry, I would take a glass and use it as a burnisher to restore the sheen to the burqa. Now I get through three burqas every month! My first husband brought a tin of sweets back for me when he was working in Kuwait. I kept the tin and used it to put my burqa inside. Sometimes I feel that this tin holds something of my dead husband; it certainly reminds me of him, although I

have been married two more times since. I tried the niqab once when I went on a pilgrimage to Mecca. I felt like I was choking!

25- Name: Taher, Ahmed Mohammed

Taher Trading Estate

Age: 65

Company: Taher Trading Estate

Born: UAE

Date of interview: 26.08.2012

Location of interview: Taher Trading Estate shop

For 50 years now, we have imported fabrics from India to make burqas with. The most famous brands are: Rabbit, Telephone, Stars and Diamond. The names correspond with the illustrations on the packaging. Some of these brands have disappeared over the years and have been replaced with new ones; a manufacturer needs to continue to stimulate the market. The burqa fabric comes in green, gold and red.

Customers in the Emirates prefer the Stars brand (it is of a higher quality), which costs 60DH a piece. The size of each piece is 1m x 1m; from this you can make 25 burqas. They produce this fabric in India but do not use it locally. Now my customers are Asians not Emiratis.



26- Name: Um Ali

Age: 47

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 30.08.2012

Location of interview: Social Services Department, Fujairah, UAE

My name is Um Ali and I am 47 years old. I live in Fujairah, which is the seventh member of the United Arab Emirates. I was born in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. In Abu Dhabi, I made burqas for sale to the harems. I learned burqa cutting when I was 13 years old from Ms Amna Al-Romaithi. The first time I myself wore the burqa was three days before my wedding. It used to be expected that a woman would wear the burqa after marriage. I was very young at the time though, so it was difficult for me to get used to wearing it and I tore three burqas up in rejection. Of course, I got used to wearing the burqa after a while. At first, I did not know how to really handle it; how to put it on; how to wear it; how to take it off. My mother-in-law had to teach me.

It is, in fact, well known in Emirati society that a girl starts to wear the burqa when she gets her first menstrual cycle, or when she gets married. It is possible to distinguish an unmarried woman, a married woman or an elderly woman from the size of her burqa.

The burqa becomes bigger as the woman gets older; elderly women also have a smaller eye opening in theirs.

I used to cut and sell burqas before I got married and I continued to do this afterwards. Indeed, I was already very experienced at this point in recognising the burqa textile's quality and value. There are many different types of burqa textile, such as *Abu-Najmah*, *Abu-Rocket* and *Abu-Abryq* (Teapot). You can tell them apart by the printing on their packaging. They usually come in red and green, but the best quality burqa textile is green/yellow.

When the textile quality is not very good the fabric is usually thick and the indigo dye immediately starts to come off as you cut the fabric. You can also tell the textile quality is poor if it turns a dusty black colour only two days out of its packaging. Burqa prices used to be around 10DH. Good quality fabric used to cost 25DH per packet. Each packet contains a large piece of fabric measuring 120 cm x 120 cm. The lower quality fabrics cost only 15DH. It is cheaper to buy in bulk (a dozen fabrics at the same time). When I was living in Abu Dhabi, I used to buy burqa fabric from one preferred dealer. When I moved to Fujairah, I started buying fabric from dealers in Dubai and Sharjah. From one packet, I can make about 30 to 40 burqas. However, this depends on the size of the burqa; I obviously cut it according to the customer's order/specification. I know several women from Fujairah who used to cut and make burqas. I know Sheikha (sister of the local Sheikh) Hamed bin Saif did, but I have forgotten the other women's names!

I had a dedicated room in my house with an en-suite bathroom where I would make burqas. After sunset, when all my household chores were complete and the children were tucked away in bed, I would go to my private room and work there until midnight. If I worked hard, I could make ten burqas in a night. When I had finished my work, I had to use cologne mixed with water in order to remove the indigo dye from my hands. I also had to wear special protective clothes while cutting burqas. I wore a black '*Jellabya*' (full-length gown), '*shela*' (scarf) and black trousers.

After finishing making a burqa, I would put it into a metal tin (a sweet or biscuit tin) to keep it safe. I would also put the burqa packets into a wooden chest in order to protect them, preserving the textile from the air so that it did not tarnish. My own burqas I would put between the pages of a notebook to help maintain their shape. You used to need good sewing skills to make burqas. Everything was made by hand then, but now sewing machines are used, which is obviously much quicker/easier.

Before I started working, I would wax the fabric in order to make it smoother and make it easier for me to insert the needle. There is a certain type of stitch used (the '*shallalah*') in order to create the sword part that finished off the burqa. This part was very important because it stabilised the burqa on the woman's face. The forehead of the burqa used to be wider. For the '*Al-Sater*' (cheeks), and '*Al-Kharah*' (side of nose), I used to use the same stitch I used for the hems; they were small stitches sewn with a single thread. In order to give the burqa its beautiful shape and make it look more refined, I used to use a soft glass ball (*Al-Msqih*) for straight of sewing of the burqa. I also used to use red cotton cords to erect and stabilise the burqa on the face, but nowadays this is just an aesthetic element and serves no real function.

During Ramadan, I receive special orders. Women want to cover their faces with big burqas in order to show their respect to God. They feel that this shows greater decency and the fact that they are asking for forgiveness from God. In winter, women also ask me for larger burqas because they need to protect their face from the harsher/windier conditions.

There are particular days during the year when it is also customary for women to wear a new burqa: for festivals, holidays and Eid. If a woman wants to visit a relative or friend in order to express her condolences after a death, she must wear an old burqa (with no shine). Women with little money would come to me with their old burqas for me to make them shiny again. I would put the burqa on a piece of wood and start beating it to restore some of its lustre; it can never be as glossy as it was when it was new, but it is an improvement. The shape of a bride's burqa is smaller with wider open eye holes. Sometimes the burqa is decorated with gold stars, especially if the bride is from a high-class family.

I do not make burqas now. Now only Indian men make and sell burqas. Some women request them to put crystals on the surface of their burqas. They wear this decorated type of burqa at weddings and other celebrations. The modern burqa now looks like a moustache! I myself wear more than five different burqas per year. In the past, women would only have had two, one for everyday activities and one for special occasions. The type of burqa women from Fujairah wear is called *Al-Mankuos*. Women from different areas wear different types of burqas, which vary in terms of shape and colour. When I see a woman, I can tell where she comes from, from the type of burqa she is wearing.

Women never take their burqa off when they meet strangers. They can only take it off when they pray, sleep or make a hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Women who wear the burqa feel free when they go outside their home. If they live with a big extended family, they will also wear the burqa while doing their household chores as it is only men in their immediate family who can see them without it. I myself feel naked without my burqa. Nowadays, when I go to the market, I wear the niqab, because it is more concealing and is considered more modest. Unfortunately, I cannot distinguish between women when they are wearing the niqab. The burqa is a face covering and has nothing to do with religion; Islam does not order us women to cover our faces. Burqa-wearing is related to Emirati custom and tradition. In the past, women from Baluchi tribe had their own burqas made of a red yarn covering the upper part of the face. All women, even servants, wore the burqa in those days.

There are other interesting uses for burqa fabric:

1. If you cut the burqa fabric into small pieces and place it into a small jug of water, the water turns blue because of the indigo dye the fabric contains. You can then apply this water to the skin of a bride so that her skin will continue to glow even after washing.
2. Take a little piece of burqa fabric and place it on top of a piece of burning coal. Inhale deeply. This will stop nosebleeds.
3. The paper packaging of the burqa textile is used in the treatment of mumps and tonsillitis. Make a herbal paste, scoop it up with a piece of the packaging paper, and then apply it to the target area. This looks rather like a plaster or bandage.
4. For the treatment of a paralysed facial muscles, put the burqa on the face and remain in a darkened warm room for a week until full recovery is made. This applies to both men and women, but men find this strange as they will never have worn a burqa before! Recovery by this method is called 'Bobriqia'



27- Name: Um Mohammed

Age: 73

Born: Bahrain

Date of interview: 07.07.2013

Location of interview: Bahrain (at her home)

I did not wear the burqa before I got married. I got married very young. After I had had two children, I started wearing the burqa then. It was my mother who convinced me to wear it, as she was from the Emirates and that is what they did there. My husband could not refuse because my mother told him that wearing the burqa was a customary thing in our family. My mother said, "My daughter must continue this tradition," and that was that. I wore the burqa when I went outside, but when I got home, I immediately took it off because my husband was annoyed by the indigo dye being transferred onto his white clothes.

I did not work making burqas when I was married, as my husband refused. After he died though, my best friend convinced me to start doing it. At the beginning, my friend brought me newspapers (as pattern templates). I bought burqa fabric from Qatar and Dubai. My children did not like me making burqas at home, as the dye got everywhere, so I decided to work on the roof of my house to stop my children moaning. I got really into it and did it whenever I had any free time. I always wore special dark green protective clothes. My son-in-laws did not see my face for many years. It was only when I had to go to hospital that they saw my face for the first time, as I had to take the burqa off for my operation. Once my son took me to London with him. He said that I could not wear the burqa there, but on the second day, I put it on and told him I felt naked without it. I mean I felt so exposed that I really could not see anything without it.

28- Name: Um Said

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 01.10.2013

Location of interview: Dubai (at her home)

when newspapers were introduced into the UAE in the 1960s,³ burqa makers started to use these too as a teaching tool as they quickly became a common item in every household and were easy to come.

³ Sameer Khalil Salamah, *Sahafah Alimarat Qafzah Noeyah Zamin Qayasi [The Emirates Journalism Leap Forward in Typical Time]*, (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Heritage Club, 2005), pp.38-47.

I learned how to make burqas from my grandmother. My grandmother made burqas only for herself and her family, but by the time I was 18 years old, I myself was a professional maker. As burqa maker I started to use newspapers as pattern to cut burqa fabric. I originally hand-made burqas but after a while, I was able to buy a sewing machine. Many years ago, the burqa fabric would cost 15DH to buy, but now it is more than 150DH. The green fabric becoming more expensive in the 1970s as the quality was improved. I know the names of some types of packaging, such as 'Telephone' and 'Three Stars'. I asked my father if I could wear the burqa at age 18, as I was the only one of my friends not to have got married yet. I felt very uncomfortable when we went out together; as the only woman in the group not wearing a burqa, men would stare at me and I felt naked. When I finally got married at 22, I did not change the shape of my burqa and carried on wearing the same one. *Bo-Lafah* (curved) burqa was worn predominantly by women from Dubai. The outer edges of the cheeks are a curved shape and the forehead part is wider. Now, women who wear the burqa follow fashion which means that the *Bo-Lafah* shape has changed and only the name remains. Years ago, women would keep the same burqa for the whole year, as they could not afford another one. I myself came from quite a poor family and could only afford one burqa per year. In Dubai, on either side of the 'sword' part of the burqa, the fabric is called the 'mirror'. Women in the Emirates used to wear the big red burqa for five days before Eid, so that their skin would be soft and light by the time Eid came. When young children have unusual patches of hair growth on their skin, we light a small bit of burqa fabric and, whilst still alight, we brand the afflicted area. The burqa is not related to religion. It enhances beauty.

There is a popular Arabic saying from the nineteenth century that goes:

"لين تبرقعت الفطسة قم اطلعن يا طوال الخشوم."

Translation: In the presence of a woman with a flat nose wearing the burqa, a woman with a slim nose should leave the room immediately. This refers to the fact that the burqa will sit perfectly on a flat nose without moving, meaning that the woman will have the best-looking burqa in the room. For a woman with a slim nose, the burqa will keep falling off her face, looking messy and unkempt and requiring constant readjustment.



29- Name: Yaqub, Latifa Yusuf (Um Hassan)

Age: 60

Born: Bahrain

Date of interview: 08.07.2013

Location of interview: Muharraq, Bahrain (Old People's Community Centre)

I do not make burqas. Bahrain and Qatar calling the burqa batulah, whereas in Oman, United Arab Emirate called the burqa. I have to come to Dubai to buy ready-made burqas to take back to Bahrain with me. We used to have women who made them in our country, but now only Indians make and sell them in their own shops in the UAE. A burqa costs 10DH and I sell it for 20DH.

Bahrainis wear the burqa for henna nights, Ramadan, heritage celebrations, weddings etc. They prefer the red burqa to the green one. Rich families can afford the gold-decorated burqas for weddings. I will protect them for them afterwards by wrapping them in cotton fabric and keeping them in wooden chests. If, however, the burqa fabric tarnishes losing its sheen, the gold is removed and re-sewn onto a new burqa. In the past, Bahrainis wore the burqa day and night as a sign of decency. For me though, the niqab is a more modest form of dress than the burqa, as it covers more of the face. When I was 12 years old, I saw my best friend wearing the burqa. I went back home and told my mother that I wanted to wear one too. I borrowed my grandmother's burqa to show everyone that I had transformed from a girl into a grown woman. I ran off to show all my friends how grown up I was. However, in my excitement, I fell over and blood poured out of my nose. I never wore the burqa again apart from for special occasions and celebrations!

There is a popular Bahraini saying that goes,

الزوج يقول لزوجته:
يابنت عمي افسخي البطولة (البرقع)
قالت: كيف افسخ البطولة (البرقع) و اخوك واقف بطوله

Translation: A husband says to his wife, "Cousin, remove your burqa". In 2011, I wore the burqa during the political upheaval in Bahrain. I wanted to give a speech and I needed to be able to get to the stage anonymously. Once on the stage, I immediately took it off though.



30- Name: Yusuf, Aisha

Age: 55

Born: United Arab Emirates

Date of interview: 26.08.2012

Location of interview: Kalba, Sharjah, UAE (at her home)

I used a special thick textile called '*Zerag Warag*'. It comes in the form of a large piece of cloth fold into a rectangle and is imported from Mumbai, India. I used to go to the old souk in Sharjah to buy the fabric from my preferred dealer but now I buy readymade burqa from an Indian male. There were two type of fabric: a green gold one and a red one, both saturated with indigo dye. The price used to be 30-40 DH⁴ (Emirati Dirham), but now it is much more expensive, around 150DH.

I can distinguish each fabric from the name and illustration on its packaging. I think these graphics are pretty meaningless; nothing more than marketing gimmick to maximise profit for the manufacturer concerned. The fabrics do vary in terms of colour fastness though. If the fabric is of a particularly good quality, only a small amount of indigo dye will be transferred onto my hands when I start to cut it. The best one in this respect is called *Abo Sarookh* (Missile). I used to choose the fabric myself, as I know what to look for. I learnt how to make the burqa from a famous maker called Hajah Sharifah. She was well known for her beautiful and accurate cutting and stitching. After studying her for some time, I tore out paper from my school exercise books and tried to cut it in the same way as I had seen Hajah cut the burqa fabric. Once I had become proficient in making burqas, I started to teach other women how to make them too. Sometimes I would cut the burqa myself and then the other women would just have to sew them. If you are an experienced maker like I am, you do not need to take any measurements; I automatically know what size I need to cut.

The process of cutting the burqa is always the same, but there are different shapes for girls and unmarried women, married women and elderly women (grandmothers). There are two types of stitches used for sewing the burqa. One is called '*shallalah*' and is used for the upper part of the burqa, and the other is called '*pad*' and is used for the cheek and slot eyes parts of the burqa; this is what finishes it off and gives its final look.

I need different tools to make the burqa such as scissors, needle, soap and obviously fabric. Burqa can be made in as little as half an hour, sometimes less, depending in the skill of the maker. I prefer to make burqas in the afternoon when all the women in my neighbourhood gather to do this together and also during the evening after my children have gone to sleep. During special occasions like Eid, I often have to stay up the whole night making burqas. The '*Al-Saij*' (sword) is very important part of the burqa as it is what balances it on the nose. The width of the forehead here will vary depending on the age of the woman. The '*Al-Sater*' (cheek) is the last part made. In the past, I used a cotton red cord to secure the burqa onto the head, but now I use a coloured cord made from gold, silver thread to give it a more modern feel; unfortunately, this kind of cord cannot be secured as easily as the cotton one. The look of the burqa has changed as UAE society has changed and become more open. The burqa in the past was all about decency and modesty, whereas now it is purely adornment.

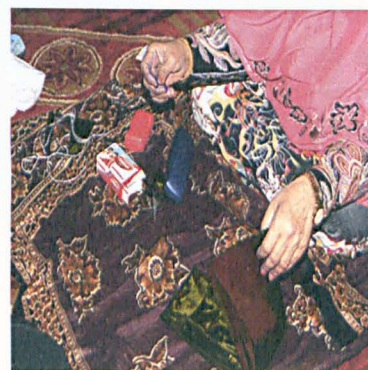
⁴DH (unofficial) or AED (official) = UAE Dirham. 1 AED = 0.18 GBP. Source: XE.com. Accessed: 12.04.2015.

The cost of a burqa depended upon the type of fabric used. In the past, it would have been 1-2DH, but nowadays they start from 5-15DH. Initially, I did not use matches for the 'Al-Saif' (sword part) because matches were expensive at that time; I used the stalks of date palm instead because it was readily available and free. When the standard of living in the UAE increased, I was able to pay for matchsticks and started using them in 1975. Some women from low-income families can only afford two burqas and cannot possibly buy new ones for every wedding and other special occasion. For this reason, they come to me to help them make their old burqas look new again. I place the burqa on a piece of wood and rub it rigorously with some soft shells/stones; this restores some of its lustre. These women might use perfume or oil to try to revive their burqas themselves.

I would never lend another woman one of my own burqas. I store them in metal tins and they are precious to me. I would happily make a woman her own burqa though. I use the same tins for that purpose too. In other words, one is for the fabric, another is for the burqas I have cut out (before they have been sewn), and another is for the burqas that are ready to be sold. I keep all these tins on the windowsill away from the children; they are not allowed to touch them. I started to wear the burqa after I got married. I was essentially forced to. I resisted at first and cut up the ones I was given to wear. I was actually lucky, as I only had to wear the burqa after I got married; in the past, a girl might be to wear burqa even before puberty!

I wear the burqa to be able to have freedom of movement when dealing with strangers; it provides me with a sense of decency and dignity. I take it off when I am at home because my immediate family is allowed to see my face. Some women keep their burqa on inside the home though. They might even sleep with them on; their husbands have never see their faces. These women will often be deeply tanned at the forehead and around the eyes.

Before 1950 in the UAE, all women wore the burqa. I can recognise where a woman is from by their burqa. In terms of the UAE, in Kalba, Sharjah, women are known for wearing a very straight/vertical-shaped burqa, the 'Al-Saif' (sword part) used to be very wide, but it has become much narrower over the years. It is harder from me to tell where a woman wearing the niqab is from, as this covers the whole face, reveal the eyes. She might be from the Emirates, Pakistan or India. These women see the whole world around them, but no-one notices them. It is important to note that the burqa has never been related to Islam; it is just part of custom and tradition in the Emirates and other areas. I do not want this ever to change. On a completely different note, offcuts of the burqa fabric can be used to treat skin ulcers and allergies. For mouth ulcers, you take a piece of the burqa cloth, wet it and place it directly on the ulcer.



31- Name: Yusuf, Mohammed (Artist)

Age: 60

Born: Sharjah, UAE

Date of interview: 24.05.2012

Location of interview: Sharjah, UAE (at his studio)

My first work featuring the burqa was 'Divorced Woman', showing a woman wearing the Emirati burqa carrying her belongings on her head. It should be understood that, in the UAE, following a divorce, the woman will move from her husband's house to her parents' house. Therefore, here I am focusing on a small detail of divorce to better convey the feelings of sadness and lonesomeness that it brings. For me, this looks like a theatrical scene.

In another work of mine, 'Freedom', the burqa is used as a symbol of freedom. In the past, women in the UAE very rarely left the house. When a girl had her first menstrual cycle, her family would essentially force her to start wearing the burqa; it was not optional and there was no possibility of declining. This work, therefore, raises the question of whether wearing the burqa really brings the wearer freedom or not. The door in the piece does not have a lock. The black burqa represents the woman's age and social status. Putting the burqa on the door in this way emphasises the idea of the two worlds, the inside and the outside. I made an iron burqa despite the fact that burqas are typically made of cotton because I wanted the piece to be durable and have longevity.

Appendix 2: Audience Response to installation 'Adornment and Preservation', Sharjah Art Museum, UAE, February, March 2013.

1- As an Australian the constant exposure is new to me. At first it looks oppressive but as it becomes less shocking there are some days I would choose to wear a burqa. If it is truly a personal choice and not suppression I can understand it.

2- The burqa for me is like a war mask and creates fear in the hearts of the enemy
The burqa is like a warrior's mask.

البرقع بالنسبة لى كقناع الحرب يبث الهيبة في قلوب العدو

3- Indigo dye on those beautiful skins make them more beautiful.

4- Magic in mystery woman is mystery is a beauty.

السحر في الغموض وغموض المرأة هو جمالها

5- Modesty and dignity
Accessories and the legacy of the past
Story engraved in the memory
Beauty and nature

احتشام و وقار

زينة و ارث من الماضي

قصة محفورة في الذاكرة

جمال و طبيعة

6- Excellent, the burqa is beautiful.

7- My memories is of my grandmother when I went into her room and see
Macintosh's sweet tin and run to take the chocolate, I was so surprised to see
burqas inside.

هي ذكرياتي مع جدتي عندما ادخل غرفتها واري علبة (ماكنتوش) اركض لآخذ شوكولاتة لاتفاجأ بالبراقع بداخله

8- Emirati womens' beauty icon
Was and still the burqa smell reminded me of the days when my mother looked
beautiful and adorned herself.

رمز جمال المرأة الاماراتية

كانت و لازالت رائحة البرقع

ذكرتني بايام والدتي حين تتجمل و تتزين

9- The women look really ugly wearing it.

10- I was born in the UAE and adore the burqa and the diversity of forms in different parts of the country.

انا من مواليد الامارات و اعشق البرقع الاماراتي و تنوع اشكاله في مختلف مناطق الدولة.

11- Cover to the woman's face. It is one of Emirati heritage icons.

ستر لوجة المرأة و احد رمز التراث الاماراتي

12- The burqa complements the beauty of the Emirati woman and symbolises her all over the world.

البرقع هو مكمل لجمال المرأة الاماراتية و رمز لها في كل العالم

13- If a woman is a treasure, why hide her behind a burqa?

A man is also a treasure, do we hide him?

If a human being lives underground, he dies. The light is essential for all life.

14- Burqa memories, happiness and nostalgia combined with gold-coloured indigo dye and symbols of fears.

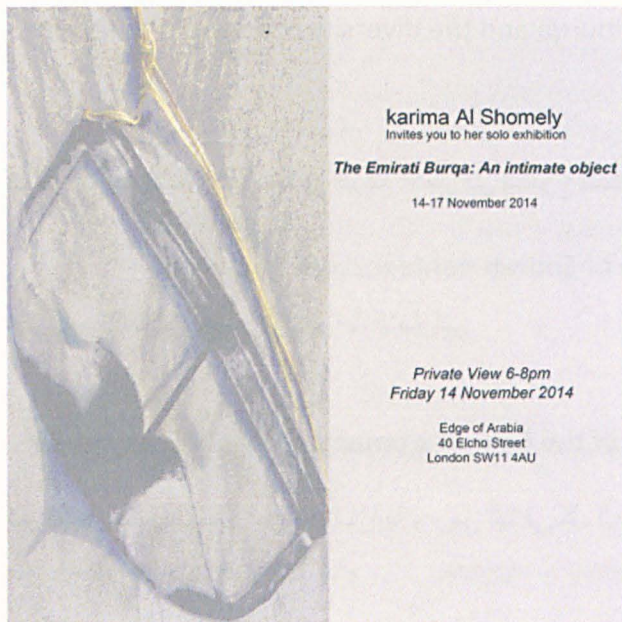
البرقع ذكريات و مخاوف وسعادة و حنين رموز متجمعة بلون النيل والذهب

15- I think that those who invented the Emirati burqa were practical people, so the function of the burqa is like sunglasses nowadays and they are not looking for anything symbolic but the symbolic meaning has happened over of the passage time.

اظن ان الذين اخترعوا البرقع الاماراتي كانوا ناس عمليين بحيث ان هذا البرقع وظيفة النظارات

الشمسية في ايامنا هذه وانهم لم يكونوا يبحثون عن اى رمزية ولكن هذه الرمزية اخذت معناها بمرور الزمن

Appendix 3: 'The Emirati Burqa: An intimate Object', Exhibition invitation and Exhibition statement, Edge of Arabia Gallery, London, 14-17 November 2014.



Exhibition statement:

The Emirati Burqa: An intimate object

"it is not we wear the burqa because it is shameful to go without it, but because it is beautiful to go with it."

Unni Wikan, Behind the Veil in Arabia, Women in Oman, 1982.

The work in this exhibition engages with the Emirati burqa- a specific form of face covering worn by women from at least the eighteenth century in the United Arab Emirates. As a material object, once made by women for women, the burqa embodies a wide range of economic, cultural, and symbolic associations. Based upon extensive research in the UAE from 2011 to 2014, the exhibition is simultaneously and ethnographic study of the Emirati burqa- of its different forms of genealogies, modes of production and meanings- and a creative investigation of its materiality and symbolism.

Through practices of inscription, ritual and enactment my work engages with the burqa as an intimate object.

I am inviting you to look, touch and smell this unique material in the form of many burqas.
Karima Al Shomely

Audience Interviews: 'The Emirati Burqa: An Intimate Object', Edge of Arabia Gallery, 14-17 November 2014.

There was an array of different backgrounds amongst the participants and some had grown up in the Middle East (including the UAE), while others had grown up or studied in the UK. Those from the UAE recounted nostalgic experiences. The Europeans who had grown up in the UAE thought the burqa was 'normal' but had no real idea of its meaning or history. The opinions of those interviewed who lived in the UK varied and those who had travelled to the UAE knew a little about the burqa but nothing really about its meaning or history. Those who had never been to the UAE seemed to have gained some knowledge about the burqa from books, television, newspapers and so on, while others, of course, knew absolutely nothing at all. When visitors were asked what they thought the burqa was for, it emerged that most had no idea. Interestingly, one person thought

that it worn by women and girls to protect the face from dust, the sun and other external elements. The most interesting answers were in response to "What does it feel like wearing a burqa?" I thought it would be fun, a different experience, an opportunity for visitors to try on burqas and record their feelings. No-one who tried one on had ever worn one before. Some did not recognise themselves. Some said that they thought it created a barrier and, naturally, it impaired vision for some. In terms of what they thought the first time they saw a woman wearing a burqa, answers differed depending on where visitors came from. It reminded one person of seventeenth and eighteenth century European costumes, while another thought it seemed like a barrier to the outside world. One commented that it was very unfair on women.

1-Interview VN65003

What did you know about the Burqa before tonight?

The Burqa is in our culture, actually. This is our main heritage. The people who wear the Burqa, especially the women, see it as a beautiful thing. Like maybe the Queen wearing her hat, or something like that. And it covers part of the face so the woman doesn't feel shy when talking with another person and all that. These are maybe the main things about our Burqa. There are different kinds, which is the environment changing in Arabia, UAE, Oman, but the...

What do you feel when you see a woman wearing a Burqa now?

Something amazing! We miss that, because it's in the past now, but there are still some people, some families, who still wear the Burqa. Like you, when I saw you I went oh! It gave me a shock for a while to talk about that. It's good to show other people why we wear the Burqa.

Exactly, yes. And I presume, this exhibition, does it change your views on the Burqa?

Having looked at....

Actually they remind me, because I'm from the same environment, the same country, but they take me to the past now, you know? Take me to my grandmother. I saw how my grandmother wore that. And our generation still wear it. My grandmother is still here and we wear it and we can see that. So it just took me to the past. Maybe it's something new and good for other people when they come.

2-Interview VN65004

What did you know about the Burqa before tonight?

I don't know. I'm just doing it to join in with everybody else. I don't have any... I wouldn't not do it, so yes.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

Ehm.... I suppose.... I don't know really. Not knowing the history behind it, and I didn't understand before why they wore this sort of thing, so obviously here, introduced to the knowledge of it, I wasn't so *(and then the other person speaks over her)*

Fantastic. And has this exhibition changed your views at all?

Well, I'm still going round about so I need to know some more about it, but yes.

3-Interview VN65005

What did you know about the Burqa before tonight?

Not an awful lot. Just what you see on television, reading in books, the religious thing. And I also understood it was up to the women whether they wanted to wear it or not. You could choose or not to. That was my impression, but whether that's true or not I don't know.

And how do you – I know you're not wearing one so you don't know how it feels. What's your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

Well, in this country I think it looks pretty strange. If you see a movie or documentary about the Middle East, Saudi, Dubai, and it's the norm it doesn't really look abnormal. But when you see people here walking round about wearing a cape, it looks pretty abnormal. And has this exhibition changed any of your views?

Not really. Having a look around now, obviously some of the artwork is fantastic, but we're really just getting to find out what it actually means. And my view is that people are allowed to do what they want to do as long as they're not interfering with anybody else. They could put a pillowcase over their head if they wanted to.

4-Interview VN65006

What did you know about the Burqa before tonight?

Well, it goes very deep into my early life because my mother was one of the ladies who created this, who made this Burqa, so it's very familiar to me. When I see every part and piece, I can identify which one is the right one, which one is the wrong one, which one is, for example, the city and which one is for the village. So I can compare and I can recognise each. For each region there is a certain Burqa, and it's very dear to my heart. And I feel that it has transferred from being a veil which covers the face, to a fashion which becomes just a fashion. Which has no meaning and is just only a fashion. That's it. But before, it was for the beauty – to protect the beauty of the woman. Because also, with our hot weather and the desert, a lot of dust, lots of heat, and a lot of sun, this protects the face of the woman or girl from any sort of effects from outside. You know, like dust, sunburn, something. So it used to be a bigger one, which just only kept the eyes to see but covers the whole face, but now of course it has evolved to become a fashion one like you are wearing. Even what you are wearing is like the 80s or 90s fashion. But the 2014, now I mean, the 21st Century, is now only a very thin one which becomes like a fashion more than veil. More than a Burqa.

It's another strange question for you: What's your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

I love it! Yes, because it's part of my heritage and my culture. I remember my mother, I remember my grandmother, I remember my aunties. I remember my family. Because that's what we came from.

And has this exhibition changed any of your views?

Well, in fact it has brought me back to when we were children and we saw our women and girls wearing these kinds of things and, of course, also it's a very good sort of exhibition which introduces our culture to different countries including the British and the English, the British community.

5-Interview VN65007

What did you know about the Burqa before tonight, the Emirati Burqa?

Frankly nothing. No, because I knew Karima through Kingston. I met her once and she just mentioned it, so it's the first time I have see it.

Do you want to try one? You can try any one you like on. You can walk around with it on, because then you can feel what a Burqa might feel like. Ok, how do you feel wearing the Burqa?

I feel like I'm wearing a mask. As if I'm trying to hide something.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

My first reaction is that she's being forced to do it.

Has this exhibition changed your views?

Yes. It's like the first sentence I read on this introduction. It's not that you wear the covering to shield, but because it's beautiful. I've not spoken to any women to ask why they do it, because I think it's a bit taboo and I don't want to pressure them, but I think it's interesting that they do enjoy it. It's like somebody from outside would consider it as a very male-dominated society and somebody is forced to do it, but if they're enjoying it then who am I?

6-Interview VN65008

What did you know about the Emirati Burqa before tonight?

I knew a little bit because I know Karima. I've seen her presentations earlier, so from there I knew a little bit about it. That it has cultural values attached to it.

How do you feel wearing a Burqa?

It's a little weird. I mean, I'm not in the habit of covering my face like that. It feels like I'm at Halloween or somewhere, wearing a mask.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing an Emirati Burqa?

It doesn't feel natural because, especially in London, you won't see people wearing anything like this so, of course it's catchy, it's not natural, but after looking. It looks beautiful. It looks lovely.

Has this exhibition changed any of your views?

Karima has really worked hard. I can see that. These installations are amazing, and by knowing the cultural value and how the Emirati women admire it and treat it with such respect, it's really amazing.

7-Interview VN65009

What did you know about the Emirati Burqa before tonight?

Well, I grew up in Dubai so I did know about the Emirati Burqa but not in as much detail. There are so many different types so I found out all the different shapes, how different Emirates have different styles, and the journey of it.

How do you feel wearing the Burqa?

I find it a little bit obstructive to my face and my vision. Because I wear glasses.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

Because I grew up in a country where a lot of my friends... well, they didn't wear Burqas but they wore Shayla hair coverings, it's not shocking. It's fine. It's normal.

And has this exhibition changed your views?

Well I think I have pretty liberal views, so not necessarily as to what it stands for, but more about the styles and how it evolved through time. So from an artistic point of view, I learnt more.

8-Interview VN650010

What did you know about the Burqa before tonight?

I knew it was a facial covering worn by women in the Emirates. I certainly didn't know that it was characteristic to the region. So I definitely didn't know that different regions wear different ones.

How do you feel about wearing a Burqa now?

It's actually quite cool, but maybe it's because I know that I can take it off and it's part of the exhibition, so I'm treating it more like an experience.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

I smile because I know she's probably from the same part of the world where I used to live, where I have very fond memories from.

And has this exhibition changed your views?

Yes. As I mentioned, I learned a lot more about the different shapes and the fact that different regions wear different shapes, but the material... I always thought it was made out of leather so that was very surprising. But not in terms of the cultural aspects.

9-Interview VN650011

What did you know about the Burqa before tonight?

All I thought about it really is just modesty and women covering themselves in Muslim countries. My first initial reaction with a Burqa is an Afghani one, with the netting, but speaking with Karima they wouldn't call that a Burqa, they would call it something else so it's quite interesting. And I didn't realise there were so many different types of Burqas. I learned that today.

How do you feel about wearing a Burqa now?

Like my friend was saying, it's quite fun but I know I can take it off. Which is the nice thing about it.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

I kind of think about back home, which is the Emirates, when I see a woman wearing a Burqa. I don't find it shocking because I know a lot of people who do wear it, mothers of friends back in school, so it's kind of a good sentiment actually.

And has this exhibition changed your views?

It's definitely changed in the sense that I didn't realise people have it as a fashion statement as well. So again we were speaking with Karima, and the one I'm wearing now is really, really thin. I would not have thought of that as a Burqa. I thought it was like a little mask I might wear at a Venetian ball, so in that way it has changed. It's more of a fashion statement, not just about modesty.

10-Interview VN650013

What did you know about the Burqa before tonight? About the Emirati Burqa before tonight?

About this Burqa?

Yes. What did you know about it before tonight?

Because I'm from Yemen, not Emirates, but I like this one because it's natural. I don't know what it means but I like it.

How do you feel wearing the Burqa? Do you like it? What do you think?

Yes, I like it. I like it.

Why?

It's some article for me, accessories, and I feel relaxed. Not crowded for my face. I feel relaxed.

It's comfortable.

Yes, comfortable. Yes.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

It's ok.

You don't have a reaction? It's normal.

It's normal, yes. It's normal.

Has this exhibition changed your mind about anything?

No. I think not.

It's the same.

Yes, it's the same. It's ok.

11-Interview VN650014

What did you know about the Emirati Burqa before tonight?

Nothing.

How do you feel wearing the Emirati Burqa?

I'm comfortable as a thought, but not physically comfortable.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing an Emirati Burqa?

Interesting, culturally wise, but always maybe we are from a different background and we think why do people have to wear this on their face?

Has this exhibition changed your views?

More about feeling that it's a piece of art maybe. Seeing it as a piece of art is something that gives me a different perspective, but nothing different with regard to how I feel about seeing a person wearing a Burqa.

12-Interview VN650015

What did you know about the Emirati Burqa before tonight?

Only a little through discussing with Karima.

Why did you choose not to try on a Burqa?

Because I would have been very happy to try it on, but I was very concerned about the fugitive indigo dye and what might be in it. How toxic it might be.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

Depends on the circumstances. I'm looking at you now, and you're wearing one, and it looks like a fancy dress mask. Well, one of the things is that seeing a woman wearing a Burqa and a full veil, and the whole black outfit, it reminds me of a historic past...

No, the Emirati Burqa.

Oh, okay. Okay. Mmmm I think this is probably the first time I've been conscious that's what I'm looking at, and... it is a mask. But I did want to make a point that in general they remind me of 17th and 18th Century costume from Europe.

Has this exhibition changed your views?

I think it's given me some more information. I don't think it's changed my views.

13-Interview VN650016

One of the things it makes me think about is protection. And certainly the 17th Century examples that I can think of in this country, an illustration by Holler, a woman representing Winter, where probably the mask is to protect her face from the cold. And these were perhaps originally to protect women's faces from extreme heat.

14-Interview VN650017

What did you know about the Emirati Burqa before tonight?

As far as I know, it used to be something traditional back in, let's say, in the 18th Century. People used to wear it for different events such as marriages, and generally it was more like part of the culture of the Emirate people. So this is as far as I know. This is the idea.

Why did you choose not to try on a Burqa?

It's because it's for women.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing an Emirati Burqa?

I think it's totally fine really, it just reminds me of the old days because nowadays you wouldn't find most people wearing it to be honest.

And has this exhibition changed your views at all?

Yes it did. In a way, I have a better understanding now. As far as I know, there are different types of Burqas. There isn't just one type. There are different designs as well. I never knew, I just thought it was one design but I've seen different designs now.

15-Interview VN650033

Do you know anything about the Burqa before this exhibition?

I know that women have to wear it in some countries, and it's more in public places than in a house.

16-Interview VN650034

Do you know which country they are from?

Iran. Saudi Arabia I think.

So you've seen this kind of Burqa, or was it different?

Not like that one. The material one yes, but not that one. Because your one looks more like a gadget than a proper Burqa.

When you are wearing the Burqa, what is the feeling that you have.

Uncomfortable.

Why?

Because I'm not used to having anything on my face.

But also you're missing something that you mentioned to me.

It covers my lips and my face didn't look... I didn't recognise myself behind that Burqa.

Do you think it enhances your eyes when you are wearing the Burqa? Or enhances the beauty of ... here, you can see yourself.

I think... I don't know, to be honest. Some people look good in anything so it doesn't matter what you wear.

When you see a woman outside, in a public space, and she is wearing a Burqa, what is the first thing that comes to mind. What is your reaction about it, or your feeling about it.

It's different because I come from a country where women dress completely different, so the first time I saw a woman in a Burqa was in London. I didn't understand why, but then I understood it's part of the culture so that's the way women dress. And initially I think it was invented to protect women, basically.

So does this exhibition change your view about the Burqa?

I think it's the first time I can see a Burqa being something other than black material over a woman's face. It actually shows it could be decorative, so here it does.

17-Interview VN650035

What did you know about the Burqa before today?

What I knew is what I have seen women wearing. Kind of a sign of Muslim woman, I would say, in Britain or when I travel to Dubai. Or in any other country. Whenever I would see them wearing it, it would identify them immediately as Muslim. What I knew was a kind of feminine sign of religion and identity.

When you were wearing the Burqa just now, what was your feeling? When you looked at yourself.

It was not me anymore.

How come?

Well, it was me but it was not me, so you couldn't spot who she is. I was the person that I knew is me but, by looking at my image, I was not recognisable. So I was becoming somebody in the presentation who was hiding from what I am. So a kind of barrier. A kind of limit for me to see myself or, if somebody is in front of me, seeing me. You know?

18-Interview VN650036

What did you know about the Burqa before you came here?

I knew something about it. Not this particular one, but I have seen women wearing it and I know that women cover themselves so that they're not tempting to men in a way.

How do you feel about wearing Burqa.

I think for me it's restrictive. It feels a bit odd.

What is your first reaction when you see a woman wearing a Burqa?

Sometimes I think it's a little bit of a barrier, because I'd love to see her eyes, or I'd love to see her nose. To see what she really looks like.

Has this exhibition changed your views?

It has, because I think, for me, it looks as if it's more sort of enhancing and more of a decorative ornament rather than something that's restrictive.

19-Interview VN650037

What did you know about the Burqa before you came this exhibition?

I've seen it in many parts of the Middle East. I've seen the Burqa because I've travelled. And it's different in different places. I remember being in Bandar Abbas in Iran and it's a bit like this, with gold. And then in Oman like a bit colourful and more pointed.

When you're wearing the Burqa, what is the feeling?

As a man?

Yes.

Well, as a man it feels like going to a fancy dress party. So like you're dressing up for a party, but it feels ok. You know, I'd like to put it on the top of my head like sunglasses and take it down when I need to hide.

As you've travelled a lot in the Middle East, and you've seen women wearing a Burqa, what has been your reaction or your feeling when you've seen them? Have you thought about it?

Well, when I first saw it I thought it was very unfair on women, but the more I travelled the more I realised it was a complicated cultural and historical reason. So many different reasons. I think that now I tend to leave it to the women's choice. It's their choice.

Has this exhibition changed your point of view in some way?

Well I need to go and have a good look. I think that in England I'm not like average Englishmen, because I've spent a lot of time in the Middle East, but for an average person in England, they probably have a very political view of the Burqa I think. So I think that it's good to discuss it. Yes. What do you think?

20-Interview VN650038

As you're from a Gulf state, you know about the Burqa, but do you know the function of it?

This kind of Burqa is quite rare in Bahrain. I don't see them so often in Bahrain but I do see it from my grandmother's generation. They use it more.

And do you know the reason? Why she wears it?

My grandmother... they wear it for many reasons. I think partly practical reasons, partly to dress.... Yes, I think my grandmother always wears it if there are men around, and when she goes in the Souk and whatever, but I think a lot of it is to protect her face from the outside elements.

You've tried the Burqa now. How does it feel when you put the Burqa on your face?

I really like that feeling. I feel fine. I feel ok in it. I feel good in it. I don't know how I would feel if I was walking around London, outside. Here, with you, I feel very comfortable wearing it.

If you look at your reflection, what do you think?

I don't know. It's interesting. It's surprising because, when I wear the Hijab I feel like I almost don't look like me because my hair is something that I recognise as part of me, because I always make it a curly hair and crazy. But from this one I don't know.

Something about it. it's somehow like a mask, and protected, but yes... I feel okay

Did you look around this exhibition? What do you think?

I really like the idea of the labour of making it and how you're showing a lot of this the relationship of building these objects, you know what I mean? I really, really love that you're showing that here because it's usually when people talk about the issue of the Burqa, it's usually just images people wearing them, whereas this is all about ... but I haven't really looked properly. But I will.

21-Interview VN650039

Did you have any idea about the Burqa before?

Yes.

From where?

Well I'm from Pakistan, and we have a very different Burqa in Pakistan but the concept is quite similar. And I've grown up in the Middle East so I've seen it before.

But in Pakistan, is it the same shape?

In Pakistan it's just fabric.

And do they call it Burqa?

Yes. Same word, Burqa.

Because in Afghanistan they call it Burqa.

Yes, same.

Because I asked a lady and she said they didn't call it that.

Niqab?

Yes, this is what they call it.

But Niqab is the literal word which means to cover. But we also call it Burqa.

You have tried it twice. What do you feel when you have the Burqa over your face?

I think there's something about... I mean, if I were to think about it without knowing what it's supposed to do – because I know religiously and culturally what it's meant to do, what the role of the Burqa is – if I didn't know that, I would say it's actually quite empowering. It makes me feel strong. It almost acts as a shield from outside world pressures and things like that.

You have been with me here, and did you see any woman wearing the same Burqa here in London?

Yes I have, yes.

What do you feel? I know you know the background about it, but to see the Burqa here, what does it give you?

I don't think it's abnormal. I think it's normal because I've seen it all my life.

Here?

Yes. For me I think it's normal. I do think there's some level of... you need to also adapt when you're in a certain society, the same way when anybody from here goes to the Gulf they adapt to that society. I think similarly it's important for people coming from there to adapt but I don't think that means they should take their Burqa off. If that's what they choose to do, I think it's their personal decision. I think it's fine.

22-Interview VN650040

Did you know about the Burqa before?

Slightly. Not the full aspect of the story.

How do you know about it?

From living in different cities, and travelling, and seeing people wearing them.

Ok – now we are wearing the Burqa. What are you feeling?

I guess slightly confused, but not uncomfortable.

And when you see women wearing a Burqa here or during your travels, what is your first reaction? What do you think about it?

It's a difficult question because I think sometimes people carry themselves differently. So sometimes I see it and it looks quite normal, and respectable and correct, and sometimes I feel that it stands out, so I guess that it's contextual. It depends on where I see the woman. If it's on a bus, or if it's in London, or in France, or in Canada. Sometimes I feel differently.

Seeing this exhibition, have your ideas or thoughts about the Burqa changed?

I think the aesthetics, the beauty of it has changed, yes.

So do you know now the reason why women wear the Burqa?

It has opened up my mind a bit, yes.

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

Interview Questions for women wearing and making the burqa

Name:

Age:

Date:

Place (area):

- 1- What kind of fabrics is used to make a burqa? Where does the fabric come from?
- 2- Do you go to the market to buy the material and how much did it cost last time you purchased it?
- 3- What is the distinction between the qualities of each type of fabrics?
- 4- Do you deal with a particular dealer to buy materials and if so, where?
- 5- Is there a pattern or one cut of the burqa?
- 6- Are there certain families known to deal with cutting the burqa in the region and how do you judge the quality of the cut of a burqa?
- 7- How old were you when you started to cut the burqa? Who taught you?
- 8- Each lady's face is different. Do you measure each face so that the burqa to be appropriate for each face and for every lady?
- 9- Are there any special stitch sewing for the burqa in any part used every stitch? Why?
- 10- What are the tools used to make the burqa?
- 11- What is the length of time from the beginning to the end of finishing the burqa?
- 12- Is there any time of the day to cut the burqa?
- 13- On what basis do you price the burqa? How were prices in the past and how are they now?
- 14- Does the lady choose the type of cloth for the burqa, or do you?
- 15- Is there a special burqa for every occasion?
- 16- What are the particular parts of the burqa?
Every part, explain in details
- 17- Why have you used a cotton type fabric in this part of burqa?
- 18- Why has the form of the burqa in the past and the present changed? Has the purpose changed?
- 19- Is there one shape of the burqa in this area, so if there is possibility to identify wearing the burqa from this area/region?
- 20- What are the uses for old burqas?
- 21- Do you use oil or perfume to polish the burqa to refresh its shininess?
- 22- Describe the bridal burqa
- 23- Do women borrow burqas, and if so, why?
- 24- Where do you store the burqa?
- 25- What age did you start to wear the burqa? Were you forced to wear it?
- 26- What do you feel when wear it and how do you feel when you take off the burqa?
- 27- What are society's perceptions of women who are not wearing the burqa?
- 28- In the past there was extended family style, when ladies gather without men did they take off the burqa then?
- 29- Is the burqa linked to the Islamic faith or does it have other meanings?
- 30- In addition, previously the burqa was covering most of the features of women and women not take off her burqa, but in front of her husband, have you heard about cases do men divorce women when he saw her face without a burqa?
- 31- There is also a custom that ladies had to replace the burqa veil why do you not do that?
- 32- What is the difference between the burqa and the veil?

Questions for women who live in UK

Name: date:

Age: time:

Address:

Nationality:

- 1- Did you wear face cover in your origin country?
- 2- Did you still wear it here?
- 3- Which type of face covers rolling in your country?
- 4- In any age you worn face cover? Why?
- 5- What material made off?
- 6- What the rule of wearing face cover?
- 7- Is there any connected with religious?
- 8- What is your sense (feeling) when you're wearing face cover? Or take off?
- 9- Is there are specialist women who make face caver? From which rank?
- 10- Can you distinguish between women from her face cover to which family belong?
- 11- When you came here did you continue wearing face cover? If yes why? Or you take off? Why?
- 12- It is your decision about wear or nor to wear face cover? Why?

Questions for Mumbai burqa textile manufacturers

Name:

Age:

Name of the factory:

- 1- When was the opening of the factory?
- 2- When did the factory start producing the fabric of burqa?
- 3- Is the process of the producing the fabric of burqa is different from the past to the present? How?
- 4- What are the materials used to producing the fabric of burqa?
- 5- Is the production of the fabric manually or industrially?
- 6- What are the stages of the production?
- 7- As I know, manufacture use indigo in producing the burqa fabric, however, do they use the natural indigo or the industrial one? And why it change?
- 8- To which countries you export this fabric?
- 9- Is there any country refrained from importing this fabric? Why?
- 10- Are there many types of burqa fabric or only one? If there are many types, can you please mention?
- 11- Distinguishing between the burqa fabrics according to what?
- 12- Are there another countries import the burqa fabric? If yes, Say who
- 13- The shiny mental color on the fabric, what is it? And it made from what?
- 14- Is this fabric used locally? In what?
- 15- Is order of cloth burqa become less or increased in recent years? Why
- 16- Is the operation of the warping are in the factory or somewhere else?
- 17- Can you tell, what is the quality of the paper that is using in warping?
- 18- Why does illustrates on the warping paper change? Does present the quality of fabric or goes with marketing role?
- 19- Do the colors of the warping paper symbolize for something?
- 20- The existence of the picture on the right or the left, does it have a meaning for the factory role?
- 21- Do you produce or order a main king of fabric quality for the royal family in UAE?
- 22- How the prices of fabric were has been change from past and now? Why?
- 23- The dealer from United Arab Emirates, did he still the same one or change?

24-Why the burqa fabric is folded like this and not like any other kind of fabric?

Appendix 5: Documentation of Practice

This appendix comprises of one DVD with two folders of films that document two exhibitions of 2014, held in Sharjah and London, and selected interviews conducted with burqa makers in the U.A.E. from 2012-13. This is followed by detailed documentation of art works included in the London exhibition, 'An Intimate Object', that is the summation of my practice-based research with a description of what the work is and how it operates within the space of the exhibition conceived as an installation.

(i). DVD Folder One:

- Exhibition: 'Zeena and Khazeena' (Adornment and Preservation), Sharjah Art Museum (UAE), February- March 2014, 00:01:28 minute
- Interviews with the burqa makers, 2012-2013, 00:10:06 minute

(ii) DVD Folder Two: Three films shown in 'An Intimate Object' Exhibition and video of the exhibition held at the Edge of Arabia Gallery, London, 14-17 November 2014

- 'Zeena' (Adornment), 00:03:37 minute, 2013
- 'Neel' (Indigo), 00:03:27 minute, 2014
- 'Khait' (Thread), 00:02:48 minute, 2014
- 'An Intimate Object', London solo exhibition, November 2014, 00:05:00 minute.

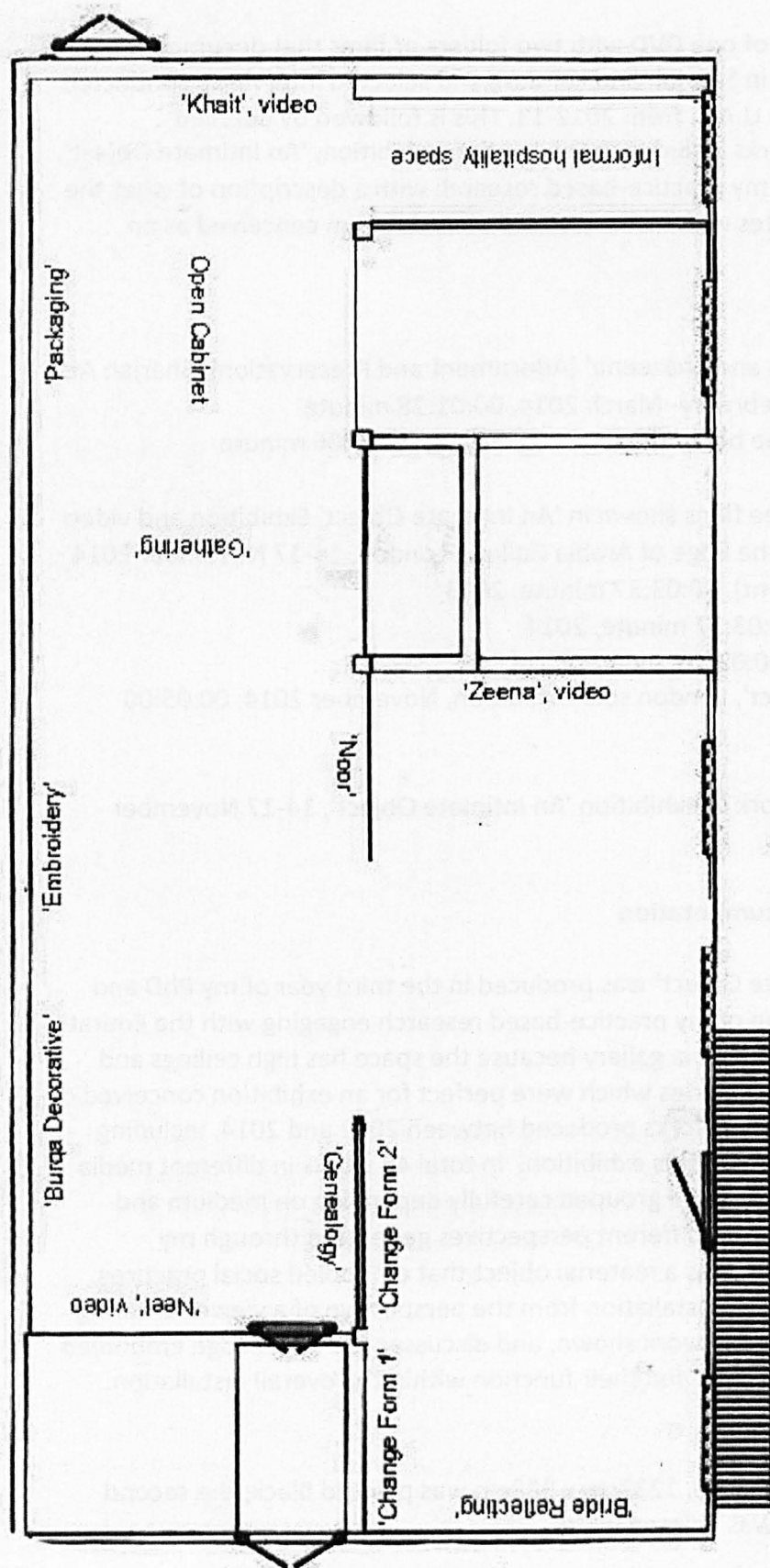
(iii) Documentation of work in exhibition 'An Intimate Object', 14-17 November 2014, London

'An Intimate Object': Documentation

The exhibition 'An Intimate Object' was produced in the third year of my PhD and represents the culmination of my practice-based research engaging with the Emirati burqa. I chose the Edge of Arabia gallery because the space has high ceilings and two large interconnecting galleries which were perfect for an exhibition conceived of as an installation. I presented works produced between 2012 and 2014, including new work made specifically for this exhibition. In total 45 works in different media were included. All the works were grouped carefully depending on medium and subject in order to present the different perspectives generated through my research on the Emirati burqa as a material object that embodied social practices. The following documents the installation from the perspective of a viewer entering the gallery space, detailing the work shown, and discusses the knowledge embodied in the individual works or series and their function within the overall installation.

1. Exhibition Plan

The first gallery, at the entrance, 1237cm x 588cm was painted black; the second gallery, 2240cm x 407cm was painted white.



Floor plan of gallery, show place of each work, 2014

2-3. 'Changing Form I', 'Changing Form II' Photographs printed on acrylic, 180cmx120cm, 150cmx99cm 2014

Opposite the entrance to the gallery I showed the two photographs 'Changing Form I' and 'Changing Form II' next to each other as the subject deals with the burqa shape changing through generations and offers a visual timeline of women burqa wearers. The audience is therefore first presented with two contemporary photographic images of a burqa wearing female. The figures in the photograph are of myself as I have a deep understanding of the history, social rules and can portray the emotional meanings associated with the burqa.

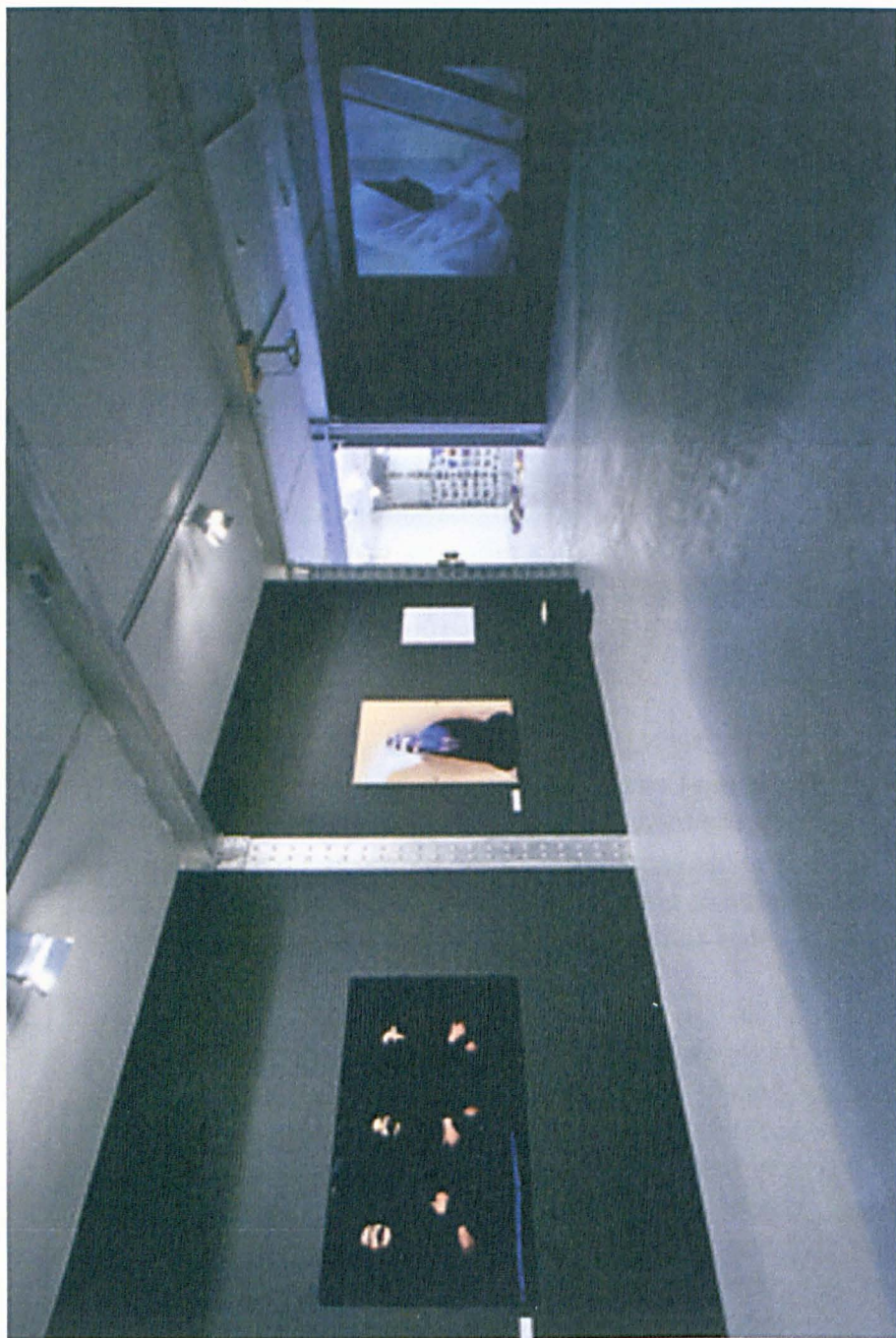
Both large-scale dramatic works were produced in one long exposure using motion capture. I chose to print on acrylic to give maximum reflection of the viewer to become part of the work.

My intention was that figure emerging from the dark background of 'Changing Form I' was also to be shown on a black wall creating a more dramatic effect. I used soft lighting with the black abaya to focus onto the woman's face and hands, which are the only parts of the body visible when a female steps outside of her house in the UAE.

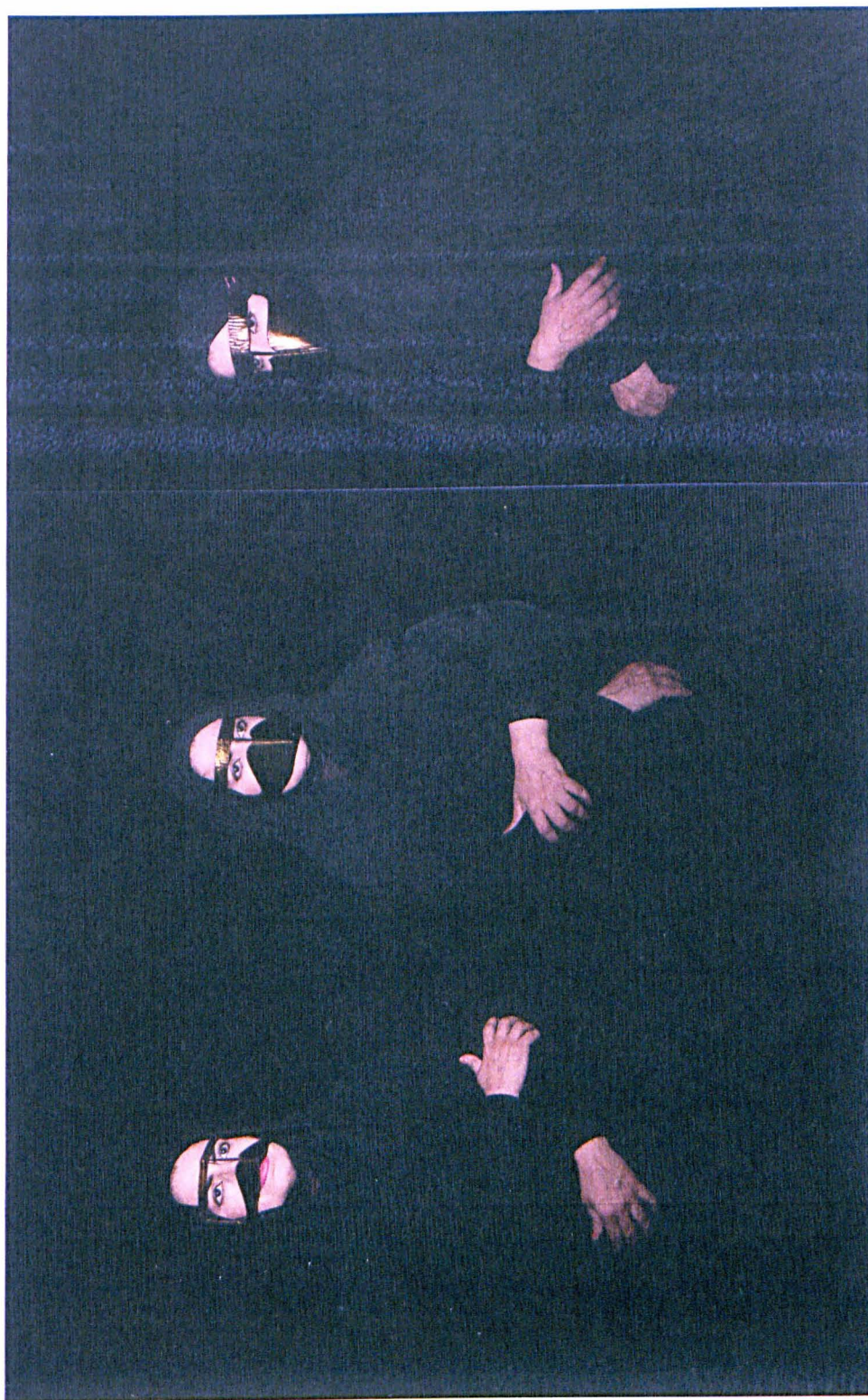
By contrast, in 'Changing Form II', the bright light casts strong shadows to represent the passing phases of life. The three female gazes are averted away from the onlooker so that the burqas are the focal points. The image is deliberately theatrical suggesting a living archive of the changing forms of the burqa. In 'Changing Form II' I present burqa customs in relation to a woman's age and rites of passage. The images purposefully blur into one another so the viewer has to look closely at the work and consider its content.

Both photographs are of self-images, which confront the viewer on entering the gallery, immediately directing one's vision to the imposing figures portraying past history to the present. The photographs draw upon a longstanding history of ethnographic photographs of female subjects in the Middle East and subvert this history with the inclusion of myself as object and subject. Within the overall installation the photographs simultaneously work to introduce the Emirati burqa and its changing forms over time, to focus on the embodied female wearer as a living subject, and to suggest an object intimately intertwined with womens' experience.

The purpose of showing these two photographs at the entrance is that the viewer immediately visualizes different forms and shapes of Emirati burqa.



'Changing Form I', 180cm x 120cm, 'Changing Form II', 99cm x 150cm, printed photograph on acrylic (left-hand side), 'Zeena', Video 2014



'Changing Form I', Photograph printed on acrylic, 180cm x 120cm, 2014



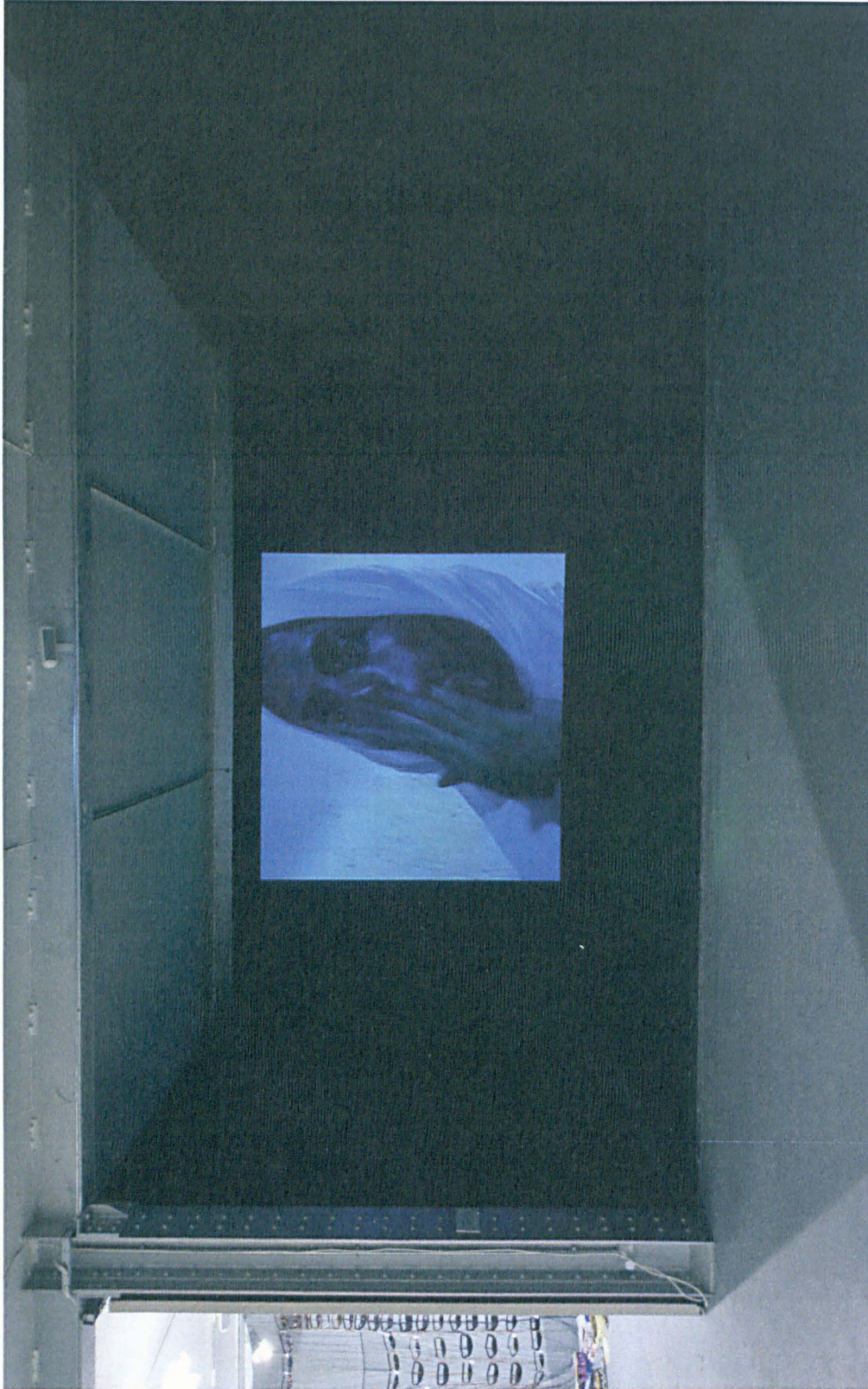
'Changing Form II', Photograph printed on acrylic, 99cm × 150cm, 2014

4. 'Zeena' (Adornment), video, 00:03:37 min, 2013

In the same gallery, on the right side of the entrance, was 'Zeena', a video of a bride preparing for her wedding night. On the opposite wall was 'Bride Reflecting', a photograph of a bride waiting for her groom. Both works are about symbolic belief and ritual associated with the burqa from a female perspective.

'Zeena' (Adornment) was filmed in an old building in Sharjah, formerly a prominent family home, recently restored by the Sharjah government and now used as the office for the Fine Arts Society. I chose this location because of its former life as a domestic dwelling and its highly textured plaster wall suggesting a historic domestic interior. Creating a woman's personal life and her treasured belongings, I placed metal tins on the floor containing burqas. The soft light gives an impression of an old style of lighting used in the past and the focus is on the female figure isolated from the outside world, without a sense of time, and involved in an inner dialogue. The silent video imaginatively reflects upon the marriage ritual and the isolation of the three days before her first night of marriage.

In the first half of the 20th century, a bride-to-be would go into seclusion before her wedding. Indigo dye was applied over her entire body. The indigo remained on her skin for the three days. As a result, her skin was apparently paler and smoother. Women believed that the indigo dye from the burqa fabric contained the light of the Prophet Joseph. The bride received this light through the application of the dye to her skin.



Film 'Zeena' projector on the black wall in first gallery

Screenshots of 'Zeena' (Adornment), video, 2013 (below).





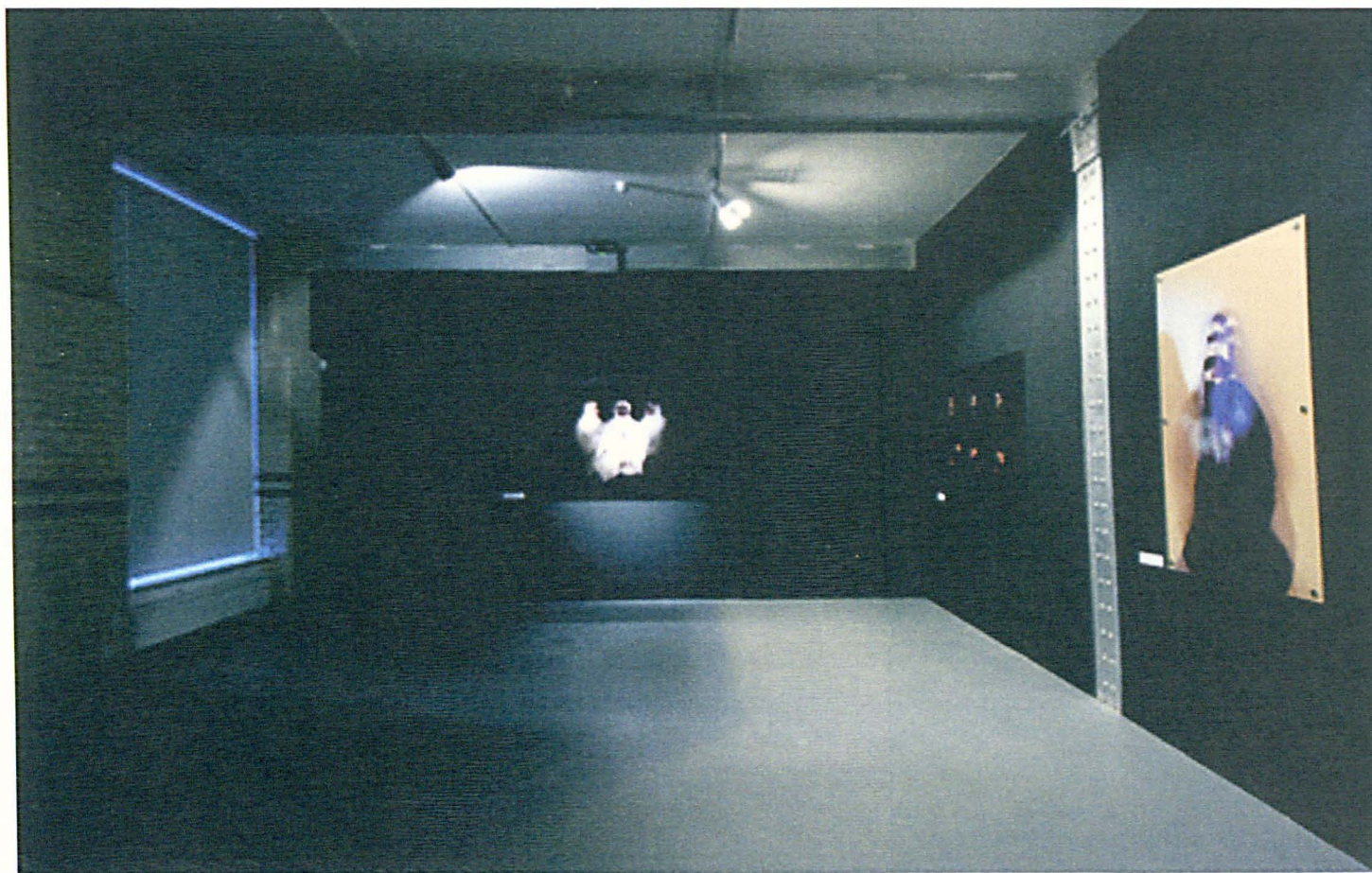


5. 'Bride Reflecting', photograph printed on acrylic, 180cm × 120cm, 2014

Using motion capture, I produced three self-images within a single frame, creating an imagined narrative about the unknown husband in the 'form' of a conversation. Wearing a burqa decorated with crystals and the white traditional garment worn in 'Zeena', the black background of 'Bride Reflecting' symbolised night and created maximum contrast. In re-presenting stories of past Emirati traditions in a visual and material form, the photograph expresses a female subjectivity with an obvious sense of self-communication.

The female figure in both 'Zeena' and 'Bride Reflecting' enters into an inner dialogue during the rituals. In 'Bride Reflecting' the female figure occupies the multiple spaces of the past, present, future and has a spectral quality. The black wall of the gallery emphasises the dramatic silence of 'Zeena' and the 'Bride Reflecting'.

The works in the first gallery are associated with burqa rituals and rites of passage. The focus of these works are on presenting imagined moments in the lives of Emirati women as burqa wearers and makers. I place myself in the frame as a female artist re-enacting rituals associated with the burqa accounts (from my primary research) to emphasise the social role of the burqa as an embodied object.



'Bride Reflecting', printed photograph on acrylic (far end), 180cmx120cm, 2014



'Bride Reflecting' printed photograph on acrylic (long exposure), 180cmx120cm, 2014

In the second gallery the installation consisted of 35 works in different media: two films, ten embroidered works, three drawings, six engravings, one installation, three collage and found objects. The two-dimensional works were shown in groups as a parallel to the collective activities of women burqa makers sitting together making burqas in their village courtyards. The theme of each grouping is discussed below.

6. 'Neel' (indigo), 00:03:27 min, 2014

I submerged the burqa in a large glass basin of mineral water and recorded the process of the seepage of indigo dye on film. The video 'Neel' was projected on the short wall of the second gallery. This placement enabled the viewer to see diagonally across from 'Neel' to the previously discussed video 'Zeena'. Both videos focus on indigo and across the two gallery spaces, the videos appear as if in a diagonal conversation. The looped videos simultaneously show two temporal aspects of indigo: the ritual of its application and the indigo escaping from the burqa as if the burqa is a bleeding body slowly losing its power. I wanted the viewer to make the connection between these two videos, each dealing with indigo as its subject matter and representing the symbolic belief about indigo dye and the female body.

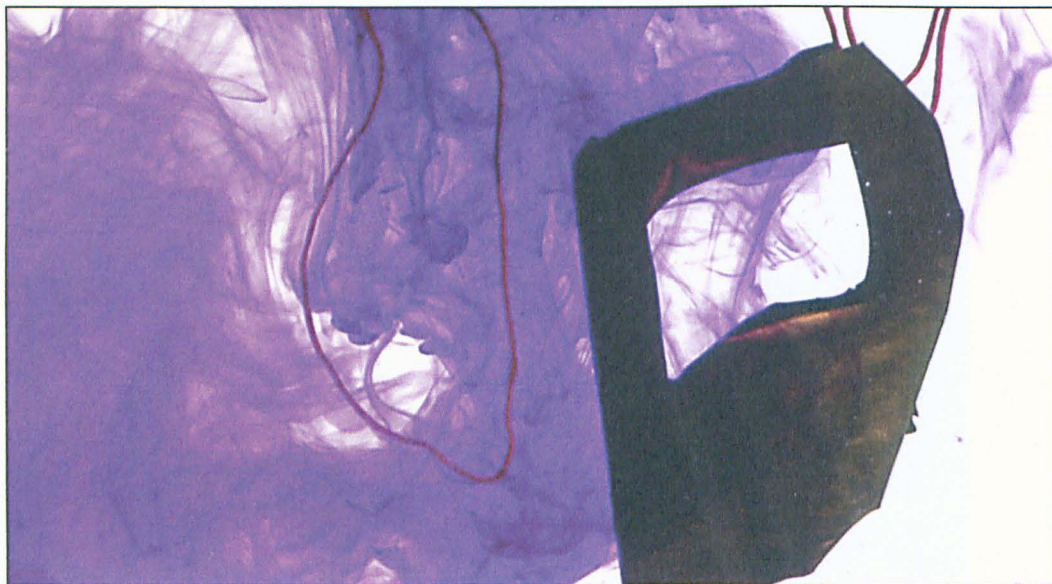
'Neel' represents the action of immersing a burqa in water: the indigo dye disperses. A metaphor for the disappearing tradition of wearing the burqa in the UAE.



'Neel' (Indigo) projected on the white wall in the second gallery, 2014

Screenshots of 'Neel' (Indigo), video, 2014 (below)





7-9. “A Genealogy of Burqas’

This grouping of works consists of three sets of framed drawings: ‘Burqas Shapes’, 2014, consists of 12 drawings on paper with black ink, with a total frame measurement of 81cmx81cm; the second frame contains 8 drawing made from the indigo-infused water residue from burqa fabric soaked for 24 hours, 86cmx90cm, 2013; the third frame has 9 watercolour drawings based upon regional burqa names, 81cmx107cm, 2014.

The first frame ‘Burqas Shapes’, contains a group of twelve black ink drawings depicting how burqas are worn in the UAE. The middle frame ‘Indigo Burqas’ contains eight burqas form painted with different tones of indigo dye derived from immersing burqa fabric in water as discussed in chapter two is parallel to the method of women maker burqa used to experience the quality of burqa fabric. The third frame, ‘Burqas Names’, contains nine drawings showing the different shapes of the burqa according to the local name for each burqa according to age, region and status. Each set of drawings offers a different perspective on the burqa, according to shape, name and region, and presents different ways of perceiving and understanding the burqa.

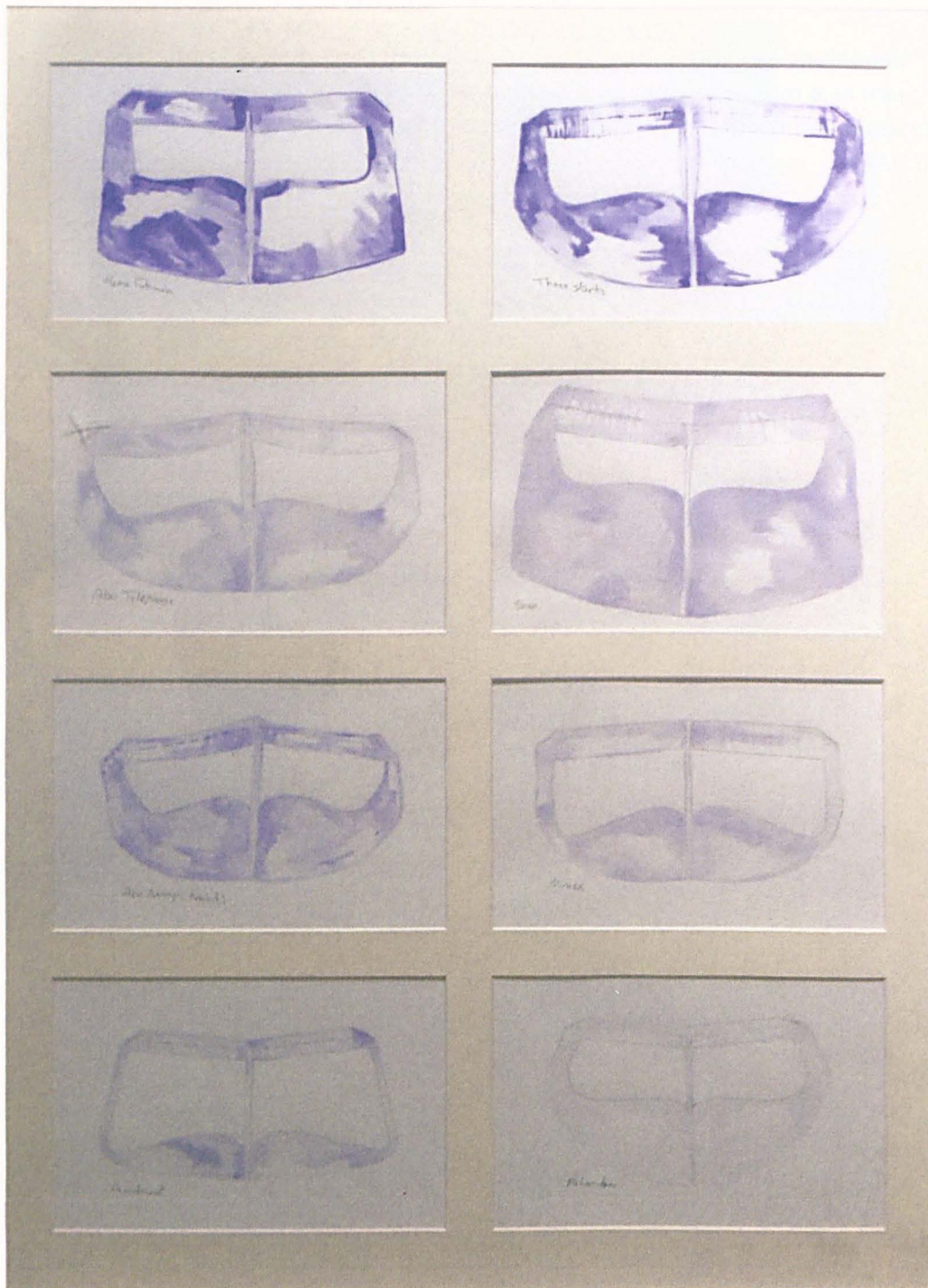


Image of installation 'A Genealogy of Burqas', first frame (drawing according to burqa size, black ink, 81cmx81cm, 2014); second frame (drawing made from the water residue from burqa fabrics soaked for 24 hours, indigo dye, 86cmx90cm, 2013). Third frame (drawing based upon burqa names. water colour. 81cmx107cm. 2014)

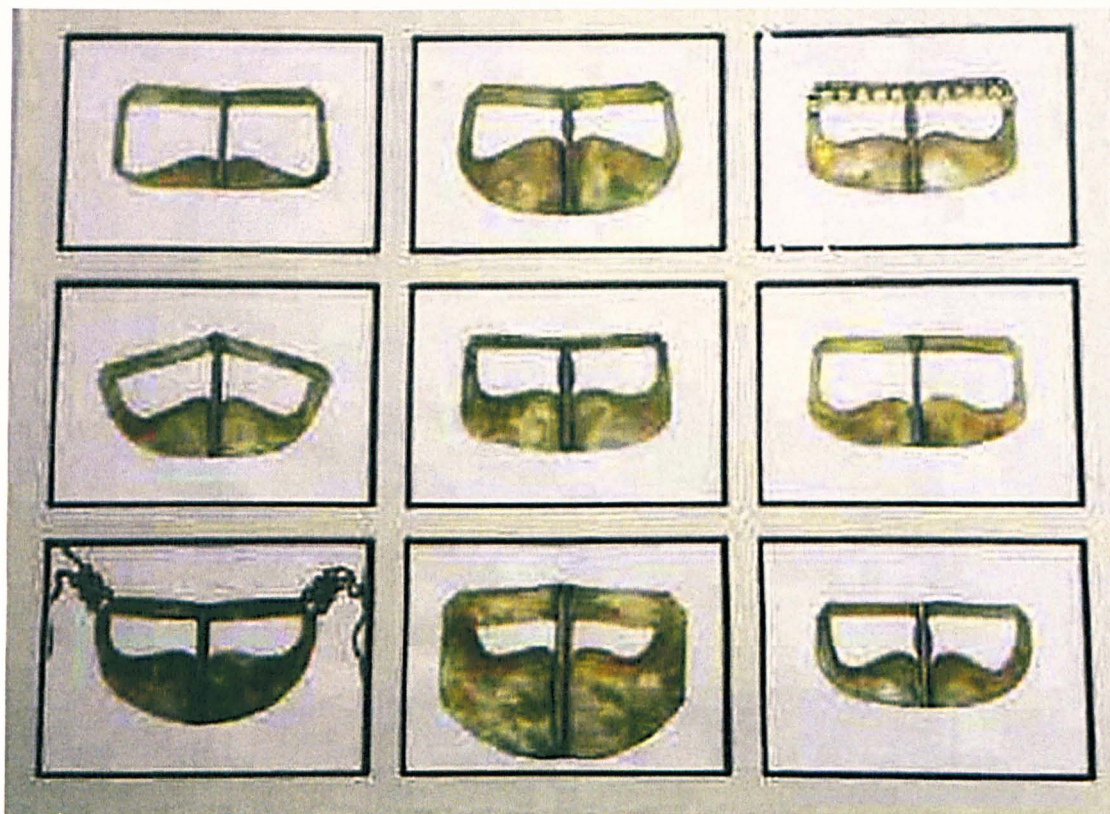
The series of 'Genealogy' drawings and watercolours were placed adjacent to 'Neel' and could be seen as a metaphor for the disappearance of the burqa and, in time, a loss of the personal and collective memories associated with it in the fast changing society of the UAE.



'Burqas Shapes', drawing on paper, black ink, 81cmx81cm, 2014



'Indigo Burqas', drawing on paper, indigo dye, 86cmx90cm, 2013



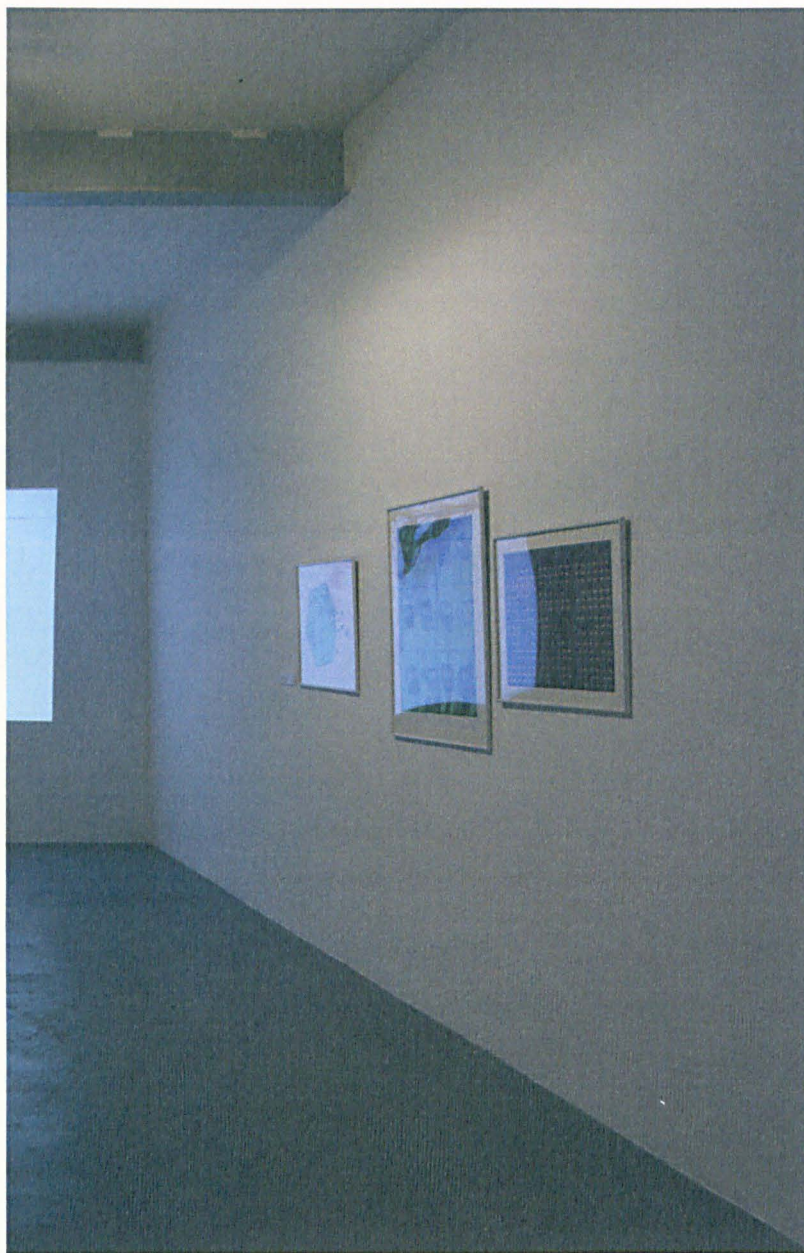
'Burqas Names', drawing on paper, water colour, 81cmx107cm, 2014

'Burqa Canvases'

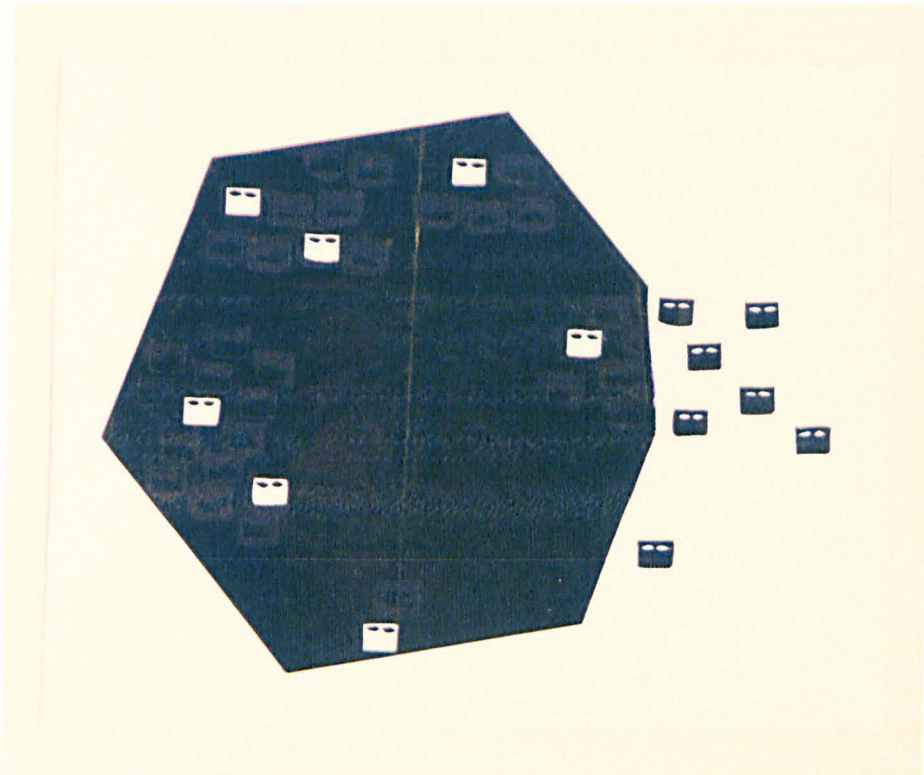
The next group of works used burqa fabric as my 'canvas'. They represent the handmade quality and craft of making burqas. I experimented with different methods to create them and to transform the function of the burqa fabric.

10-12. 'Decorative Burqa Forms', Burqa collage, 40cmx40cm, 80cmx85cm, 70cmx50cm, 2014

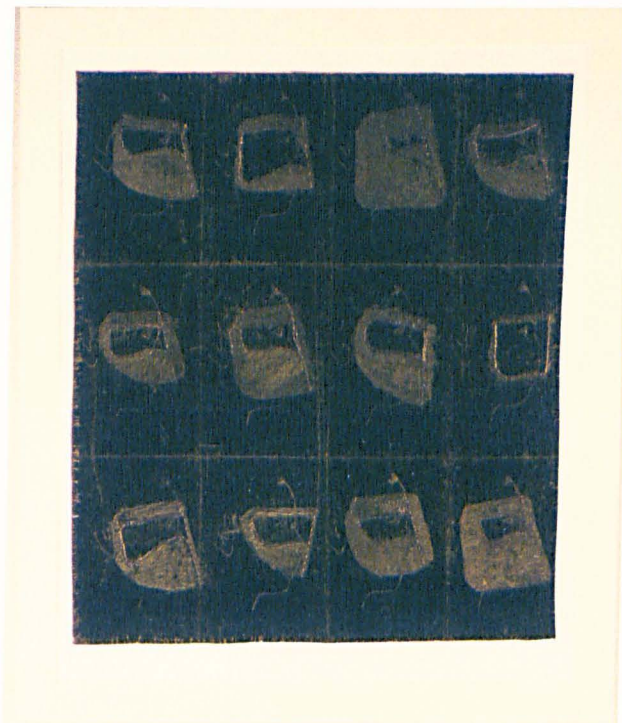
'Decorative Burqa Forms' is a group of two-dimensional works made with a laser-cutting machine that transferred the burqa shapes onto the burqa textile. I have changed the burqa fabric from being a functional item of dress into a domestic decorative object and given it a new lease of life as an art medium.



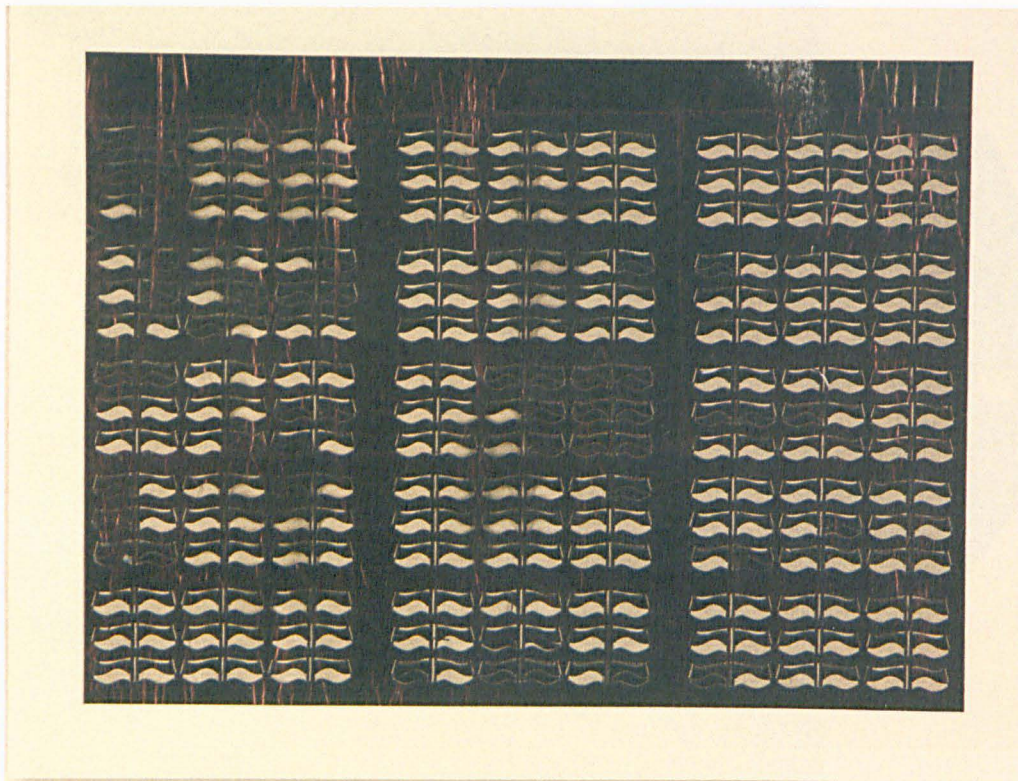
'Decorative Burqa Forms', laser machine, burqa fabric, first frame 40cmx40cm, middle frame 80cmx85cm, third frame 70cmx 50cm, 2014



'Decorative Burqa Form', laser cut into burqa fabric, 40cmx40cm, 2014



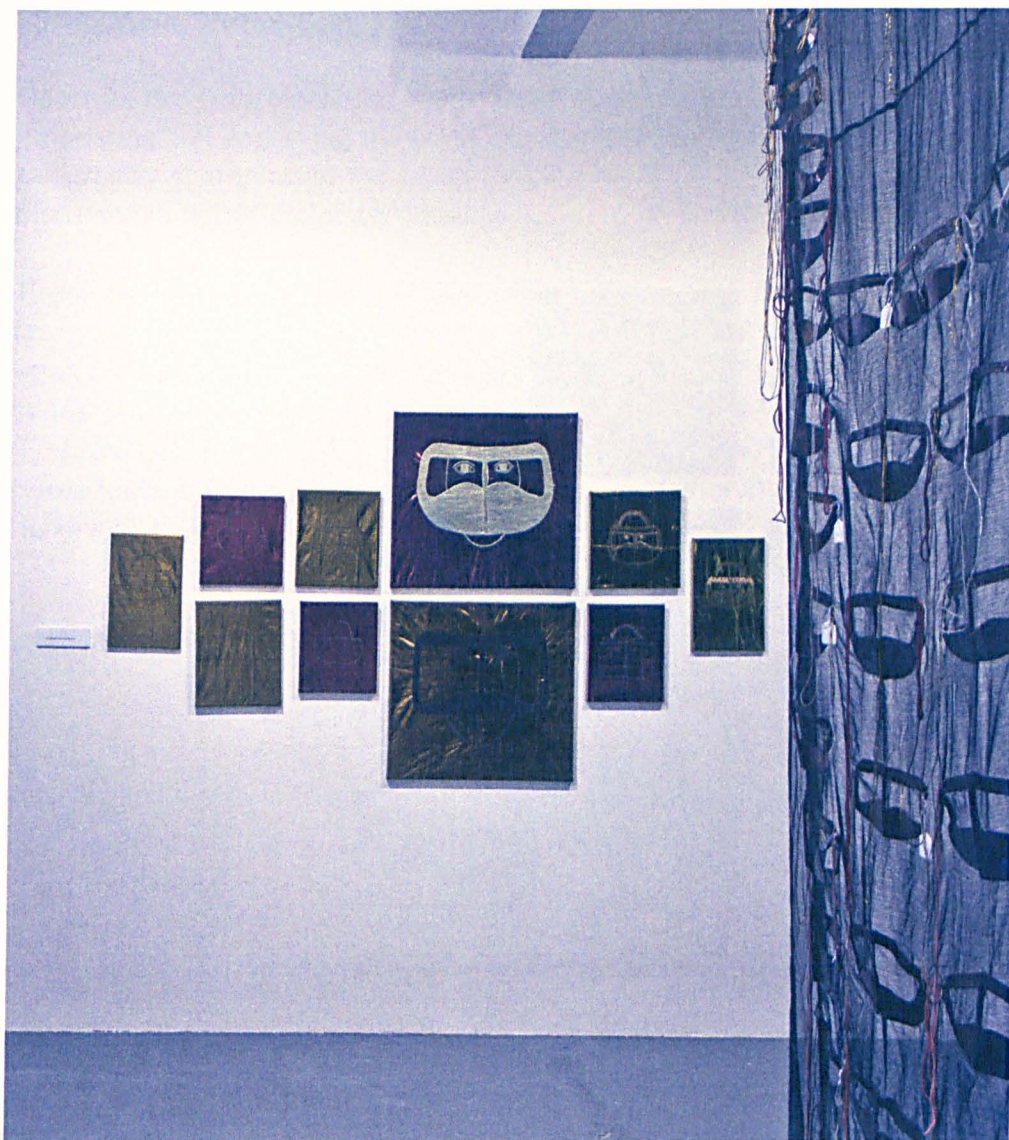
'Decorative Burqa Form', laser cut into burqa fabric with hand sewing, 80cmx85cm, 2014



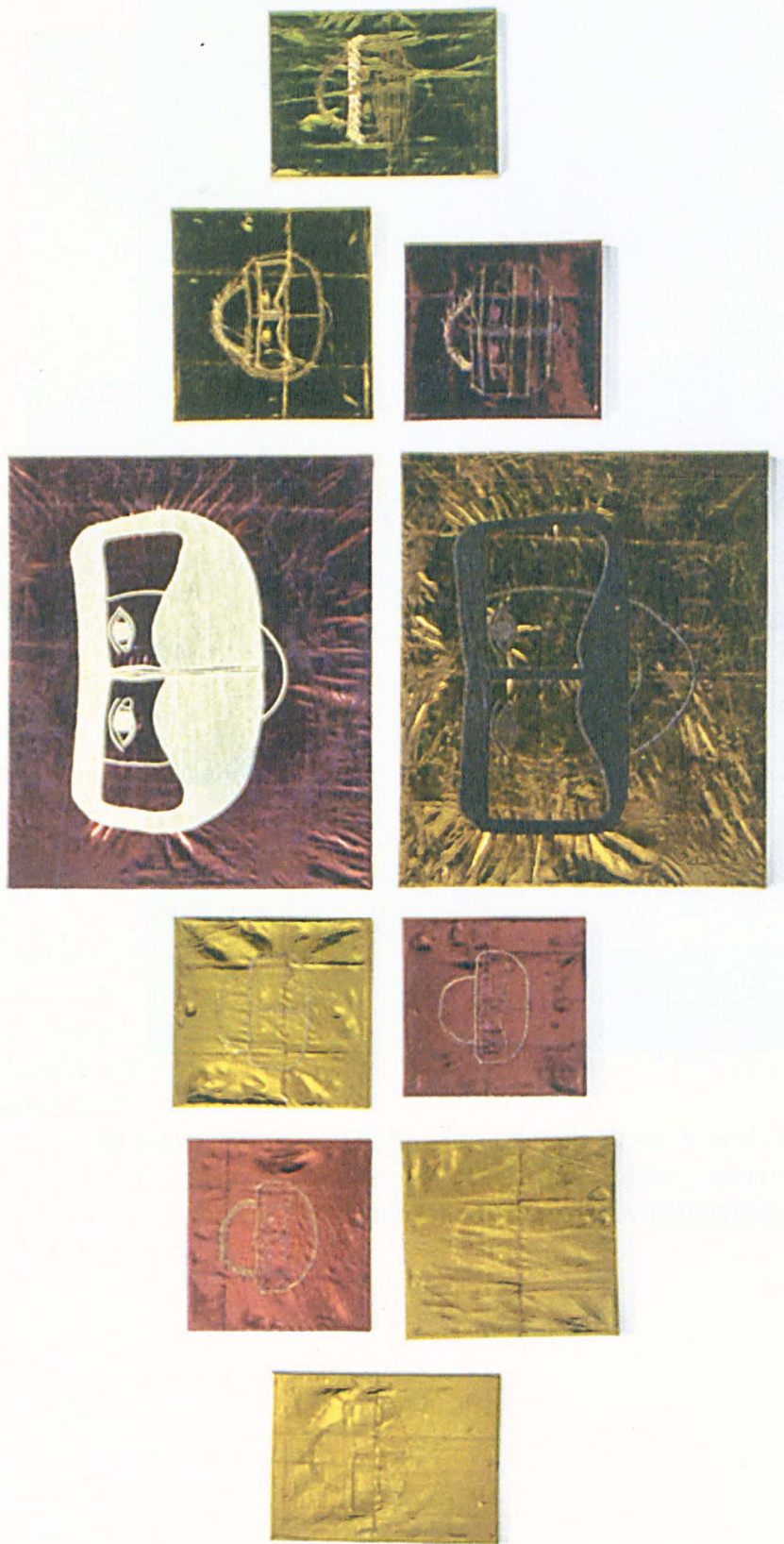
'Decorative Burqa Form', laser cut into burqa fabric, 70cmx50cm, 2014

13-22. 'Embroidered Burqa Forms' Burqa Fabric, 2014.

The group of ten embroidered burqa forms were made by hand and machine. These works use the methods employed by women burqa makers as discussed in chapter two. Through my use of the burqa fabric and these everyday domestic methods of production I present a new way of looking at the form of the burqa on the burqa material itself.



'Embroidered Burqa Form', burqa textile madder red and golden green, (total 10 pieces, 6 golden green; 4 madder red), 25cmx35cm, 34cmx34cm, 35cmx36cm, 37cmx35cm, 63cmx76cm, 64cmx76cm, 39cmx30cm, 34cmx32cm, 39cmx30, 34cmx34cm, 2014

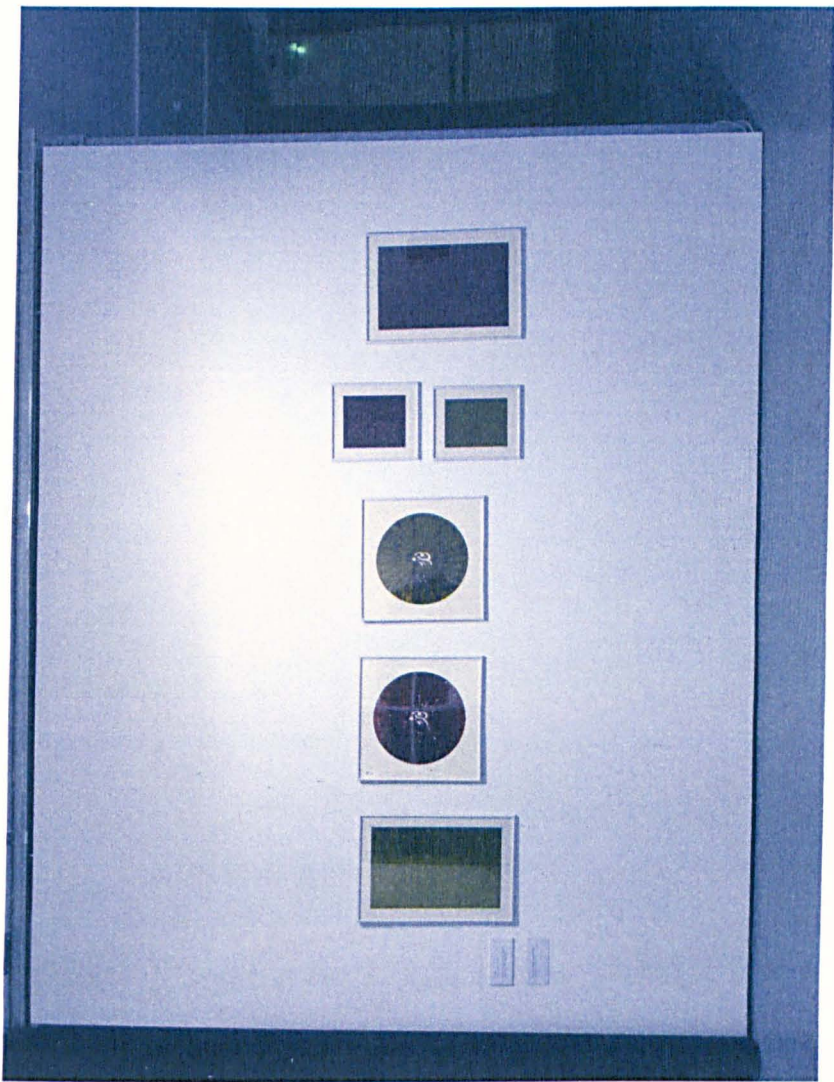


Embroidery, Burqa Form, Burqa Textile madder red and golden green, 2014

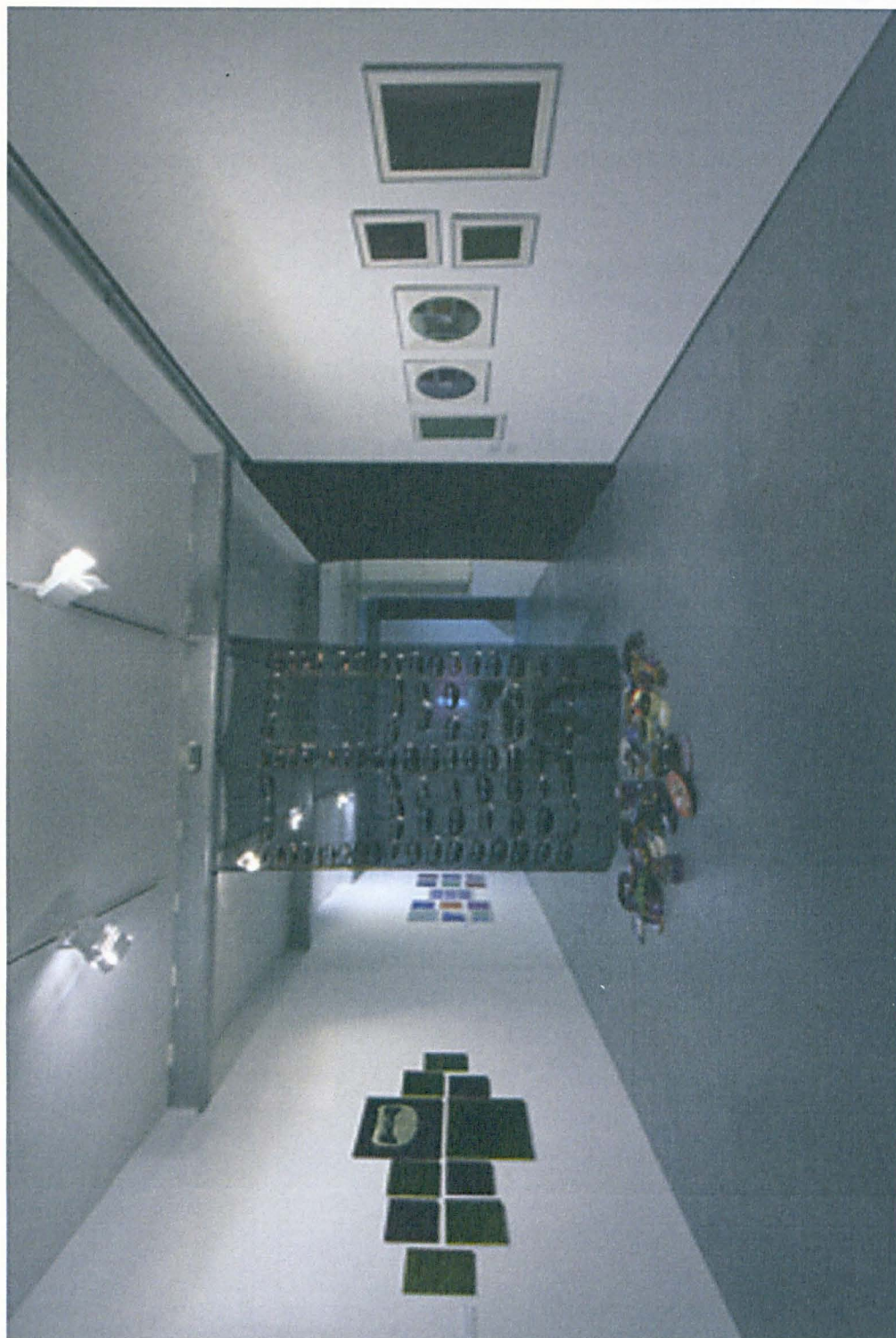
23-28. 'Noor' (Light), burqa fabric, laser machine, 50cmx85cm, 50cmx85cm, 35cmx35cm, 35cmx35cm, 35cmx28cm, 35cmx28cm, 2014

Opposite the embroidered group is 'Noor' (Light), a group of six works made by embossing and engraving the word 'Noor' onto the burqa fabric using Arabic calligraphy to emphasise the belief that the burqa contains the prophet's light as discussed in detail in chapter three.

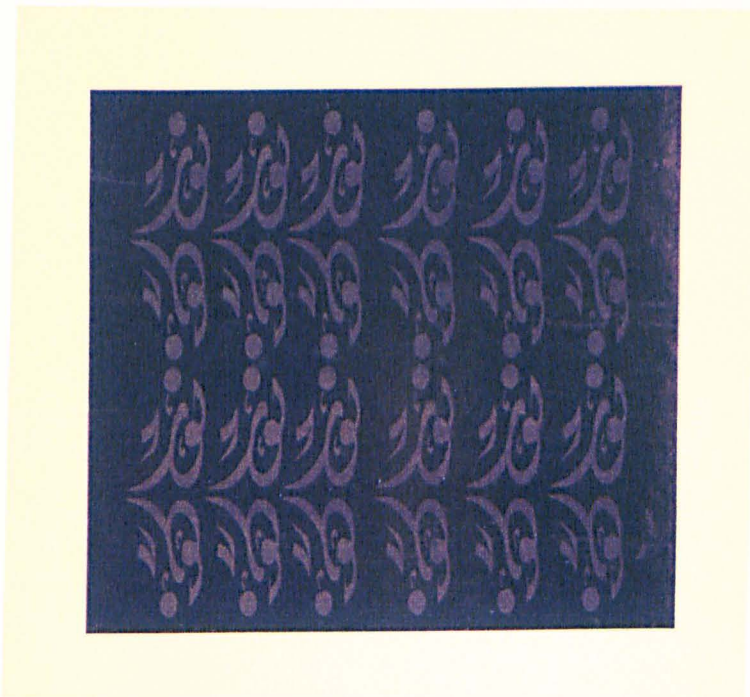
These inscription works extend the series of 'Decorative Burqa Forms' that also used laser cutting to make manifest a widely held belief about the burqa and its impact upon women's beauty. Within the overall installation, the arrangement of the 'Noor' series in a group, echoing the arrangement of the 'Decorative Burqa Forms' and the 'Embroidered Burqa' series, created a certain rhythm and harmony relating to the burqa makers' methods and that they worked together in groups, in one house, making burqas and training new makers.



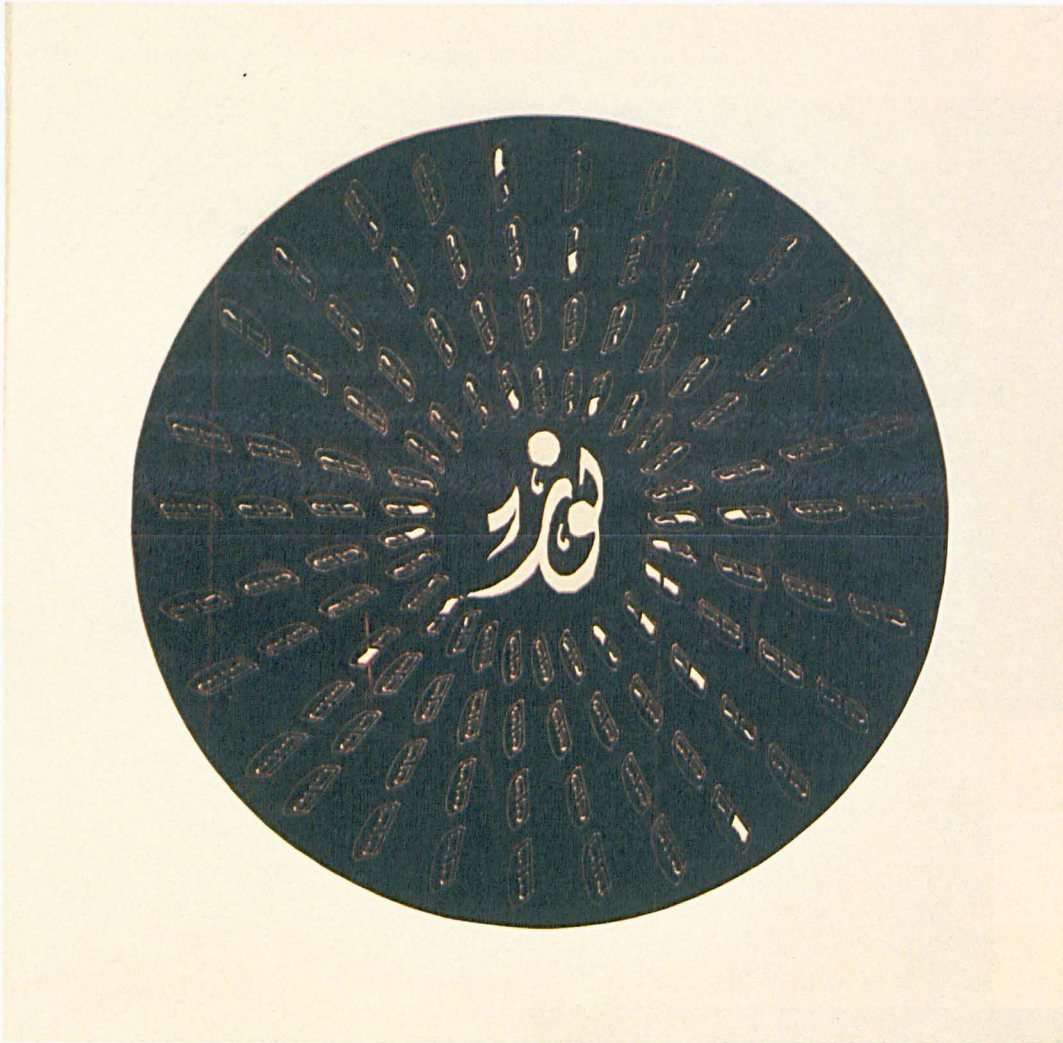
'Noor' (Light) series, rubbing the shine of the burqa fabric with laser-cut inscriptions, embossed by press, 50cmx85cm, 35cmx35cm, 35cmx28cm, 2014



'Noor' Series opposite the 'Embroidery' group and 'Gather' installation in between, 2014



'Noor Series', Rubbing the Shine, Burqa Fabric, Laser Machine, 35cmx28cm, 60cmx40cm, 2014.



'Noor Series and small burqas', laser machine, burqa fabric, 35cmx35cm, 2014.



'Noor Series', embossed burqa fabric, woodcut print, 50cmx85cm, 2014.

29. 'Gathering' Installation, 3m x 1.8m, mixed media, 2014

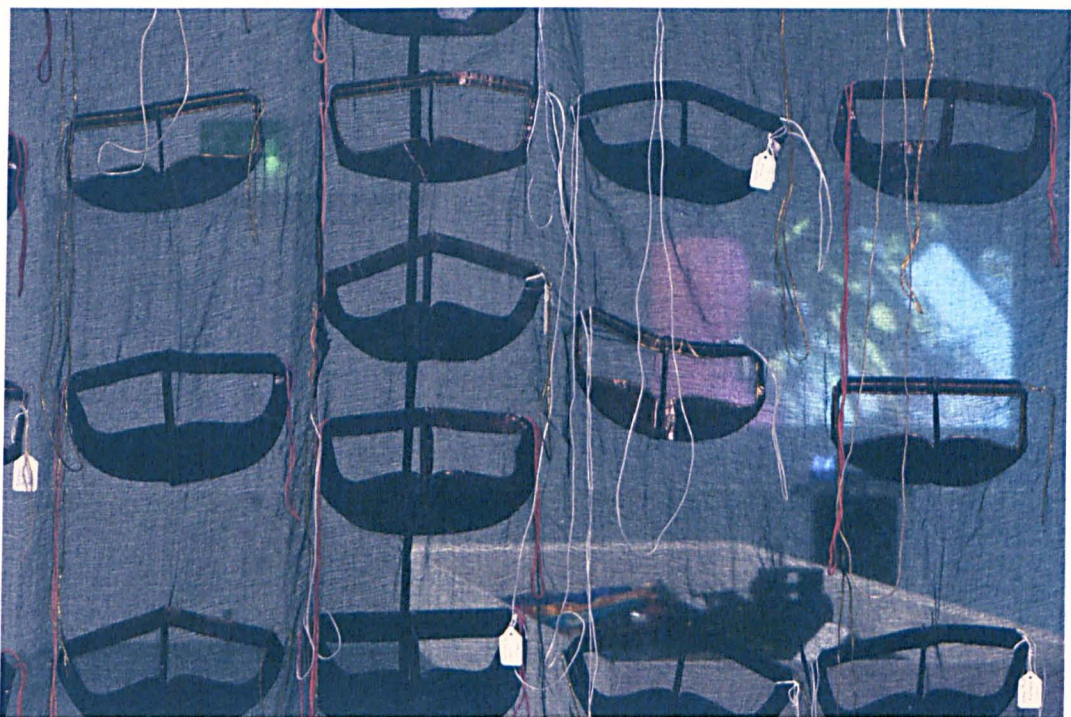
As part of a continuing exploration in presenting the burqa as an individualised and intimate object, because all burqas were personalised by their owner's perfume, the installation in the middle of the second gallery enabled visitors to experience the typical smells associated with the burqa as well as the different shapes and colours that Emirati women could select from. 'Gathering' introduced found or pre-existing objects into the gallery space through the used women's burqas attached to the sheer black fabric and the surrounding burqa containers on the floor collected from my interviewees between 2012 and 2014. Each burqa attached to the hanging fabric carries the owner's name and place of origin. Materialising the history of Emirati women through these personal and intimate objects, through their physicality, their smell and feel, 'Gathering' foregrounded embodied knowledge through the senses. With this 'screen' of burqas I also wanted to create a small division within the gallery space representing a space in a house where, in the past, burqa making was done in a domestic setting.



'Gathering', installation, displayed in the Centre of the second gallery, mixed media (used burqas, fabric, metals tins containing burqas), 2014



Detail of 'Gathering', showing the used burqas inside the metal tins, 2014



Detail of sheer black fabric with used burqas carrying the owner's name on the handwritten tags, 2014



Used burqas inside metal containers with names of women owners and their region on the lids, 2014

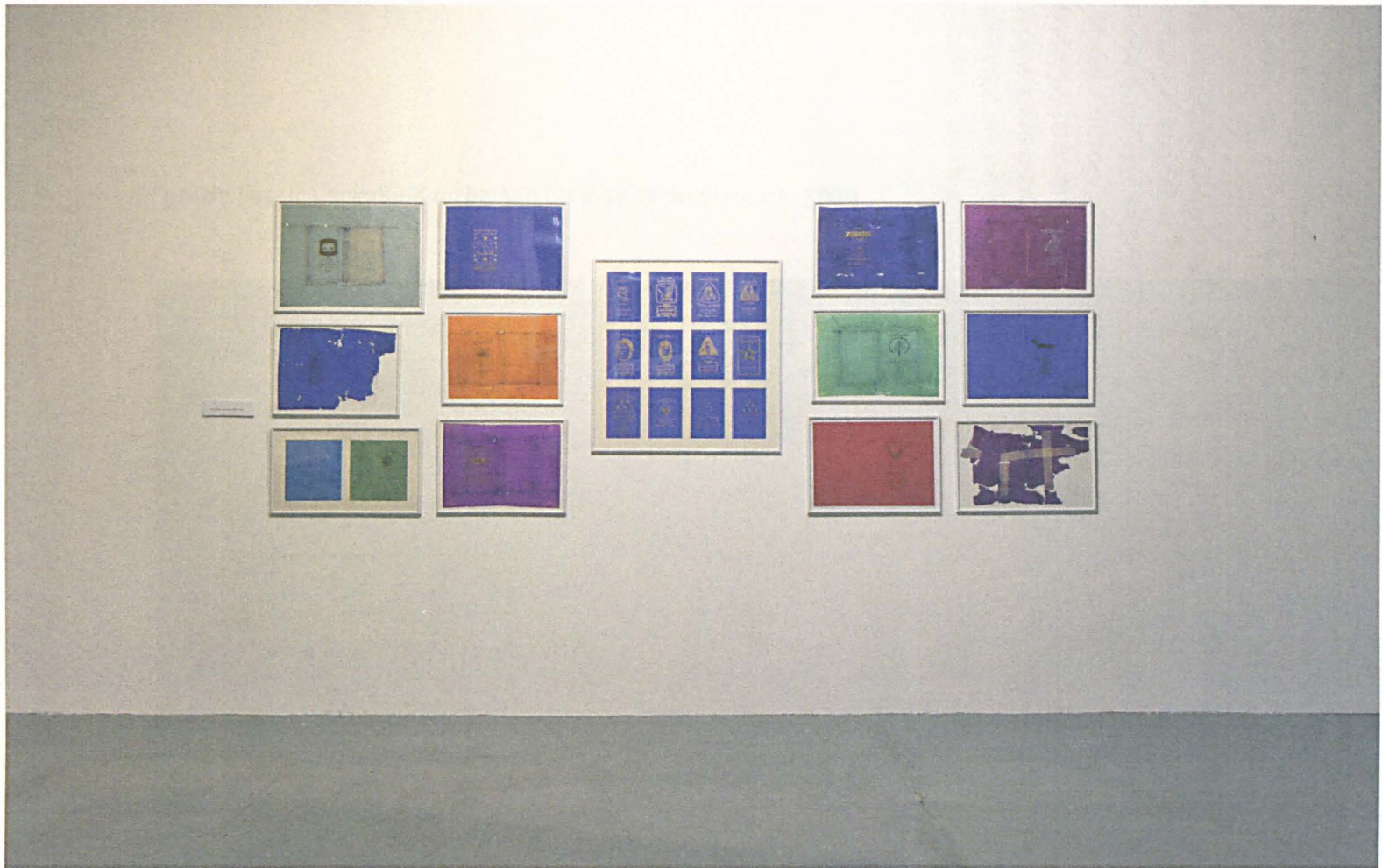
31-43. Burqa Packaging, 2014

An installation of 13 different burqa packaging: 41cmx50cm, 50cmx63, 42cmx54cm, 42cmx53cm, 42cmx53cm, 42cmx53cm, 42cmx53cm, 42cmx53cm, 43cmx55cm, 41cmx54cm, 42cmx59cm, 39cmx63cm, 80cmx86cm

On the other side of the burqa screen or curtain I arranged a series of visually striking burqa fabric packaging in individual frames to present them as works of art. These fragile packaging, once part of an everyday material culture of the burqa, convey a history of usage and of personal memories. Some women I interviewed, for example, had kept their burqa packaging as mementos of the time when their burqas were made. This is the first display of the archive of burqa packaging I have collected where I played with presenting the often discarded packaging of the burqas as visual objects in their own right.

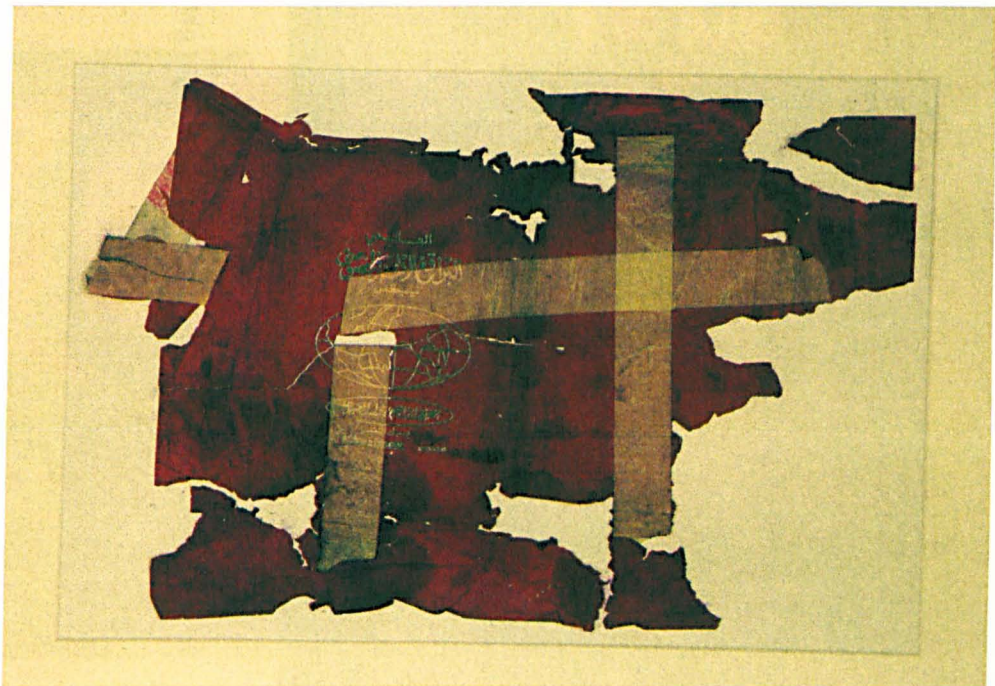
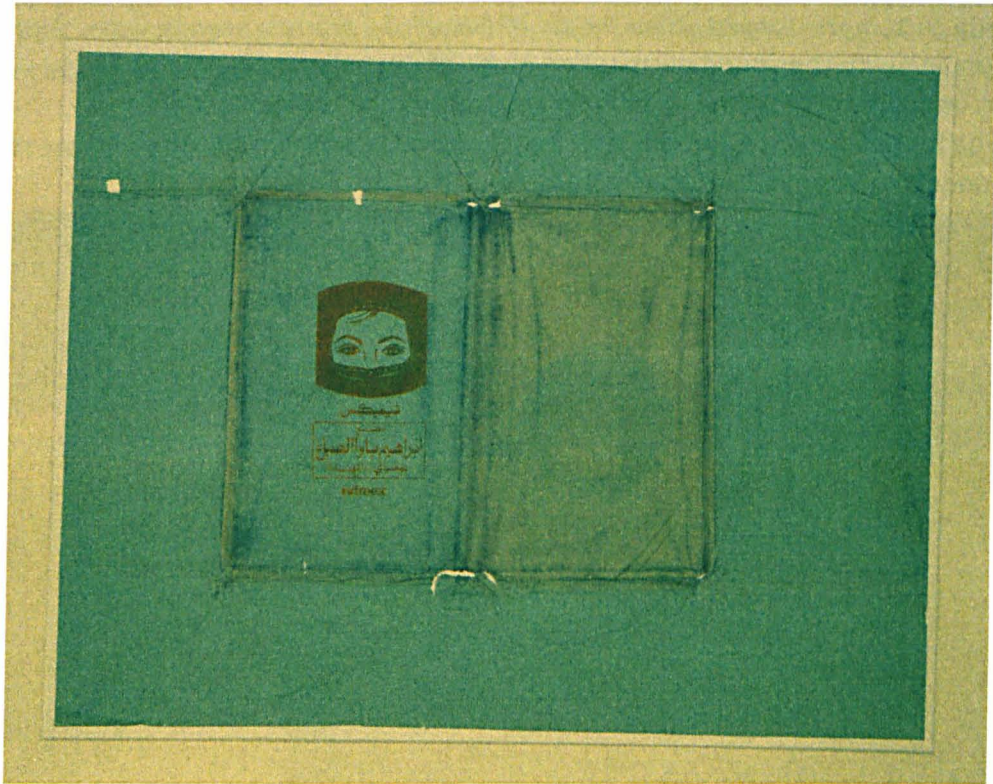


Burqa Fabric Packaging displayed on wall as an artwork, 2014



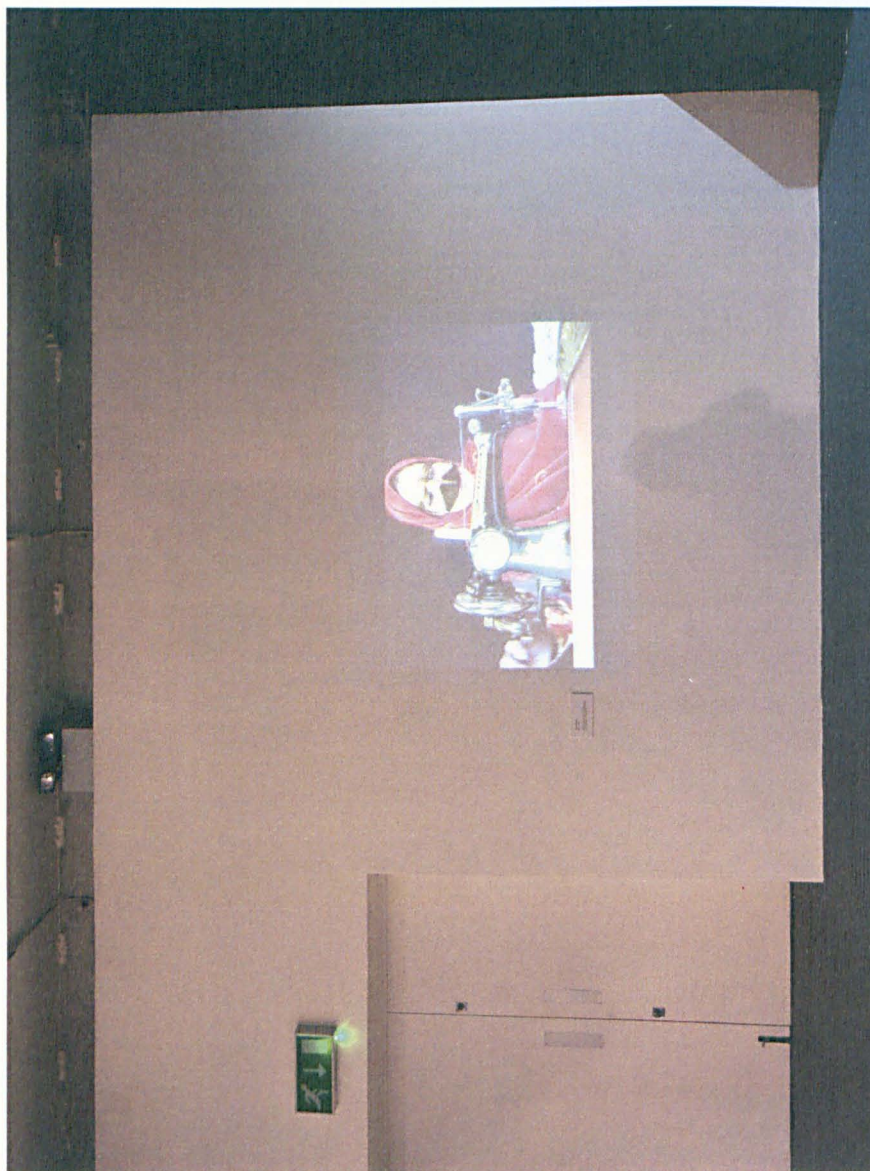
Burqa packaging showing the different burqa fabric brand names with the dates of their production, 2014

Examples of burqa packaging, 2014 (below)



44. 'Khait' (Thread), video, 00:02:48 min, 2014

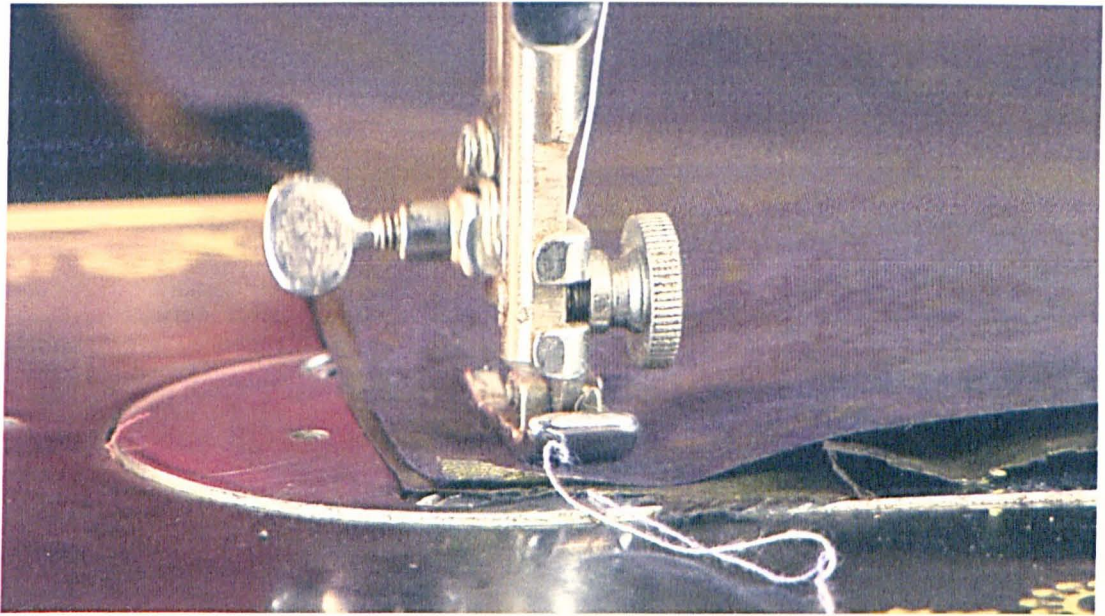
Behind the burqa curtain the looped video 'Khait' (Thread) of a woman sewing was continuously running with the sound permeating much of the gallery. This made viewers curious enough to follow the sound. By re-enacting the difficult act of sewing the burqa fabric I focus on the arduous female labour and the repetitive actions and sounds that were once part of a burqa maker's life. This labour is brought into the space of the gallery and offers another perspective on the different kinds of women's embodied experience associated with a seemingly straightforward item of traditional Emirati's women's dress.



'Khait' projected on the end wall of the second gallery, 2014

Making and selling burqas was a female occupation in the United Arab Emirates until 1980. It was financially unrewarding but socially liberating as these women rarely socialized outside their families.

Screenshots of '*Khait*' (Thread), Video, 2.48 min, 2014 (below)



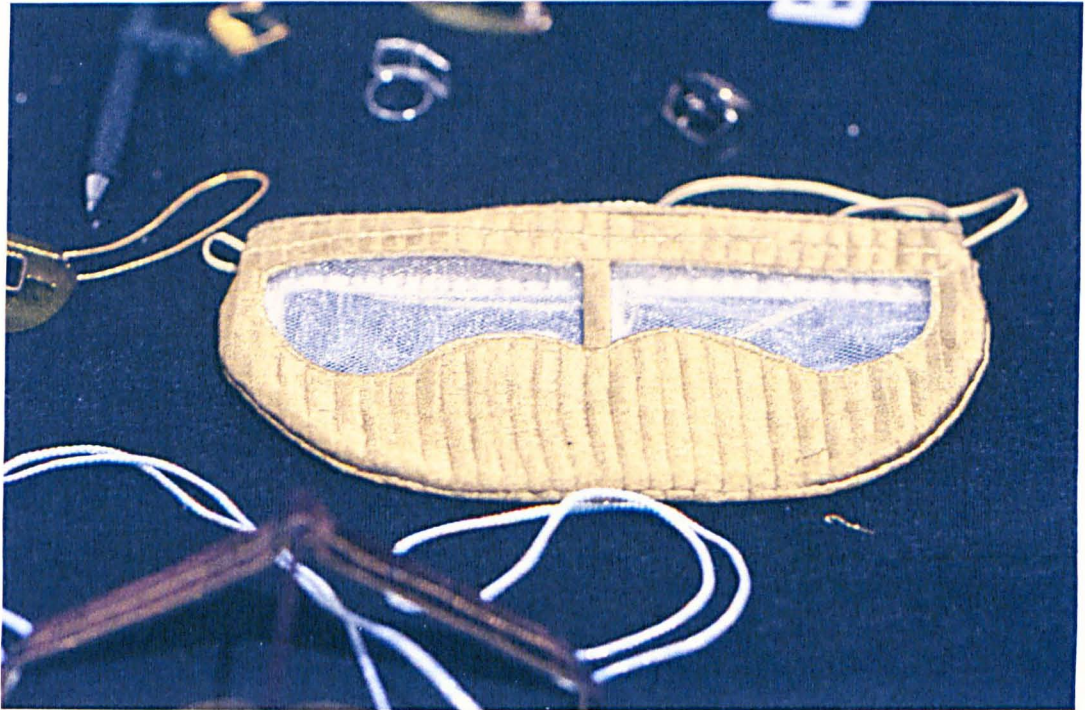


45. 'Display Cabinet'

In one half of an open cabinet I displayed craft tools and the materials of burqa making such as burqa fabric, needles and a burqa machine. In the other half, I presented modern gifts and dolls dressed in traditional Emirati costume and wearing a burqa, and jewellery and accessories made in the burqa form. Visitors could pick up and touch these objects. These tools, once owned by women burqa makers and carrying their imprints, speak of the labour of Emirati women and their need to earn an independent income. In the gallery space, the tools of domestic craft also become anthropological objects. Overall, the display foregrounds how the burqa function has changed from being a protector and an intimate object associated with the identity of the Emirati women wearer to an accessory and tourist commodity.



Open Cabinet, tools of burqa making, a burqa machine, dolls dressed in traditional clothes, burqa packaging and accessories, 2014



Detail of Cabinet with tools of burqa making and accessories, 2014



A Burqa Machine display in the open cabinet, this machine produced small-embossed straight lines that looked like the drapes on the forehead part of the burqa, 2014



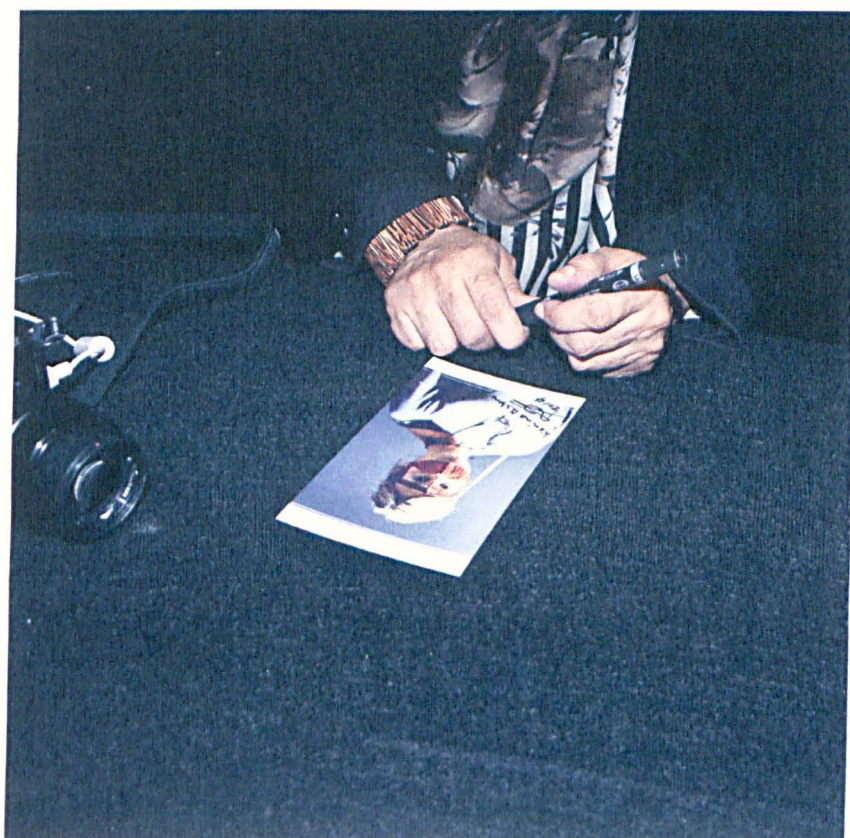
Detail of Cabinet with dolls in traditional Emirati dress and unfinished burqas, 2014

46. Hospitality space

Next to *Khait* (thread), in an open oblong gallery space, I created an informal space for hospitality. I wanted an audience response, and here the visitors could try on a selection of burqas or ask questions. I recorded their responses to the exhibition and the wearing of their chosen burqa. I then photographed each one wearing their burqa and autographed the photo, inviting them to keep it as a souvenir, just like the burqa itself has become a souvenir in contemporary Emirati society.



Visitors trying on a selection of burqas, 2014



Photograph signing, a souvenir

I interviewed twenty visitors who viewed this exhibition. They were all asked the same questions about their perceptions and experiences of the burqa.

Staging this exhibition, 'An Intimate Object', was crucial to re-framing the burqa as an embodied material object with its own history. The installation of the works allowed the burqa to 'speak' materially, socially and politically. The installation also engendered participation, inclusion and created formal and socially embodied links for the audience. Focusing on the materiality of the burqa, its making, wearing and associated meanings the installation of works in 'An Intimate Object' focuses on embodiment, enactment and performance and offers another way of 'doing history' and embodying knowledge through the senses through an art practice that acknowledges the subjectivity and positioning of the female artist. The exhibition, like a conversation, involves an active exchange and a projection of works onto relations perceived in the work itself.¹

¹Katy Macleod; Lin Holdridge, *Thinking Through Art* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.90.